

"CHILLY SCENES OF WINTER"

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Based on the novel
by
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FADE IN

INT. GOVERNMENT OFFICE BUILDING - TYPING POOL 1

CLOSE SHOT OF a wall clock, the minute hand jerking up to the ten. The time is now ten of five.

Twenty-five Women in the typing pool noticing the clock. Typing stops. End of the day activities.

INT. SMALL OFFICE OFF TYPING POOL AREA 2

CHARLES, twenty-eight, is working at his desk. He checks his watch, pulls off his earphones which are plugged into a cassette tape recorder.

Charles opens his bottom desk drawer. Fifty or more cassettes. He selects "Folk Fiddling from Sweden" for his walk to the parking lot.

He straightens his "In" and "Out" baskets and his pencil holder so that everything is at perfect right angles to the desk. He aligns his phone so that it, too, is just so.

He puts on his jacket and scarf which are hanging on the back of his door. He returns to his desk, sits in his chair, one hand gripping the handle of the cassette player. He stares at his watch.

INT. TYPING POOL AREA 3

The minute hand makes it to the twelve.

Typists are chattering, getting their coats on.

Charles, carrying his cassette player, crosses past the typing pool area and out into the corridor.

INT. ELEVATOR 4

packed with people, Charles among them. His boss, BILL PATTERSON, in his mid-forties, notices Charles.

PATTERSON

Well, Charles. How'd the work go today?

CHARLES

Fine, sir. How did the bossing go today?

Cont.

Patterson looks at him, decides Charles is being funny.
He laughs.

PATTERSON
Another day, another dollar.

CHARLES
That's true.

INT. LOBBY FLOOR

5

The elevator empties. Charles moves to the candy stand
which is run by a BLIND MAN. Charles selects a candy bar.

BLIND MAN
What do you have?

VOICE OF CHARLES
I don't have Laura.

BLIND MAN
Hey. What do you have?

CHARLES
A Heath Bar.

Charles gives him a quarter, the Blind Man feels through his
change and gives Charles three pennies.

CHARLES
Thank you.

Charles moves to the revolving doors. It's pouring outside.
Charles prepares for the weather by unwrapping the candy bar
and popping it into his mouth, and turning on the cassette
player. He goes out into the rain.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET LEADING TO PARKING LOT

6

Charles walks along listening to "Folk Fiddling from Sweden."
The rain beats down. Charles' glasses are streaming with
water. It's hard to know how he sees through them, but he
trudges along, impervious to this and everything else.

EXT. PARKING LOT

7

Charles approaches his car, a beat-up yellow Chevy, tries to
unlock it but it sticks. Suddenly he gives the offending
lock a crunching kick. He tries the key again. The door
opens.

INT. CHARLES' CAR

Charles double-checks all the locks, adjusts the mirror. We SEE that the car is empty and he is alone.

Charles removes his glasses, tries to wipe them dry on his wet scarf.

LAURA'S VOICE

(o.s.)

Give them to me.

Charles looks in the mirror. LAURA is sitting in the back-seat. She looks terrific.

Charles comes alive.

CHARLES

Hi, Laura.

LAURA

Give me your glasses.

CHARLES

Come and get 'em.

Laura climbs into the front seat, holds her hand out. Charles gives her the glasses. She puts them underneath her poncho, cleans them on her shirtfront.

CHARLES

(suggestively)

What's going on under there?

LAURA

(smiles)

You're terrible, as usual.

CHARLES

I'm wet too. Can you dry me off the same way?

LAURA

Don't you wish.

She holds the glasses up. They aren't quite dry. They go under the poncho again.

LAURA

You still haven't got them fixed.

CHARLES

I don't have another pair to wear in the meantime.

Cont.

LAURA

They can fix them while you wait.

CHARLES

They can?

LAURA

Of course.

CHARLES

How do you know things like that?

LAURA

How do you not know things like that?

CHARLES

I need you to come and live with me and tell me things like that.

A DIFFERENT ANGLE

9

Charles is drying his own glasses. Laura isn't there. He is dejected again.

CHARLES

Laura, Laura, Laura, Laura...

Charles pulls out of the parking lot.

INT. CHARLES' LIVING ROOM (LATER)

10

A one-story suburban house which Charles inherited from his grandmother. Modest but cozy.

Charles' friend, SAM, is just entering from outside where it is still raining. He carries two six-packs.

SAM

Hi.

SUSAN, Charles' nineteen-year old sister, is curled up in an armchair reading a magazine. She doesn't look up.

SUSAN

Hi.

ELISE, who is sitting on the couch, looks at Sam but says nothing. Sam drops his slicker on the rug, moves to the kitchen with the six-packs.

INT. KITCHEN

11

Charles is cooking chili at the stove.

CHARLES

Hi. I forgot to invite you
for dinner.

SAM

I know. I thought I'd come
anyway. What are we having?

CHARLES

Laura's chili.

SAM

You mean Laura's recipe for
chili.

CHARLES

Yeah. Laura's recipe for
chili.

SAM

You had me worried. For a
minute there, I thought you
meant Laura made the chili and
it's still in the icebox a year
later. Who's the...

Sam holds his hands cupped in front of his chest, moves them
up and down.

CHARLES

Her name's Elise. Susan's friend
from college.

Sam rolls his eyes, walks back into the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM

12

SAM

(to Elise)

Hi, I'm Sam.

ELISE

Hi.

Sam expects her to move over on the couch for him, but she
doesn't. After a beat or two...

SAM

Would you please move over?

She does. Sam sits down next to her.

Cont.

SAM
Susan? How's school?

SUSAN
(still reading)
I'm sick of it.

ELISE
Didn't you have beer with you
when you came in?

SAM
Yeah, but I don't like you.
You wouldn't move over for me
so I won't give you any beer.

Elise giggles. Sam always has great success with women.

SUSAN
Are you drunk?

SAM
No. Just trying to be cheerful.
My dog died.

SUSAN
What happened to your dog?

SAM
She had a heart attack. Eight
years old. Everybody's dog
lives longer than that.

ELISE
(sympathetically)
That's so sad.

SAM
She was smart, too. She could
lip-read.

ELISE
Lip-read?

SAM
I'd say to her...
(mouthing it)
...'dinner'...

ELISE
Dinner?

Cont.

SAM

And she'd run to her dish.

ELISE

(giggling)

Honestly? You'd just go...

(mouthing it)

... 'dinner'? And she'd run to her dish? That is so incredible! Did you teach her? I mean, how did she know how?

SAM

Yes. I taught her. Certainly.

INT. KITCHEN

13

Charles looks directly INTO CAMERA.

CHARLES

His dog really could lip-read.

Charles takes the lid off the chili to stir it with a wooden spoon. The steam fogs up his glasses.

INT. DINING ROOM

14

The pan of chili and the six-packs are on the table. Sam, Susan and Elise are seated. Charles is dishing up the food.

The phone is ringing in the kitchen.

SUSAN

Do you still work at that awful men's store?

SAM

I'm lucky to have the job. Wait until you get out. Why don't you answer the phone, Charles? Maybe it's Laura.

CHARLES

Shut up.

But he moves into the kitchen. Maybe it is Laura.

SUSAN

Why would Laura call?

SAM

She wouldn't. Your brother lives in hope.

INT. KITCHEN

15

CHARLES

Because I'm going to get her
back!

Suddenly Charles leans back against the counter and looks
INTO CAMERA. The phone ringing fades down.

CHARLES

Here is how I met Laura.

INT. CHARLES' OFFICE - DAY (A YEAR AGO)

16

Charles is working at his desk, his earphones on. His
glasses weren't broken then.

VOICE OF CHARLES

My job is to read reports.
Then I make reports on the
reports. I give them to my boss,
Mr. Patterson. I've never
figured out what he does with
them but I've been promoted twice.

BETTY enters. She is twenty-four, has-a pretty face but a
plump, short body. She wears menacing-looking boots.

VOICE OF CHARLES

After I make out my reports,
I put them in my Out basket and
one of the typists comes in and
gets them.

Betty takes some sheets from the Out basket. She asks him
something but Charles can't hear her. He pulls off his
earphones.

BETTY

Is this all you've got?

CHARLES

That's a profound question.

BETTY

What?

CHARLES

That's all I've got.

BETTY

Mr. Patterson wants to see
you. Right now.

Cont.

CHARLES
What do you mean, right now?
What's wrong?

BETTY
I'm just telling you what he
said.

CHARLES
Did he say...
(pleasantly)
...'right now' or did he say...
(angrily)
...'right now.'

BETTY
He said you should go to his
office.

CHARLES
(anxiously)
I'll have another report very
shortly.

She goes out.

VOICE OF CHARLES
I'd never been fired before.

Charles gets up. We FOLLOW him out.

INT. TYPING POOL AREA

17

Charles walks past the rows of typists like he's walking
the last mile.

VOICE OF CHARLES
I wished I'd brought a shopping
bag. Where will I put everything
when he tells me to clear out
my desk by five o'clock?

Charles gets to Patterson's office. THROUGH the open door,
we SEE Patterson on the phone. He beckons to Charles.

INT. PATTERSON'S OFFICE

18

Charles enters. He looks a little pale.

Patterson hangs up.

PATTERSON
Sorry. Can you go up to the
library for me? Jeanette's out
sick.

CHARLES

The library.

PATTERSON

Here's the list.

CHARLES

You want me to go to the library.

PATTERSON

Something wrong, Charles?

CHARLES

No, no. I just uh...the library's where?

PATTERSON

Oh. The ninth floor.

CHARLES

Yeah. I haven't been up there for a couple of years.

PATTERSON

Right. Ninth floor. Sorry to ask you but Jeanette's out sick.

CHARLES

Sure.

PATTERSON

If you could go now.

CHARLES

I could go now.

PATTERSON

Thank you.

INT. TYPING POOL

19

Charles exits Patterson's office. He walks past the typists again and out to the corridor.

INT. ELEVATOR

20

Charles pushes nine, then notices that the Inspection Certificate is slightly askew. He straightens it.

INT. CORRIDOR - NINTH FLOOR

21

Charles comes out of the elevator, walks toward the library.

INT. LIBRARY

Charles enters, looks around, sees a young woman (Laura) at the librarian's desk. She is marking some folders.

Laura looks up at Charles as he approaches her desk.

LAURA

Hi.

CHARLES

Hi.

LAURA

Help you?

Charles gives her the list. He thinks she's terrific-looking.

LAURA

Oh, you're from Mr. Patterson.
Where's Jeanette?

CHARLES

She's out sick.

LAURA

Okay.

Charles is staring at her. Laura looks at him questioningly. He averts his eyes.

Laura gets up. She is a little taller than he is in her high-heeled suede boots. She starts toward the stacks. Charles follows her.

LAURA

I'll bring them to you. You
can wait at the desk.

CHARLES

I'll help you.

LAURA

I can manage.

CHARLES

Some of them might be up high.

LAURA

We have little ladders.

CHARLES

I'll hold the ladder so you
don't fall.

LAURA

I do this all day, you know.

CHARLES

Have you ever fallen?

LAURA

No.

CHARLES

You're lucky.

LAURA

Will you do me a favor?

CHARLES

Sure.

LAURA

Wait at the desk.

CHARLES

That's what I was afraid you
were going to say.

Laura laughs.

LAURA

All right. Come on.

Charles follows Laura around while she collects the books
on the list. He is already crazy about her.

LAURA

One of these isn't in.

CHARLES

Good. I'll come back everyday
and see if it's been returned.

LAURA

Are you nuts?

CHARLES

No. I'm completely normal.

She has collected all the books. They walk back to the desk.
Laura sits down and checks them out to Mr. Patterson.

CHARLES

What's your name?

LAURA

Tell Mr. Patterson I'll call
Jeanette when the other book
comes in.

She hands him the books.

CHARLES

You aren't going to tell me
your name.

LAURA
I'll tell you my name. Laura.

CHARLES
Laura. That's a...

LAURA
(cutting in)
Beautiful name. I know. 'Bye.

CHARLES
I wasn't going to say that's a
beautiful name. I was going to
say that's a coincidence.

LAURA
What is?

CHARLES
My name is Charles.

LAURA
I don't get it. What's the
coincidence?

CHARLES
There isn't any. I just wanted
to tell you my name.

Laura laughs.

LAURA
Charles what?

CHARLES
Richardson. Laura what?

LAURA
Connelly. Hey...I've got to
get back to work, okay?

CHARLES
Okay. 'Bye, Laura.

LAURA
'Bye, Charles.

Charles walks out of the library.

INT. CORRIDOR - NINTH FLOOR

Charles starts toward the elevator, changes his mind. He reenters the library.

INT. LIBRARY

Laura isn't at her desk. Charles walks into the stacks, sees through a space in the books that she is walking down an aisle. He hurries around the corner so he can bump into her. She jumps.

LAURA

Oh! You scared me.

He grins. Laura looks at him.

LAURA

I thought you'd be back, but I thought you'd wait until tomorrow at least.

CHARLES

I couldn't wait until tomorrow, are you kidding? I think we should go out tonight.

LAURA

Why do you think we should go out tonight?

CHARLES

Because we'll get along. I like you.

LAURA

I'm married.

Charles is stunned.

CHARLES

I don't believe you.

Laura extends her left hand with the wedding ring on the fourth finger. Charles stares at it. Finally...

CHARLES

We'll just have to disregard it.

LAURA

Okay.

CHARLES

(surprised)

Okay?

Cont.

LAURA
We're having some problems.

CHARLES
I'm sorry. No I'm not.

LAURA
I am. It makes me feel awful.

CHARLES
I'll make you feel better. I
don't want you to feel awful,
I want you to feel terrific.

LAURA
I haven't felt terrific for a
long time.

CHARLES
If I make you feel terrific,
will you marry me?

Laura looks alarmed. Charles laughs quickly.

CHARLES
Just joking. We hardly know
each other.

INT. STAIRS TO LAURA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT (A YEAR 25
AGO)

Laura is leading Charles up the stairs.

VOICE OF CHARLES
Laura took me home with her on
our first date but I loved her
so much I didn't try anything.

INT. LAURA'S APARTMENT 26

One room which contains a mattress on the floor with an
Indian throw on it. No other furniture.

CHARLES
You just moved in?

LAURA
Four weeks ago. It wouldn't
be bad if I fixed it up and
got some furniture.

CHARLES
I thought maybe it was your
minimalist period. I'll just
put this on the chair.

He puts his jacket on an imaginary chair and of course it falls to the floor. Laura smiles.

LAURA

I'll put mine on this chair.

Her coat falls to the floor.

LAURA

(laughing)

I'll put my purse on the table.

The purse drops on the floor.

Charles dusts off his hands as though to say "that's that."

LAURA

I have some wine. I don't know
if you like wine.

CHARLES

(holding forth an
imaginary glass)

I love wine.

LAURA

No, I really do have some wine.

CHARLES

Real wine? I don't know if I'm
up to that. I'm kidding, get
the wine.

Laura goes into the kitchen.

Charles strolls around the room. There isn't much to look at. He sits down on the mattress. He gets up again, wanders into the kitchen.

Laura is standing at the counter, her hand on the wine bottle. She is crying quietly, doesn't notice him.

Charles backs out of the kitchen. He stands there a moment, unsure of what to do. He reenters the kitchen.

CHARLES

(shyly)

Laura? Would you like me to
go home?

She shakes her head, continues crying.

Cont.

Charles moves hesitantly toward her, puts his arms around her. This seems to be just what she wants.

LAURA

(crying)
I just don't know if I did the right thing.

CUT TO:

INT. LAURA'S APARTMENT (TIME LAPSE)

27

Laura and Charles sit on the mattress, the wine bottle on the floor next to them, half empty by now.

LAURA

I went out to buy a chair last weekend, but I couldn't decide what to buy. I mean if I go back to Jim, there's no point in investing in a lot of furniture. So I thought, okay, I'll just get a folding chair. Then I started thinking how awful it would be to live someplace with only a mattress and a folding chair, and I got so upset I just came home and didn't buy anything.

Charles nods sympathetically.

CHARLES

I think you ought to come stay at my place.

LAURA

Your place?

CHARLES

Yeah.

LAURA

I can't do that.

CHARLES

Then you ought to get some furniture for this place. It's depressing.

LAURA

I don't seem to be able to do that either.

Cont.

CHARLES

Then you ought to come stay at my place.

LAURA

Charles, I just met you this afternoon.

CHARLES

Okay. How long would you have to know me before you'd come and stay at my place?

Laura laughs, shakes her head.

CHARLES

I have two bedrooms. You wouldn't have to sleep in my bed if you didn't want to. Of course I'd like it if you would, but I wouldn't make it a condition.

LAURA

I think I'll stay here for the time being. But thank you anyway.

CHARLES

Not at all. I'll ask you again sometime.

INT. CHARLES' KITCHEN (PRESENT TIME)

28

Charles is startled out of his reverie by the phone. He grabs it.

CHARLES

(eagerly)

Hello?

CLARA'S VOICE

(o.s.; phone
filter)

I'm so glad you're there. If you weren't there, I was going to kill myself.

Charles' expression changes.

CHARLES

Hi, Mom.

INT. DINING ROOM

SAM

Sometimes I'd test her. I'd
go...

(mouthing it)

...'dinner'. And she'd run to
her dish. Then I'd go...

(mouthing it)

...'never mind'...

ELISE

Never mind?

SAM

And she'd go in the other room
again.

ELISE

That is just incredible.

Charles enters from the kitchen.

CHARLES

Susan, we have to go over to
Mom's.

SUSAN

What's the matter?

CHARLES

(unemotionally)

She's in pain. She's thinking
of killing herself. Again.

SUSAN

(getting up)

Where's Pete?

CHARLES

Not there.

(to Sam)

We're going over to Mom's.

SAM

I figured that out. Good luck.

EXT. CLARA'S AND PETE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Charles' car pulls up the drive. Susan gets out, heads for
the front door. Charles follows more slowly.

INT. CLARA'S AND PETE'S HOUSE

Susan races up the stairs. Charles follows her at a walk.

INT. CLARA'S AND PETE'S BEDROOM

32

The room is a mess. Several heating pads dangle from the unmade bed. The floor is strewn with movie magazines, old cartons of food, dirty plates.

Susan hangs back. She wants Charles to go first. He does.

INT. BATHROOM

33

CLARA is in the tub. She wears a black Frederick's of Hollywood nightgown and purply-red lipstick. Her hair is dyed red. Cigarette butts and a movie magazine float in the water.

CLARA
(pressing her
side)
The pain is right here. I
didn't take a laxative. I knew
I shouldn't take a laxative.

CHARLES
You're going to be all right.

CLARA
You hate me. You don't want me
to be all right.

CHARLES
I do want you to be all right.

SUSAN
Of course we want you to be all
right. What a thing to say.

Charles and Susan attempt to haul Clara out of the tub. She is like a dead weight.

CLARA
I was going to kill myself.

CHARLES
I know.

SUSAN
Of course you weren't.

More efforts to get her out of the tub.

CHARLES
Try to help a little, Mom.

Cont.

Clara twists and slaps the water so that it splashes Charles, soaking his shirt.

CLARA

I'm in pain!

With a great effort, they get her out.

CHARLES

Get her into something dry and
we'll put her to bed.

INT. BEDROOM

34

Clara is asleep. Charles and Susan tiptoe out.

INT. STAIRCASE/FRONT HALL

35

As they come down the stairs, the front door opens, their stepfather, PETE, enters. A stocky, rumpled man in his late fifties. He looks worried.

SUSAN

Hi, Pete. She's okay.

PETE

Another bathtub deal?

CHARLES

Yeah.

PETE

(sighs)
Oh boy.

SUSAN

It's okay, she's asleep now.

PETE

She's always tired after one
of those.

Susan and Charles are now in the front hall.

PETE

How 'bout a quick drink long
as you're here?

CHARLES

Can't do it tonight, Pete.
Maybe another time.

Cont.

PETE

If you were my own kids instead of my stepkids, I bet you'd stay and have that drink.

CHARLES

We have some friends visiting. Otherwise we would.

PETE

You're not coming to dinner on Sunday either, are you.

SUSAN

I have to go back to school.

PETE

He doesn't have to go back to school.

CHARLES

I'll be there.

PETE

Good! What could I get that you would like, Charles? What do you specially like?

Charles says the first thing that comes to mind.

CHARLES

Olives.

Susan looks at Charles. He shrugs.

PETE

Olives! Any special kind?

CHARLES

Just regular olives.

PETE

The big ones or the small kind?

CHARLES

The big ones.

PETE

Big ones. We should have olives and celery and all the trimmings. How does that sound?

CHARLES

Really good, Pete.

EXT. CLARA'S AND PETE'S HOUSE

Pete is walking them to the car. Susan gets in her side.

CHARLES

See you, Pete.

PETE

How's the car holding up?

CHARLES

Okay. Uses a lot of gas.

PETE

If you ever want a good car wax,
let me recommend Turtle Wax.

CHARLES

I'll remember that.

PETE

No you won't.

CHARLES

Turtle Wax.

PETE

You don't like me. But it'll
be nice to have you for dinner
anyway.

Charles gets into the car. As he backs down the drive,
Pete stands there waving to them.

INT. CAR

SUSAN

Poor Pete. He tries.

They drive along in silence. After a bit, Charles pulls
into a residential street.

SUSAN

Where are we?

Charles pulls over to the side of the road, turns off the
ignition. He stares out his window at a small A-frame
house.

SUSAN

Why are we stopping here?

Cont.

CHARLES

That's where Laura lives. With her husband and her stepdaughter. Jim and Rebecca. When Jim was in college, he played football and they called him Ox. Can you imagine living with a man called Ox?

SUSAN

Charles, why are you showing me Laura's house?

CHARLES

I thought you'd like to see it.

SUSAN

Do you do this a lot?

CHARLES

No. Sometimes.

SUSAN

Does she know you do it?

CHARLES

I hope not.

SUSAN

Can we go home now?

INT. CHARLES' HOUSE (IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING)

38

Carrying a can of beer, Charles moves down the hall to his bedroom. He opens the door, turns on the light.

Sam and Elise are going at it in his bed.

Charles turns the light off, closes the door quietly. He comes back down the hall and into:

INT. DINING ROOM

39

Susan is sitting at the table drinking a Coke.

CHARLES

I should have known.

SUSAN

What?

Cont.

CHARLES
Sam and your friend Elise. In
my bed.

SUSAN
Oh.

Charles sits down at the table across from Susan.

CHARLES
I wish I had some cigarettes.
You don't smoke, do you?

SUSAN
No.

CHARLES
Or drink?

SUSAN
Wine sometimes.

CHARLES
You don't even like beer.

SUSAN
No.

Charles finds Susan's straightness mystifying, but he nods.

CHARLES
If you don't smoke or drink, do
you do that?

He gestures with his head toward his bedroom.

SUSAN
Yes.

CHARLES
Figures.

SUSAN
Charles, what happened to Mom
all of a sudden?

CHARLES
You want to know what I really
think? I think one day she
just decided to go nuts because
that was easier. This way she
can say whatever she wants and
hit the scotch and lie around
in the bathtub and just not do
anything. Sorta tempting, isn't
it.

Susan looks at him worriedly.

CHARLES
I'm going to sleep.

INT. LIVING ROOM

40

He takes off his shoes, rearranges the couch cushions, and lies down. He reaches for the afghan hanging over the back of the couch, flings it open, snuggles underneath it. He is uncomfortable, wriggles around.

Suddenly we SEE Laura crossing the living room to the couch.

Charles is happy as she gets under the covers. They try to lie on the narrow couch together.

CHARLES
You better take the inside.

She moves over so she is on the inside.

CHARLES
That's better.

LAURA
Yes.

CHARLES
Are you comfortable?

LAURA
No. Are you?

CHARLES
No.

They laugh.

LAURA
I have an idea.
(rolls on
top of him)
Am I too heavy?

CHARLES
No. I like it.

LAURA
So do I. Can you sleep like
this?

Cont.

CHARLES

I'm definitely willing to try.

Laura nestles her head into Charles' neck, closes her eyes. Charles holds her tightly. He is smiling.

A DIFFERENT ANGLE

41

Laura isn't there, Charles turns uncomfortably on the couch. Finally he closes his eyes.

INT. TYPING POOL - DAY

42

Betty starts to type something, realizes she is missing some material. She picks up the report, gets up from her desk. Betty still wears the menacing black boots. FOLLOW her INTO:

INT. CHARLES' OFFICE

43

She waves a hand in front of his face to get his attention. He takes off his earphones.

BETTY

This one's missing a summary.

CHARLES

Sorry.

He fishes through his papers, hands Betty the missing sheet. While she glances at it, he sneaks a look at her boots. Charles has a sudden:

FANTASY

44

Betty is lying in bra and panties on top of his desk. He is trying to pull her boots off.

BETTY

They don't come off!

BACK TO SCENE

45

Betty is once again standing in front of his desk.

BETTY

Okay then.

CHARLES

Uh...what do you hear from Laura?

Cont.

BETTY

Oh that's right, you know Laura.

CHARLES

Just casually. From when she used to work here.

BETTY

I can't believe it's been almost a year since she went back to her husband. Did you know she went back to her husband?

CHARLES

I heard. How's she getting along?

BETTY

Fine, I guess. I didn't see her over the holidays. Married people are always so busy over the holidays. The single people are out in the cold.

CHARLES

(laughs)

How true.

Betty is pleased. She likes him, wants him to ask her out. An awkward little silence.

BETTY

Okay then.

Betty walks out of the office.

Charles swivels around in his desk chair, looks out the window. A bleak winter day.

CHARLES

Okay, Laura, when I turn around, be there.

He spins around. Patterson is standing there.

CHARLES

(embarrassed)

I was just uh...

PATTERSON

Problem, Charles.

Cont.

CHARLES
I know how it looked,
Mr. Patterson, but I was actually...

PATTERSON
You've met my son.

CHARLES
Your son. Uh...no sir, but
I've heard you mention him.
He's at Dartmouth, isn't he?

PATTERSON
Hates it. Hates it. Freezing
to death up there. Of course
he wants to be at Harvard but
he didn't get in.

CHARLES
I imagine it's pretty cold in
Boston, too.

PATTERSON
Right! I talked to him on the
phone last night and I said...
and I've always wanted to say
this to him...I said, 'I think
you place too much importance
on getting into Harvard.'

CHARLES
How did he react to that?

PATTERSON
Asked me to send him an electric
blanket.

Charles nods in what he hopes is a thoughtful manner.

PATTERSON
And I was thinking maybe you
know some poets or singers or
people like that who could
help him loosen up a little.

CHARLES
Right off the top of my head,
I don't think I know any poets
or singers who deal with
agonizing over not getting into
Harvard.

Cont.

PATTERSON

Well I think it's actually a sexual problem. Why is he cold? Because he's not getting any action up there at Dartmouth. Why does he want a electric blanket? Nothing else to keep him warm. See?

CHARLES

I guess so.

PATTERSON

Get on it right away, would you?

CHARLES

Right away, sir.

Patterson exits. Charles shakes his head as if to clear it. He takes a key from his pocket, unlocks the middle drawer of his desk, moves some papers aside.

INSERT - PHOTOS

46

We PAN DOWN a string of four dime store photos of Laura taped to the bottom of the drawer, and a card which reads:

"Laura's number: 372-7307
Don't call her."

BACK TO SCENE

47

Charles shuts the drawer quickly. He swivels around to look out the window again. He gets a faraway look in his eyes.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE LAURA'S APARTMENT (A YEAR AGO) 48

We SEE Charles' finger press her doorbell, then LEAVE the FRAME. Laura opens the door, looks into the hallway, bursts out laughing.

Charles is sitting in a large rocking chair, rocking back and forth in the hallway.

INT. LAURA'S APARTMENT

49

They bring the chair in. Laura is very excited, can't wait to try it. She sits in it, starts rocking, a beatific smile on her face. Charles feels heroic. He sneaks a look INTO CAMERA. She loves the chair!

INT. LAURA'S KITCHEN

Charles watches in fascination as Laura puts the finishing touches on a beautiful seafood pasta dish. Laura's style is languid and graceful...even when she cooks.

CHARLES

You could be a Cordon Blue chef, you know that?

LAURA

I always wanted to open a little restaurant.

CHARLES

Why didn't you?

She shrugs.

INT. LAURA'S LIVING ROOM (LATER)

Laura is now bringing a magnificent souffle in from the kitchen. She sits down on the floor across from Charles, serves him some, watches anxiously as he tastes it.

CHARLES

Oh my God.

LAURA

Oh good, I was worried. I just made it up as I went along. Can you tell what's in it?

CHARLES

Oranges. Chocolate. Some kind of liqueur.

LAURA

Cognac.

CHARLES

You never made this for anyone before?

She shakes her head.

CHARLES

Promise you'll never make it for anybody but me.

She laughs.

CHARLES

I brought you the chair, didn't I? And you like it, don't you?

Cont.

LAURA

I love it. But you shouldn't have.

CHARLES

I didn't do it for you, I did it for me. You won't come and live in my place, right?

LAURA

Right.

CHARLES

So I'll be coming over here all the time, right?

LAURA

Right.

CHARLES

And I have to have some place to sit, right? So it's my chair.

LAURA

Wrong. It's my chair.

CHARLES

It's my chair.

They look at each other. At the same moment, they get up off the floor and race for the chair. They reach it at the same time; each is trying to push the other off and sit in it.

Charles wins. He slides into the chair, grabs Laura, pulls her down onto his lap. He kisses her.

Laura gets up very fast.

LAURA

Charles. I'm married to somebody else, and I don't know what's going to happen, and I'm just not ready for that yet.

CHARLES

Okay.

Cont.

LAURA

I mean I just can't go hopping
from one man to another. You
can understand that, can't you?

CHARLES

Yeah, I understand. Sort of.

Laura moves o.s. STAY ON Charles who looks very unhappy.

INT. SMALL RESTAURANT - DAY (A YEAR AGO)

52

Laura enters, spots Charles at a table by himself, crosses
and sits down with him.

CHARLES

Hi. It got late so I ordered.

LAURA

I don't want anything.

CHARLES

You don't know what you're
missing.

He sticks his fork in his mashed potatoes, lifts the whole
glob off his plate. Laura doesn't laugh.

CHARLES

You okay?

She doesn't reply. Charles doesn't know what's wrong so he
continues eating.

LAURA

Have a nice day yesterday?

CHARLES

Yesterday. Sunday. Yeah, as
a matter of fact, I did.

LAURA

What did you do?

CHARLES

Slept late. Went over to my
mother's for lunch. That wasn't
too great. Then I went over to
Sam's for a few beers. Then
some friends of his called so we
went over there. Then we all
went out and ate spaghetti.
Got home around midnight.

Cont.

Laura nods.

CHARLES

What did you do?

LAURA

Sat around waiting for you.

CHARLES

What? We didn't have plans,
did we?

LAURA

No.

CHARLES

Then why did you...I mean...

LAURA

You've been over every single
day since we met. Ten days in
a row.

CHARLES

Laura, I'm sorry. Why didn't
you say something on Saturday?

LAURA

I didn't know I had to. I just
thought you'd be there like
always.

CHARLES

I was going to call you from
the restaurant but there was
somebody in the phone booth.

LAURA

Terrific.

EXT. STREET NEAR GOVERNMENT BUILDING

53

They are walking back to work. Charles puts his arm around
Laura but she pulls away. Her hands are jammed deep in her
coat pockets. She is walking as fast as she can.

Finally Charles grabs her, pulls her to a halt.

CHARLES

I wasn't sure you cared whether
I showed up or not.

LAURA

I got used to it.

Laura pulls away, continues walking. He walks along with
her.

LAURA

I like it when we're together.

CHARLES

So do I.

LAURA

You still want me to stay at
your place?

CHARLES

Yes. Christ. Yes.

LAURA

In the spare bedroom, okay?
I'm not ready for the other thing
yet. I probably shouldn't do
this at all. I mean I left Jim
and I intended to live by myself
for a while and really think
things out and all of the sudden
you come along and...oh God.
Can I bring my chair?

Charles feels a great surge of happiness.

CHARLES

You can bring the chair.

LAURA

I have to return the mattress
to my girl friend.

CHARLES

We'll return the mattress.

LAURA

If I get on your nerves, you
can kick me out.

CHARLES

Fat chance.

She hugs him.

INT. CHARLES' BEDROOM - NIGHT

54

Charles dumps his clothes on the floor to free up hangers.

INT. CHARLES' LIVING ROOM

55

Laura looks around. The chair is already in the living
room. She calls:

LAURA

It's such a nice house.

36

INT. SPARE BEDROOM

56

A single bed, a rag rug on the floor. Charles sets the hangers down.

CHARLES

It was my grandnother's. She
left it to me in her will.
Along with the fuel bills.

Laura sits down on the bed. She looks off distractedly.

STAY WITH Charles as he goes into:

INT. HALL

57

As Charles opens the closet, takes out an extra blanket. He takes it to the:

INT. SPARE BEDROOM

58

CHARLES

You might need this.

Laura looks at him, nods. He sets it down. A long pause.

CHARLES

I guess you'll want to unpack
and all.

LAURA

Yes.

CHARLES

If you need anything, just give
me a holler.

LAURA

Okay. 'Night.

CHARLES

'Night.

LAURA

Charles?

CHARLES

(hopefully)
What?

LAURA

Would you shut the door after
you?

Cont.

CHARLES

Sure.

He goes out, shuts the door behind him.

INT. CHARLES' BEDROOM - LATE NIGHT

59

Charles is lying awake in the dark. He hears Laura's door open. The hall light goes on. He can see the light leak at the bottom of his closed door.

Pretty soon a gentle tap on his door.

CHARLES

Laura?

She opens the door. She wears a thin white batiste nightgown. Her hair hangs down over her shoulders. She is backlit by the hall light; she looks very beautiful to him.

LAURA

Hi.

CHARLES

Hi.

Neither one says anything for a while.

LAURA

I can't seem to fall asleep.

CHARLES

Me either.

Another long pause.

LAURA

Could I change my mind and sleep in here with you? I don't have to if you don't want me to.

CHARLES

(trying to keep
voice steady)

I want you to.

Laura goes into the hall, turns off the light, and comes into Charles' room and into his bed.

INT. KITCHEN - THE NEXT MORNING (STILL A YEAR AGO) 60

They are eating breakfast.

LAURA

Is the toast too dark?

CHARLES

The toast is perfect. Best toast I've ever eaten.

LAURA

I hope the coffee's strong enough. I never used this kind of percolator before.

CHARLES

Best coffee I've ever had.

Laura laughs. That Charles adores her is apparent on his face. She feels suddenly uneasy, gets up.

LAURA

Who's this?

She walks around the kitchen doing a perfect imitation of the way Charles walks, his shoulders slumped, his head thrust slightly forward. He laughs.

CHARLES

Oh. She's pretty but she's mean. Who's this?

He does a perfect imitation of the way Laura winds a strand of hair behind her ear while looking off distractedly.

Laura laughs. She picks up the dishes, moves to the sink.

LAURA

Do you have a birdhouse?

CHARLES

A birdhouse? No, I don't have a birdhouse.

LAURA

Can we get one?

CHARLES

Sure, if you want one.

Cont.

LAURA

I love to watch the birds
come and feed. We'd probably
get sparrows now, but in
the spring we'll get robins
and bluejays.

Charles realizes they are making future plans...and he is
elated.

CHARLES

Why don't we also get a
birdbath? For the summer.

Laura looks at him over her shoulder.

LAURA

Don't push it, Charles.

CHARLES

Okay. I'm just glad you want
to stay.

Laura turns back to the dishes.

LAURA

Yeah. I do.

Charles smiles broadly.

INT. CHARLES' OFFICE (PRESENT TIME)

61

Still smiling, Charles come out of his reverie. Dammit, he
will call her. He checks the card in the drawer again,
dials her number. While waiting for it to ring...

CHARLES

Don't worry, I'm not going to
beg her. The one thing I swore
I would never do is beg her.

LAURA

(phone filter)

Hello?

CHARLES

Hi. It's a voice from your
past.

LAURA

(filter;
surprised)

Charles?

CHARLES

Can you talk?

INT. A-FRAME KITCHEN

62

REBECCA, five, moves into the kitchen during this scene with brush, comb, barrettes. She climbs onto a counter behind Laura and sets to work on Laura's hair. Rebecca is a thin little girl with large, dark eyes. Laura clearly adores her, submits to the new "hairdo" with good humor.

LAURA

Hi. Jim isn't here. He's at work.

CHARLES

Maybe he's out cheating on you. Maybe you should just assume that and cheat on him. With me.

LAURA

What?

CHARLES

I thought I might as well get to the point.

Laura laughs. Charles turns to CAMERA with a self-satisfied expression. It's going very well.

LAURA

How've you been? Are you okay?

CHARLES

No, I'm miserable. I miss you.

A long silence from Laura's end. Charles closes his eyes.

VOICE OF CHARLES

Oh God.

CHARLES

Laura, five minutes. Just let me see you for five minutes, that's all I ask.

VOICE OF CHARLES

Asshole, you said you weren't going to beg her. Stop talking.

CHARLES

Please, Laura. I haven't seen you in months.

LAURA

Okay.

Cont.

CHARLES

Great! Now? I mean when? I mean it doesn't have to be now, it can be tonight or tomorrow.

LAURA

What's tomorrow, Saturday? Tomorrow is good.

CHARLES

Yeah. Tomorrow is good. Yeah.

LAURA

Ouch! I'm sorry, Rebecca's combing my hair. How's two o'clock?

CHARLES

Two o'clock. Perfect time. Where?

LAURA

On the crescent by the school. But Charles, we're talking about five minutes, okay?

CHARLES

No question.

LAURA

I'll see you tomorrow. I've got to go.

CHARLES

Where are you going?

LAURA

I'm baking bread. I have to take it out of the oven.

CHARLES

How domestic.

LAURA

If you feel that bitter about it, maybe we shouldn't meet.

CHARLES

(quickly)

I love you, I'll see you tomorrow.

He hangs up, bangs his fist into his palm in self-congratulation.

INT. LOBBY - FIVE O'CLOCK

Charles comes off the elevator carrying his cassette player. He stops at the candy stand, selects a candy bar.

BLIND MAN

What do you have?

VOICE OF CHARLES

I have hope. I'm going to see Laura tomorrow.

BLIND MAN

Hey. What do you have?

CHARLES

A Mars Bar.

INT. CHARLES' LIVING ROOM (A LITTLE LATER)

Sam is playing the piano and singing "All I Have To Do Is Dream," an old Everly Brothers song.

Charles enters from outside. As he hangs up his jacket...

CHARLES

Sam, I want my own bed tonight.

Sam fits his replies into the pauses as he sings.

SAM

'Only trouble is...' You'll get it. 'Gee whiz'...

CHARLES

Take Elise to your place.

SAM

'I'm dreaming my life away...' She's gone. She had me drive her to the train.

(continues with final chorus)

'I need you so...that I could die, I love you so...and that is why. Whenever I want you, all I have to do is drea-ee-am.' The Everly Brothers. What ever happened to the Everly Brothers?

CHARLES

One went crazy and one's still around. What are you doing here?

Cont.

SAM

Eating the leftover chili.
(takes bowl of
it from atop piano;
continues eating)
Susan's at your mother's and
she'll be home for dinner.
What is dinner, by the way?

CHARLES

Leftover chili. Is there more?

SAM

Yes, there's more. I don't
know that I want it again
though.

CHARLES

Wait a minute. Why aren't you
at work? I thought you worked
late tonight.

SAM

I got canned.

CHARLES

What! Why?

SAM

They didn't say.

CHARLES

Bastards. Jesus. It was a
stinko job anyway.

SAM

It paid the rent.

CHARLES

Didn't they give you severance
pay?

SAM

Yeah, but I owed a lot of
people money around there and
they all gathered 'round. They
knew they wouldn't be seeing
me anymore.

CHARLES

Are you broke?

Cont.

SAM

Yeah.

CHARLES

You better stay here a while.

SAM

I couldn't do that.

CHARLES

Sure you could.

SAM

Okay. Temporarily.

CHARLES

You'll have to sleep on the couch till Susan goes back to school.

SAM

I'm pretty tall for the couch.

CHARLES

Okay, I'll sleep on the couch. You can have my bed.

SAM

That's what I thought. I put my stuff in your closet already.

Charles looks at Sam.

SAM

You want me to sleep on the floor?

CHARLES

No.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

65

Once again Charles is wriggling around uncomfortably on the couch. He looks TO CAMERA.

CHARLES

What do you want me to do? He's been my best friend since fourth grade. Skip it, okay?

He turns over, goes to sleep.

EXT. CHARLES' BACKYARD - DAY

Another cold grey day. Charles goes to the bird feeder, pours some birdseed into it. He goes back into the house.

INT. KITCHEN

Susan has washed her hair, is drying it on a towel.

Sam wanders around in maroon pajamas and striped ski socks.

CHARLES

What time is it?

SAM

At the tone, the time will be...twelve noon. What time are you seeing her?

CHARLES

Two o'clock.

SAM

Nervous?

CHARLES

No, I'm not nervous.

But he is. Sam rolls his eyes.

SUSAN

Can I give you some advice?

CHARLES

You're going to give it to me anyway so I'll say yes.

SUSAN

You need some new clothes.

CHARLES

I don't have any money.

SUSAN

You've got fifteen or twenty dollars, don't you? Everybody's got fifteen or twenty dollars.

SAM

I don't.

CHARLES

What new clothes can I buy with fifteen or twenty dollars?

Cont.

SUSAN

A new sweater.

CHARLES

What's wrong with this one?

His sweater is torn, has holes in both elbows.

SAM

Nothing that I can see.

Susan looks at them disparagingly.

SAM

What can you expect from a child her age? She never even went to Woodstock.

CHARLES

Neither did we.

SAM

But we could have.

CHARLES

True.

With deft movements, Susan makes a turban from the towel.

SUSAN

Woodstock was just a whole bunch of people walking around in the mud looking for a place to pee. I saw the movie.

Sam and Charles looks at each other. Charles suddenly picks up his jacket and walks out.

EXT. CRESCENT NEAR REBECCA'S SCHOOL (LATER) 68

Charles' car is parked. He is waiting for Laura.

INT. CHARLES' CAR 69

Charles looks at his watch. Laura is late. The car radio is playing Janis Joplin's "Get It While You Can."

CHARLES

But Janis...what if she won't come out of her A-frame? How can I get it?

He hears a horn, sees Laura pulling up on the opposite side of the crescent. She rolls down her window, yells:

LAURA

I'm sick. I just came to tell you.

Cont.

CHARLES

What?

LAURA

I called but you'd already left.

Charles gets out of his car, runs across the crescent.

CHARLES

What's wrong with you?

LAURA

The flu I guess. I ache all over.

CHARLES

You shouldn't have come out.

LAURA

I thought of you waiting here.
I knew you'd wait for hours.

CHARLES

Roll the window up.

He goes around, gets in the passenger side.

INT. LAURA'S CAR

70

as Charles closes the door behind him, looks at Laura.

LAURA

Don't look at me. I look
awful.

CHARLES

You should be in bed.

LAURA

I know. I was.

CHARLES

I wouldn't have waited for hours.

LAURA

Yes you would. And if you'd
been home when I called, you
wouldn't have believed I was
sick. What are you doing?

Charles edges over on the seat, puts his arm around her.

CHARLES

Checking to see if you have a
fever.

(putting his lips
to her forehead)

I think so.

Laura seems uncomfortable. She pushes him away gently.

LAURA

You still didn't get your
glasses fixed.

CHARLES

I'm waiting.

LAURA

What for? Oh Charles...

(sighs)

I better get back now.

CHARLES

I wish I could take you home
and take care of you. I could
bring you aspirins and rub your
back. I could get in bed with
you and we could watch TV.
During the ads, I could bring
you liquids.

LAURA

That would be some Saturday
night.

CHARLES

That would be a perfect Saturday
night.

LAURA

Sure. And Jim could change the
channel.

(looks out windshield;
after a few beats)

I'm sorry I'm sick. I'll see
you another time.

CHARLES

Promise?

She nods.

CHARLES

I'm going to follow you home.
You're too sick to drive. Wait
until I turn my car around, okay?

LAURA

Okay.

CHARLES

You'll call me.

LAURA

Yes. I'll call you.

CHARLES

I love you.

LAURA

I know. Go on.

49

EXT. CRESCENT 71

Charles gets out, returns to his car and gets in.

INT. CHARLES' CAR 72

He turns on the ignition. A grinding sound. He is frantic.

CHARLES
Start you bastard, start!

He tries again. The car starts.

EXT. CRESCENT 73

Charles pulls around behind Laura's car, follows her.

EXT. LAURA'S STREET 74

The cars move along until they reach the A-frame. Laura turns into her drive. OX is in the yard with Rebecca. Ox is tall, broad-shouldered. Despite the cold, he wears just jeans and an Irish cable-knit sweater.

INT. CHARLES' CAR 75

He is coasting very slowly past Laura's house.

CHARLES
I bet that sweater set you back
more than fifteen or twenty bucks,
Ox, old buddy.

EXT. LAURA'S HOUSE 76

Laura gets out of her car. Rebecca runs to her. Ox also moves to her, puts his arm around her. They walk toward the house, Rebecca clinging to Laura's hand.

BACK TO CHARLES 77

Charles' neck is craned around to watch them as long as possible as the car coasts along. A sudden jolt and a loud thud...Charles has skidded on a patch of ice into a tree on someone's treelawn.

EXT. LAURA'S A-FRAME - STREET 78

Laura, Ox, and Rebecca turn at the noise. Laura shakes her head...wouldn't you know it.

Ox lopes easily across his yard and crosses the street to Charles' car.

Cont.

OX

You okay, pal?

CHARLES

I'm fine. Pal.

Charles would like to vanish from the earth. Instead he puts his car in reverse, backs onto the street. Ox guides the operation.

OX

You've got quite a dent in your front end. Was that there before?

CHARLES

No. But I can't do anything about that either.

Ox holds up his hand in a sort of Roman salute. Charles takes off down the street, accelerating very fast.

EXT. CHARLES' HOUSE (THE NEXT DAY)

79

as Charles pulls into his drive, he sees an old maroon Cadillac parked at the curb.

INT. CHARLES' LIVING ROOM

80

as he enters. Sam, still in his pajamas, is at the piano playing blues riffs.

CHARLES

Whose car?

SAM

Susan's boyfriend.

CHARLES

He drives a Cadillac?

SAM

He's going to be a doctor, isn't he? I guess they start early.

CAMERA FOLLOWS Charles DOWN the hall and INTO:

INT. SPARE ROOM

81

Susan and her boyfriend are packing her suitcase, getting her things together. MARK is twenty with very long hair in a headband. He wears white Mexican pants and sandals. He seems an odd choice for the super-straight Susan.

Cont.

CHARLES

Hi.

SUSAN

Oh good, I was afraid we were going to miss you. Mark, this is Charles.

MARK

(extends hand)

Glad to meet you, Charles.

CHARLES

Same here. You're leaving already?

SUSAN

Mark wants to get an early start.

MARK

Sue...if you'll fold the sweater the other way...

Mark quickly and efficiently reorganizes her packing.

CHARLES

You have time for some coffee?

MARK

I take no artificial stimulants.

CHARLES

A glass of milk or something?

MARK

I'm loaded with calcium for the day, thank you..

Mark zips the suitcase. Charles looks at him. Maybe he's not such a strange choice for Susan after all.

SUSAN

We're going to stop by Mom's so we'll probably have something there.

CHARLES

Yeah. Hawaiian Punch.

Susan laughs.

MARK

I'm sorry I can't accept your hospitality, Charles, but I do want to meet your mother and stepfather.

CHARLES

That's okay.

Mark picks up the suitcase and exits.

Susan is glowing. She is obviously crazy about Mark.

SUSAN

Do you like him?

CHARLES

(valiantly)

Sure I like him.

Susan beams. She is getting her jacket on. She looks at Charles and suddenly her expression changes.

SUSAN

I hate to leave you with that girl being so rotten to you.

CHARLES

She's not rotten to me. She's married to somebody else.

SUSAN

Charles, face it. If she really cared for you, she'd leave her husband. Women walk out on their husbands every day of the week.

Charles doesn't want a lecture. He picks up her book bag.

CHARLES

Let's not keep Dr. Mark waiting.

SUSAN

He's not a doctor yet. He's only in pre-med.

CHARLES

I'm optimistic about his future.

They exit the spare room.

EXT. CHARLES' HOUSE

82

Charles and Susan walk to the Cadillac with the rest of her gear. Mark stows it efficiently in the trunk. He and Charles shake hands again. Susan and Charles hug.

Susan and Mark get into the car. As they pull out, he has his arm around her, she is snuggled up on his shoulder.

Charles watches the car as it recedes into the distance. He feels very much alone.

INT. PATTERSON'S OFFICE - DAY (TWO WEEKS LATER)

Charles hands Patterson an album...Janis Joplin's "Pearl."

CHARLES

I'm sorry it's taken so long, sir, but this ought to do it for your son. Especially 'Get It While You Can' on side two.

PATTERSON

Wait a minute. Janis Joplin. Isn't that the hippie singer who killed herself? Won't he say 'why should I take advice from someone who committed suicide?'

CHARLES

If he thinks that way.

PATTERSON

I'll take a chance and send it. Thanks, Charles. I knew you'd come through.

CHARLES

You're welcome.

INT. TYPING POOL AREA

As he crosses, he falls into step with Betty who has just bought coffee and a danish at the coffee cart.

BETTY

I don't know how I can eat this after the dinner I had at Laura's last night.

CHARLES

You were at Laura's last night? How is Laura?

BETTY

Fine. She had the flu a couple of weeks ago, but she's fine now. I wish she weren't such a good cook though. I'm trying to lose weight but with dinners like that I'll never make it.

CHARLES

What did she cook?

BETTY

Lobster Newburg. It was delicious.

CHARLES

With rice?

BETTY

Mmm-hmm, rice. And she had a very nice salad with an unusual dressing.

CHARLES

What did you have for dessert?

They are at Betty's desk. She sets down her food.

BETTY

Should I come in?

CHARLES

Yes.

INT. CHARLES' OFFICE

85

Betty looks in the Out basket.

BETTY

I don't see anything for me.

CHARLES

I meant just to talk.

Betty is thrilled.

CHARLES

So what about dessert?

BETTY

Oh. It was a fruit compote thing with liqueur in it. Very refreshing.

(looks at Charles
curiously)

How come you're so interested in what Laura served for dinner?

CHARLES

Oh no. I just uh...well I'm interested in menus because I'm uh...thinking of having some people over one of these evenings.

(does she
believe him?)

Maybe you could come. Not a big party or anything.

Cont.

BETTY
(believes him)
I don't like big parties.

CHARLES
Just a few people.

BETTY
More like a get-together.

CHARLES
Yeah.

BETTY
That sounds nice. I could come
early and help you get organized.
Help you fix the hors d'oeuvres.

CHARLES
(hating himself)
Yeah, great.

BETTY
Okay then. Let me know when.

Betty smiles again and leaves the office.

Charles sits down at his desk, closes his eyes, rests his
forehead in the heels of his palms. Whatever possessed him?

INT. LOBBY - FIVE O'CLOCK

86

Charles, ready to go home and carrying his cassette player,
makes his usual stop at the candy stand.

BLIND MAN
What do you have?

VOICE OF CHARLES
A headache. Laura promised
she'd call me when she was well
and she didn't.

BLIND MAN
Hey. What do you have?

CHARLES
A Peanut Butter Cup.

BLIND MAN
Why do I always have to ask
you twice?

CHARLES
(sheepishly)
Sorry.

INT. CHARLES' LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Charles arrives home from work to find Sam, in his pajamas, sprawled on the couch with a bottle of wine. "To Know Him Is To Love Him" by the Teddy Bears is on the stereo.

CHARLES

I thought you were going to
Unemployment.

SAM

I went to Unemployment.

CHARLES

In your pajamas?

SAM

I changed back again. If I'm
going to be depressed, I might
as well be comfortable.

(singing along
with record)

'And I do, and I do, and I
do...' They suggested jobs I
could look for but I told them
I would only consider custodial
work for a religious institution.

CHARLES

What?

SAM

Just off the top of my head.

(suddenly
thinking)

Oh. Turn that off. I have
something to tell you and it
isn't too pleasant.

Charles turns down the volume.

SAM

Your mother's back in the bin.
It seems she went on a crying
jag and then she ate a whole
card of laxatives.

CHARLES

Christ. Pete called?

SAM

Yeah. Sorry.

INT. CLARA'S ROOM IN PSYCHIATRIC WING - NIGHT

Clara sits in bed, a bright yellow ribbon wrapped around her hair. In the other bed, MRS. DELILLO, wearing a bright green ribbon. They are watching Pete who is dancing across the floor, counting aloud.

Charles enters, waits at the door, also watches Pete.

As Pete turns, he sees Charles. Embarrassed, he stops.

PETE

I was demonstrating how to turn.

CHARLES

Go ahead.

PETE

I already did it.

CLARA

I'm going home tomorrow. They knew it was a mistake to put me in here.

CHARLES

That's great. How are you?

CLARA

Charles, I'm so glad not to be dead. My first baby. I want you to meet my very fine friend, Mrs. DeLillo.

MRS. DELILLO

The Lord have mercy on your soul.
Do you smoke?

Charles extends a pack, expecting her to take one cigarette, but she takes the entire pack, puts it down the front of her nightgown.

MRS. DELILLO

Matches?

CHARLES

Can you have matches?

MRS. DELILLO

What good are cigarettes without matches?

Charles gives her a book of matches.

CLARA

Come here, Charles.

Charles moves to her bed. She grips his hand.

CLARA

He wants me to go dancing. He
wants me to take dancing lessons.

CHARLES

You should. That sounds great.

PETE

(pleased)

Hear that, honey? I signed us
up for lessons at the
Alexis Dance Studio. We're
going to learn the disco dances.

CHARLES

Disco. Yeah. Great.

He tries to extricate his hand but Clara won't let go.

CLARA

Do you dance?

CHARLES

(lying)

Sure.

CLARA

Disco?

CHARLES

No.

CLARA

What do you dance?

CHARLES

Uh...the hula.

Mrs. DeLillo laughs. Pete frowns.

PETE

Aw, he's just kidding. All
young kids dance.

CHARLES

The tango.

Pete laughs but he is getting angry.

PETE

You don't tango.

Cont.

CHARLES

I don't know the name of the
dance I do. I just sort of
move around.

Clara lets go of Charles.

CLARA

Do it and we'll tell you the
name of it.

CHARLES

Not here, Mom.

Clara looks like she's about to cry.

Charles sighs, makes an embarrassed little turn around
the floor.

MRS. DELILLO

He's the one who needs dancing
lessons.

PETE

Too bad our class is full up.
Otherwise he could go with us.

CLARA

He wouldn't go anyway.

MRS. DELILLO

You mean he wants you to go
but he wouldn't go?

CHARLES

Sure I'd go. It sounds like
fun. A lot of fun. Too bad
the class is full.

PETE

I can call and see if they had
some cancellations.

Charles desperately wants to change the subject.

CHARLES

Where did you get those hair
ribbons?

CLARA

The nurse.

(sings)

'Tie the yellow ribbon 'round the
old oak tree, the old oak tree,
the old oak tree.' That's what
I sang when she put it on me.

MRS. DELILLO

And I sang 'Tie the green
ribbon 'round the old oak tree,
the old...'

CLARA

(cutting in)

Only mine's a real song.

MRS. DELILLO

So's mine.

Clara looks at her family as if to say, the poor woman is
crazy.

CLARA

Bring my fitch coat when you
come tomorrow.

PETE

Sure will. Mommy's going home
in style.

CLARA

(sings)

'In the meantime, in between
time Ain't we got fun?' Another
song.

PETE

Mommy knows her music.

Clara nods as though vindicated.

PETE

Mrs. DeLillo knows her music too.

Clara frowns at Pete...you traitor.

MRS. DELILLO

Thank you. And I don't medicate
myself with laxatives.

CLARA

It was an accident.

MRS. DELILLO

They give you laxatives here.

CLARA

It was an accident.

PETE

Let's not dwell on past mistakes.

INT. CORRIDOR OF PSYCHIATRIC WING

89

Charles and Pete are walking toward the elevator. They pass several patients who are wandering around.

PETE

I know Mommy was mad at me, but I want to keep on the good side of that woman in there.

CHARLES

Mrs. DeLillo?

PETE

She's a dog killer. Cat killer. She had a house full of cats and dogs and she killed them all. I don't know the details. I'll be glad to get Mommy home and away from her. You never know.

CHARLES

Christ.

PETE

I'm glad you said that about the dancing lessons sounding like fun.

CHARLES

Yeah, I didn't want Mom to think... you know.

PETE

Yeah, because she probably won't go and I sure wouldn't want to go alone.

Charles looks stricken but before he can say anything, Pete begins dancing a fox trot right there in the corridor, and singing "Embraceable You." Charles is embarrassed.

A few people stop to watch, including a NURSE. Pete reaches for her and they twirl down the hall. Surprisingly, Pete is a beautiful dancer, graceful, holding himself just so as he glides around with her.

Charles watches, astonished. This is a side of Pete Charles has never seen. He feels a surge of affection for his long-suffering stepfather.

The impromptu dance over, Pete bows, kisses the Nurse's hand. She laughs. The people gathered around are clapping.

Charles grins.

EXT. HOSPITAL PARKING LOT (IMMEDIATELY AFTER)

90

Charles and Pete walk along toward their cars.

CHARLES

You're a good dancer, Pete.
You're really good.

PETE

In my day I wasn't bad.
Charles, you know what I want?
You know what I really want?
A Honda Civic.

CHARLES

Why don't you get one? Your
other car is getting pretty old.

PETE

You think so?

CHARLES

You could use a new car. Did
you and Mom used to dance like
that?

PETE

Sure. Whaddya' think? And
she was the prettiest girl on
the floor, too. I guess you
want me to get a new car.

CHARLES

Sure I do.

Pete takes out his handkerchief, blows his nose.

PETE

People should get what they
want once in awhile, shouldn't
they.

CHARLES

Yeah.

EXT. CRESCENT OUTSIDE REBECCA'S SCHOOL - NOON

91

A dozen or so young Mothers are gathered outside the school
waiting to pick up their children. They stand around in
clusters of threes and fours, chatting, passing the time
until school lets out. Our ANGLE FEATURES Laura who stands
in one group, talking animatedly with several young Women.

Snow is falling.

INT. CHARLES' CAR

92

Charles is parked at enough of a distance so no one notices him, but close enough to watch Laura. He is eating a take-out burger, but his eyes are glued on Laura.

EXT. SCHOOL

93

As the Children come out carrying paintings they made in school. Rebecca is very excited to show hers to Laura, who admires it with proper motherly enthusiasm. They move off hand-in-hand to Laura's car, Rebecca chattering away.

INT. CHARLES' CAR

94

He watches them another moment, his yearning apparent on his face. If only they were his. Then he starts his car, pulls out, his expression once again impassive.

EXT. HOBBY STORE - ANOTHER DAY AFTER WORK

95

Charles looks in the window, enters. He comes out immediately (time jump) carrying various packages.

INT. CHARLES' DINING ROOM - EVENING

96

Charles has balsa wood, glue, and paints, and he is constructing something. After a bit, he looks INTO CAMERA.

CHARLES

Laura didn't want anyone to know about us.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET - DAY (A YEAR AGO)

97

Charles is driving his car in downtown traffic on the way to work. Laura sits next to him.

VOICE OF CHARLES

As she pointed out, more often than necessary, she was still married to another guy. She made me drop her off two blocks from work every morning so nobody would catch on.

INT. CHARLES' CAR

98

Charles pulls over, Laura starts out of the car. He pulls her back in, kisses her. She starts out of the car again, he pulls her back in, kisses her again. Horns are honking behind them.

Cont.

LAURA

Why do you like me so much?

CHARLES

Because your hair is brown and
your eyes are blue and you
understand the Dewey Decimal System.

She laughs. They exchange another quick kiss and Laura gets out of the car.

INT. BAR - NIGHT (STILL A YEAR AGO)

99

Charles, Laura, and Sam at a little round table drinking, laughing, talking. Jukebox music.

VOICE OF CHARLES

The only one who knew about
us was Sam. I was a little
nervous about that one.

INT. CHARLES' LIVING ROOM (THE SAME NIGHT)

100

Charles puts Ray Charles' "Georgia On My Mind" on the stereo. He and Laura slow dance in the darkened living room.

CHARLES

How did you like Sam?

LAURA

He's funny.

CHARLES

(resigned)

Yeah. Women always go for Sam.

LAURA

Really? That surprises me.

Charles smiles with relief. Laura puts her arms around his neck and they continue dancing.

VOICE OF CHARLES

Say what you want...it was
perfect.

INT. GYMNASIUM (STILL A YEAR AGO)

101

Laura is bouncing on a trampoline. Charles watches quizzically as she bounces into a sitting position and upright again.

CHARLES

I thought you said you were on
trampoline team in high school.

LAURA
I was on the trampoline team
in high school.

CHARLES
It must have been before it
became a competitive sport.

LAURA
(stops jumping)
I never said I was any good,
you know. I only joined the
team because I was worried
about getting too tall, and
somebody told me if you jump
a lot on a trampoline, it drives
your shinbones into your feet
and you stop growing.

She starts jumping again.

CHARLES
Did it work?

LAURA
No. I grew two more inches.
Laura suddenly does a more elaborate stunt...a back flip.

CHARLES
Hey!
Laura does a truly spectacular stunt.

CHARLES
That's fantastic.
Laura, still jumping, looks over at him...that'll show you.

CLOSE ON CHARLES 102
as he watches her.

ANGLE ON LAURA (SLOW MOTION) 103
as she simply jumps, higher and higher, her hair flying, her
skirt flying, a look of abandon on her face.

INT. NATURAL HISTORY GALLERY - ANOTHER DAY 104

Displays of stuffed elk, otter, and the like. Woodland
sounds, such as the cries of loons, accompany the exhibit.
Laura looks at the displays. Charles looks at Laura.

Cont.

CHARLES

You aren't too tall. Who told
you you were too tall?

Laura makes a comment about the exhibit but Charles won't
let up. He follows her as she moves along to the next animal.

CHARLES

How tall is your husband?

LAURA

Charles...

CHARLES

Just tell me.

LAURA

Six-three.

CHARLES

I knew it.

LAURA

Yeah, I liked it that Jim was
tall.

She reads aloud from the display card concerning the mating
habits of the moose.

CHARLES

What else did you like about him?

LAURA

Don't you ever let up?

CHARLES

Just tell me that and I'll drop
the subject.

LAURA

I don't know, he was nice to
me. And he had the house and
Rebecca and I just loved her
the minute I saw her. I'd been
knocking around by myself for so
long, I was sick of it. I
went to his house for dinner
on our first date and I never
left. Does that shock you?

Charles is jealous. He looks a little sullen.

Cont.

LAURA

And he never made a lot of demands on me. If I wanted to work it was fine, if I didn't it was fine. He was easy to get along with.

CHARLES

Maybe because he didn't care that much.

LAURA

That's not fair.

CHARLES

Did you ever think what he really wanted was a live-in housekeeper and mother for Rebecca?

LAURA

(long pause)

Yes.

(suddenly angry)

Look, I left him, didn't I?

CHARLES

Yeah, but you feel so guilty about it.

LAURA

Because he never mistreated me. He never did some terrible thing to me.

CHARLES

Even if he had, you would have thought it was your fault.

LAURA

It probably would have been.

Charles laughs. Laura sees the humor in it, smiles grudgingly. At just that moment, the cry of the loon is heard. This makes Laura really laugh. She reaches for Charles' hand, presses it against her cheek.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT (PRESENT TIME)

105

Charles continues with his construction. We still can't quite tell what it is. He looks at his watch.

INT. BEDROOM

Sam is engrossed in the game. He is lying on Charles' bed, kicking his legs.

SAM

Go you bastards, go!

Charles enters, watches the play. When it's over...

CHARLES

I'm going for a ride. Wanna come?

SAM

Where to, need I ask?

CHARLES

Skip it.

SAM

Are you familiar with the term 'masochism'?

CHARLES

Sam, why don't you get another dog?

SAM

Why don't you get another girl?

CHARLES

Touché. Coming or not?

SAM

No. I don't get that much pleasure staring at A-frames. I'm probably missing an important gene but sitting in a freezing car trying to figure out if she's in the kitchen or if she's gone to bed yet just doesn't give me the kick it should.

Charles leaves the bedroom.

SAM

(calls after him)

Get some beer.

INT. CHARLES' CAR (OUTSIDE LAURA'S A-FRAME)

Charles parks his car at the curb. There is a light on downstairs at Laura's.

Cont.

Charles' car heater doesn't work. He is shivering, we can SEE his breath. He stares fixedly at the lighted window. He stamps his feet, rubs his arms for warmth.

As he watches, the downstairs light goes off. A few beats, and an upstairs light goes on.

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY (A YEAR AGO)

Charles and Laura having lunch at their usual restaurant.

VOICE OF CHARLES

All right, maybe things weren't exactly perfect. Little signs here and there...you know.

LAURA

Don't wait for me after work today. I have a doctor's appointment.

CHARLES

What doctor? What's wrong?

LAURA

Dr. Davis and nothing's wrong.

CHARLES

Are you sick?

LAURA

No. Just a regular checkup.

(to Waitress)

Could I have more coffee, please?

The Waitress pours the coffee, moves away again.

CHARLES

What kind of doctor is he?

LAURA

Gynecologist.

CHARLES

Are you late?

LAURA

No. There's nothing wrong. I go see him once a year and today's the day I happen to have the appointment.

Cont.

CHARLES
I'll drive you there.

LAURA
No you won't. He's right in
the medical building at
Penn Square and I can walk
from work.

CHARLES
Why don't you want me to
drive you?

LAURA
(losing patience)
Charles. You want to be with
me twenty-four hours a day.

CHARLES
What's wrong with that?

LAURA
There are a few things I like
to do alone and one is go to
my gynecologist. End of subject.

Laura looks annoyed, but Charles is too unhappy to drop it.

CHARLES
Is there someone else?

LAURA
I don't believe this.

CHARLES
You can tell me.

Abruptly, Laura gets up and exits the restaurant. Charles
sits alone. He feels miserable.

EXT. STREET IN FRONT OF MEDICAL BUILDING - NIGHT 109

Charles' car is parked outside the building.

INT. CHARLES' CAR 110

Charles waits. After a bit, Laura comes out of the medical
building. He honks the horn.

Laura shakes her head a little, but she gets in the car.

LAURA
I knew you'd be here.

Cont.

CHARLES

And here I thought it would
be a nice surprise.

Laura is not amused. Charles pulls the car out.

INT. BEDROOM (A LITTLE LATER)

111

They are now in bed. Laura is reading.

CHARLES

I think you're right. We're
together too much. It isn't
natural. So I've made some
plans for the next few nights
and they don't include you.

LAURA

Good.

CHARLES

I don't want you to feel neglected,
but I don't see why I should have
to give up drinking with the guys,
do you?

LAURA

What guys? You mean Sam?

CHARLES

Sam isn't my only friend,
Laura. I have many friends,
most of whom I've yet to meet.

Laura is amused but trying not to show it.

CHARLES

Also, my bowling night. Why
should I give up my bowling
night? I like you, Laura,
but I'm not going to sacrifice
everything.

Laura is smiling despite herself.

CHARLES

Now Saturday I'll be playing
poker.

LAURA

With the same guys?

Cont.

CHARLES

Yes, as a matter of fact.
And if you don't like my
friends, you can keep it to
yourself. And I don't want
to hear anymore about the
fact that I'm always out
with the guys and I don't pay
enough attention to you.

Laura gives Charles a sharp poke with her elbow.

CHARLES

Hey!

Pleased, Laura does it again.

CHARLES

You're asking for it.

LAURA

Can't take it, hunh?

Laura clenches her fist preparatory to socking him on the chest. Before she connects, he grabs her wrist. They wrestle and he pins her.

CHARLES

Laura, is Dr. Davis a lung
specialist?

LAURA

What?

CHARLES

You were coughing yesterday,
in the bathroom. The door
was closed but I could still
hear you.

LAURA

Let go of me.

He does.

CHARLES

You smoke unfiltered cigarettes.

LAURA

I smoke about two cigarettes
a day.

Cont.

CHARLES

It adds up. Two plus two plus
two plus two...

Laura looks at Charles, then moves back to her part of the
bed, props herself up on her pillows again, opens her book.

CHARLES

Well why were you so goddamn
mysterious about the doctor's
appointment?

LAURA

(turning the page)
I wasn't.

CHARLES

I don't want anything to
happen to you.

LAURA

(means it)
You scare me.

CHARLES

You scare me too, the way
you're acting.

LAURA

Dr. Davis is a gynecologist.
It was a regular checkup.
He found nothing wrong. I'd
appreciate it if you'd let me
read my book.

Some quiet. Laura reads, Charles stares at the ceiling.

CHARLES

Dr. Davis. Yeah, I know
Dr. Davis. Tall, distinguished-
looking. Grey sideburns. Older
but still attractive. Took a
little too long examining your
breasts, didn't he. I'm going
over there tomorrow and beat the
shit out of him.

Charles turns off his lamp, rolls on his side away from her.

Laura looks at him, then back to her book. She knows he's
being funny, but the intensity of his love frightens her.

EXT. CHARLES' HOUSE - DAY (A YEAR AGO)

112

Charles pulls his car up the drive.

VOICE OF CHARLES

I decided to be more casual
about things. Before I had a
chance, another little bomb
dropped.

INT. KITCHEN

113

Charles comes in from outside carrying some groceries.
Laura is on the phone. Seeing Charles, she stops.

LAURA

(into phone)
Just a second.
(hand over receiver)
Would you excuse me? This is
sort of a private call.

CHARLES

Sure. Just let me put the
milk away.

Charles puts the milk into the refrigerator. Laura doesn't
resume her conversation until he has left the room.

INT. LIVING ROOM

114

Charles goes around the room frantically searching for a pack
of cigarettes. He finally finds a crumpled old pack under a
couch cushion. He lights one; his hand is shaking. He sits
down on the couch.

EXT. PARK (A LITTLE LATER)

115

Charles and Laura are walking along in silence. Charles
reaches into his pocket for the cigarette package, but it's
empty. He throws it into a trash can as they pass.

CHARLES

Why didn't I meet you first?

LAURA

I don't know. I wish you had.

CHARLES

(hopefully)
You do?

LAURA

But the fact is, you didn't.

Forgetting he has no cigarette, Charles strikes a match and
holds it to his mouth. Catching himself, he blows it out.

As they walk along, Laura clasps her arms around his waist,
rests her head on his shoulder.

INT. CHARLES' CAR (PRESENT TIME)

116

As Charles watches, the upstairs light in the A-frame goes out. He starts his car, pulls out.

INT. DINING ROOM (A LITTLE LATER)

117

Charles is back at work on his construction.

Sam comes in, sees beer on the table.

SAM

You got beer.

Sam goes into the kitchen for one, comes back in and sits at the table. He watches Charles for a moment. The construction is now far enough along for us to know what it is: a miniature A-frame.

SAM

I don't believe it. Do you know how sick this is? You slink over to her house every night and now this. What's the point of it?

CHARLES

There isn't any point.

SAM

You intend doing it anyway.

CHARLES

I intend doing it anyway.

Charles continues working on his miniature A-frame.

SAM

Charles. Go to Laura's house. Ring the doorbell and ask her if she's coming back. Get an answer. For once and for all.

CHARLES

No.

SAM

Why not?

CHARLES

I don't want to get no for an answer.

Sam shakes his head at Charles. You're hopeless.

INT. FIFTH FLOOR CORRIDOR/TYPING POOL AREA - DAY 118

Charles comes off the elevator, enters the typing pool area. He stops short because he sees Betty alone at her desk.

She is reading a magazine and eating cottage cheese from the carton.

Deciding to be nice, Charles pulls a chair up to her desk.

CHARLES

Hi, Betty. That your lunch?

BETTY

I'm trying to lose twelve pounds.
I was just reading this...

She closes the magazine to show him what it is:
Family Circle.

BETTY

...and they've got a whole
section this month on dips.

CHARLES

Dips?

BETTY

For your party. I mean your
get-together.

CHARLES

Oh. Right. Dips.

BETTY

You might not want dips.

CHARLES

No, dips would be fine.

BETTY

Most people like them. And the
people on diets can just eat
the vegetables.

Charles nods. He wishes he could extricate himself from
this fictional get-together but it gets worse and worse.

BETTY

Do you think it will be a weekend
or a week night? Not that it
matters.

CHARLES

I don't know. A weekend I
guess.

BETTY

That's what I thought.

CHARLES

Yeah. Well, I better get back.

BETTY

Do you have anything for me?

CHARLES

(heartfelt)
Betty, I don't have anything for
you. I wish I did, but I don't.

BETTY

Don't worry about it. I still
have to finish the one you gave
me this morning.

Charles nods sadly. There is no way out with Betty.

INT. LOBBY - FIVE O'CLOCK

119

Charles approaches the candy stand nervously. He doesn't
want the Blind Man to get mad at him again. He selects a
candy bar.

BLIND MAN

What do you...

CHARLES

(cutting in)
An Almond Joy.

The Blind Man reaches out suspiciously and feels the candy
bar.

EXT. CLARA'S HOUSE - DAY

120

A light snow is drifting down as Charles' car pulls up the
drive. Charles and Sam get out, walk to the door, go inside.

INT. CLARA'S HOUSE

121

Sam and Charles come in through the vestibule. Charles goes
to the bottom of the stairs.

CHARLES

Mom?

CLARA'S VOICE

(o.s.)
Coming.

Clara descends the stairs. She has on a fifties-vintage
black strapless cocktail dress and white tennis shoes.

Cont.

CLARA
Pete's in Atlanta.

CHARLES
Yes, we know.

Clara takes one of Charles' arms and one of Sam's arms.

CLARA
One of my men is in Atlanta, but
two of my men are here to have
turkey dinner with me.

Charles is acutely embarrassed at Clara's seductiveness.

CLARA
I thought I'd dress for dinner.

SAM
You look very nice.

CLARA
I've had this for years.

SAM
It still looks very nice.

CLARA
I bet my men are hungry.

She sweeps them into the dining room. The table is set for three. Clara sits at the head, Sam and Charles on either side. Through the dining room windows, we can SEE the snow falling. All in all, a cozy setting for a family dinner.

CLARA
How are your parents, Sam? Where
are they living?

SAM
Dad's in an apartment on Lee Road
and mom's still in the house.

CLARA
They don't live together? Did
you hear that, Charles? Sam's
parents don't live together.

CHARLES
You knew that, Mom. They haven't
lived together since Sam and I
were in eighth grade.

Cont.

CLARA
I certainly did not know that.
That must make you very sad, Sam.

SAM
I'm accustomed to it.

CLARA
Brave boy.

CHARLES
You want me to bring the food
in, Mom?

CLARA
What food?

CHARLES
The turkey.

CLARA
There isn't any turkey.

CHARLES
Well the dinner. Whatever you
cooked.

CLARA
I didn't cook anything. There
isn't any dinner.

Charles and Sam look at each other. Clara starts laughing.

CLARA
There isn't any dinner.

SAM
Well. I guess the joke's on us.

CLARA
(laughing
heartily)
That's right. The joke's on you.

Charles nods.

INT. CHARLES' CAR (IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING)

122

Charles is driving. The snow is falling on the windshield,
the wipers are scraping back and forth.

Cont.

SAM

It was a little bizarre, but
it's nice to see your mother
enjoying herself for a change.

CHARLES

Christ. Poor Pete.

SAM

Why poor Pete? He probably had
his dinner in Atlanta.

CHARLES

Because he has to live with her.

SAM

I don't feel so sorry for him.
At least he has someone to take
care of.

EXT. MODEL A-FRAME - DAY

123

Snow on the ground. Charles and Sam are going up a walk
past signs with arrows: "Open." "Model House," etc.

SAM

May I ask why we're doing this?

CHARLES

I want to see what I'm up
against.

INT. MODEL A-FRAME

124

Ox is sitting at a little table. He rises as they enter.

OX

Hi there. Jim Connelly.

CHARLES

Charles Richardson. This is
Sam Traub. We're uh...interested
in an A-frame.

Ox is trying to remember where he's seen Charles before.

OX

Great.

Sam puts his finger on the side of his nose.

SAM

Did you by any chance play
football at college?

OX

Yes I did. Why? Did you?

SAM

Basketball. They used to call me Elk. Where did you go? You look familiar.

OX

I was just thinking the same. Not about you but about Charlie here. I went to Syracuse.

SAM

Nope. Ithaca. So this is an A-frame.

OX

Right. What do you guys do?

CHARLES

I'm a civil servant.

SAM

I'm an unemployed jacket salesman.

OX

I see. Well, I'll be glad to show you around. But you might keep in mind that the least expensive model is \$45,000.

SAM

Are you insulting us?

OX

Hey...not at all. Let me show you the house.

He walks them around. After pointing out various features...

OX

Where are you living now, Charlie.

CHARLES

On Kenmore Road, Jimmy.

OX

Nice street. You renting or what?

CHARLES

No, I own my house.

Cont.

Ox is impressed. Apparently Charles can afford an A-frame.

OX

How about you, Sam?

SAM

I live with Charlie.

OX

Of, of course. Sorry..

His tone is peculiar. Sam shoots him a quick look.

SAM

Why, you think it looks odd,
our living together?

OX

I don't think it's anybody's
business. Let me show you the
kitchen.

As they follow Ox to the kitchen, Charles and Sam exchange a
glance. Ox clearly thinks they're gay.

CHARLES

He's just living with me
temporarily.

OX

Sure.

Sam's eyes light up. If Ox wants gay, he'll give him gay.

SAM

Charlie, you're too much. Isn't
he too much? 'Temporarily.'

CHARLES

Sam...

SAM

Oh-oh. He's going into one of
his moods.

(confidentially
to Ox)

You have no idea what I put up
with. But I always forgive him
because he has such an amazing
body.

Ox nods nervously.

EXT. MODEL A-FRAME

125

as Ox walks them out, sees Charles' car at the curb.

OX

Hey! Now I know where I met
you. Did you bump into a tree
recently?

CHARLES

You mean that was...

OX

It sure was!

It's suddenly old home week as Ox and Charles shake hands and
laugh about the tree bumping incident.

INT. LAURA'S HOUSE

126

as Ox enters with Charles and Sam.

OX

Laura?

LAURA'S VOICE

(o.s.)
In the kitchen.

OX

We have company, babe.

Charles and Sam are taking off their jackets as Laura comes
out of the kitchen. She is stunned, of course.

OX

Remember the time the guy bumped
into the tree across the street?
Here he is! Charlie, meet Laura.
And this is Sam.

LAURA

(barely)
Hello.

OX

(putting their
jackets aside)
They were over looking at the
A-frame and I kept thinking,
Jeez this guy looks familiar,
but I just couldn't place him.

Laura turns and walks back into the kitchen.

Cont.

OX
(covering for her
apparent rudeness)
She must have something on the
stove. Make yourselves comfortable,
I'll get some ice.

Charles and Sam seat themselves on the living room couch.

CHARLES
He calls her 'babe'.

SAM
I noticed.

INT. KITCHEN

127

Ox moves across the room to Laura.

OX
They're just going to have a
couple of drinks. Try to be a
little friendlier. They're
very touchy.
(whispering)
They're gay.

Laura's eyes widen.

OX
Bring in some cheese and crackers
and stuff, okay? They're really
interested in an A-frame.

FOLLOW Ox out INTO:

INT. LIVING ROOM

128

OX
She'll bring some goodies in.
Wish you guys had been here
last week, she made pate. Ever
had homemade pate?

CHARLES
Yes.

SAM
Charlie, why don't you go help
Mrs. Connelly?
(to Ox)
He's fantastic in the kitchen.

Cont.

CHARLES

No, I don't...

SAM

Oh go on.

Sam pushes him off the couch. Reluctantly, Charles heads into the kitchen.

SAM

He's shy.

Ox nods.

INT. KITCHEN

129

Laura is angrily banging an ice tray into a bucket. She looks at Charles as he enters.

LAURA

What's going on?

Charles crosses to her, reaches for the ice tray.

CHARLES

Let me do that.

She hands him the ice tray, but he just puts it down, grabs her and hugs her very tightly. After a beat, she hugs him back.

CHARLES

I just want to know one thing.
Are you happy?

Laura pulls away from him.

CHARLES

I guess I have my answer.

LAURA

I don't know. I probably don't
deserve to be happy.

CHARLES

How can you say that!

LAURA

Ssssh!
(turns away)
Do the ice.

Cont.

Laura fixes a tray of pretzels, etc., while Charles dumps ice cubes into the bucket.

CHARLES

Does he know about us?

LAURA

No.

CHARLES

Where does he think you were for two months last winter?

LAURA

I told him I stayed with various friends, and he just accepted it. That's the way he is.

CHARLES

Christ. I would have made you account for every minute.

LAURA

(pointedly)

I know.

INT. LIVING ROOM

130

Laura comes out with her tray. Charles follows with the ice bucket.

OX

Right over here, Charlie.
What do you say, guys, scotch rocks all around?

CHARLES AND SAM

Fine.

OX

Doubles? I'm having a double.

SAM

I'll keep you company.

CHARLES

Actually, I'll have a Coke.
Want to keep my wits about me.

OX

Right, we can't have you bumping into anymore trees.

Cont.

He laughs. Charles could kill him.

OX

Say, babe, where's Rebecca?

LAURA

Playing up the street.

OX

Aw, the guys are going to miss her? Next time.

Ox has fixed drinks for all and now they sit around. Dead silence. Finally...

CHARLES

I read an interesting article in the paper about a doctor in some South American country who pulled a woman's eyes out of the sockets and cleaned them and picked off the tumors and then put the eyes back.

OX

God! That's sickening.

SAM

Did it cure her migraines?

CHARLES

And her double vision.

Laura is laughing. Ox looks at her, then back at Charles.

OX

Oh I get it. You're making it up.

CHARLES

Not at all. It was some years ago, however. It was in the same paper that had a denial from representatives of Frank Zappa that Frank Zappa had a bowel movement on stage.

Peals of laughter from Laura. Ox tries to smile.

SAM

I did see that, as a matter of fact. The same issue where Linda Ronstadt was quoted as saying she doesn't stick anything up her nose anymore except her finger.

CHARLES

Right, right. The papers give you such helpful hints these days. Did you know that rubbing yoghurt into your nipples will keep them pink?

SAM

No I didn't. Let's pick up some yoghurt on the way home.

CHARLES

Now you're talking.

Laura is doubled over with laughter.

Ox manages a tepid smile.

The room is dead silent again. Suddenly...

CHARLES

I love Laura.

Laura is stunned. So is Sam. Ox doesn't think he heard him right.

OX

What?

CHARLES

You heard me. I love Laura. I love your wife.

OX

(smiles)

You show very good taste.

CHARLES

It's not a joke.

SAM

Uh, Charles...

CHARLES

It's not a joke!

Laura mouth opens in astonishment.

Ox stands.

OX

I think you better leave now, pal.

SAM

(nervously)

Yeah, come on, Charles.

Sam pulls Charles up off the couch.

CHARLES

I love Laura.

SAM

Right now, Charles.

(propels Charles toward
the front door; to Dx)

Sorry.

Charles pulls away from Sam, walks up to Ox, says it directly in his face.

CHARLES

I love Laura.

Laura watches; she is both dismayed and intrigued.

CHARLES

I want to marry. I'm going
to marry her.

Ox recoils as though Charles is some madman let loose in his house.

OX

Get him out of here.

SAM

He's going, he's going.

Sam grabs Charles and drags him out the front door.

EXT. LAURA'S HOUSE

131

As Sam hustles Charles toward the car, the door opens and Ox flings their jackets out after them.

OX

Creeps!

Ox shuts the door again. Sam retrieves the jackets and continues to push Charles toward the car. Charles is feeling absolutely wonderful.

CHARLES

I was good in there, wasn't I?

SAM

Yeah, yeah, you were great.
Get in the car.

CHARLES

He can't say I didn't warn him, right?

SAM

Right. Get in the car.

Sam shoves Charles into the car, shuts the door after him.

SAM

Man, are you going to be
suffering when you come down.

INT. BAR (IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING)

132

Charles and Sam drinking. Sam is watching a pretty girl at the other end of the bar. He manages to catch her eye. She glances at him briefly. Sam smiles hopefully, but she isn't interested, turns back to her companions.

SAM

(sadly)

Women don't like me anymore.
I don't understand it.

Charles' high from the previous scene is starting to fade. Doubts are surfacing.

CHARLES

Sam...

Sam rolls his eyes. He knew this was coming.

CHARLES

I didn't blow it with Laura,
did I?

SAM

(carefully)

I wouldn't say you blew it, no.

CHARLES

I mean, she's got to know I
love her now. After what I did.

SAM

Whatever doubts she had are
definitely cleared up.

CHARLES

(confidently)

Yeah. She'll call me.

EXT. CHARLES' YARD - DAY

133

Charles has his box of birdseed and is pouring seed into the bird feeder. He is depressed.

VOICE OF CHARLES

The days go by, but Laura
doesn't call.

INT. CHARLES' OFFICE - DAY

134

Charles with his earphones on, lethargically doing a report.

VOICE OF CHARLES

I go to work...

INT. CLARA'S BATHROOM

135

Charles is hauling Clara out of the tub. Today she is wearing a fire-red nightgown.

VOICE OF CHARLES

I go to my mother's...

INT. CHARLES' DINING ROOM - NIGHT

136

MOVING IN ON the miniature A-frame which is now complete down to the wallpaper and the furnishings.

VOICE OF CHARLES

I go home.

There are even two little stick figures representing Ox and Laura. Charles marches the Laura figure into the bedroom, puts her in bed, covers her.

CHARLES

Good night, Laura.

He marches the Ox figure into the kitchen and sticks him head-first into the oven.

CHARLES

Good night, Ox.

Sam is passing through the dining room. Since our ANGLE is ON the A-frame, we SEE only the middle of his pajama-clad body moving past it.

SAM

Good night, Charles.

CHARLES

Good night, Sam.

INT. CHARLES' BATHROOM - NIGHT

137

Charles is soaking in the tub, a National Enquirer on the floor next to him. He looks TO CAMERA.

CHARLES

I might as well tell you the rest of what happened to me and Laura. By now we'd been together for almost two months.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT (A YEAR AGO)

138

Laura is taking the chocolate-orange souffle from the oven.

VOICE OF CHARLES

Laura still made me the famous dessert.

Charles comes up behind Laura, jams the spoon into the pan.

LAURA

Can't you wait until it cools?

CHARLES

No.

He swallows a heaping spoonful, then fans his mouth rapidly. He rushes to the sink for water. Laura laughs.

INT. PORNO THEATER - ANGLE ON CHARLES AND LAURA - 139
NIGHT (A YEAR AGO)

watching a porno movie. We hear the sound track.

VOICE OF CHARLES

She'd never been to a skin
flick and she insisted I take
her to one.

Laura is watching the screen intently, but she is making a face.

LAURA

Is this one more disgusting
than usual?

CHARLES

About average. Want to leave?

LAURA

No. I'm getting some good ideas.

Charles laughs, puts his arm around her.

EXT. PORNO THEATER/STREET - NIGHT

140

Laura and Charles come out of the theater. They pause to look at the poster of the voluptuous young woman who starred in the movie.

CHARLES

You're prettier than she is.

LAURA

Oh now I'm prettier than a
porno star. Stop it!

Laura starts quickly down the street. Charles is bewildered, stands there a minute, then hurries to catch up with her.

Cont.

CHARLES

What did I do? I just said
you're...

LAURA

I'm not prettier than she is!
Every time we go to the movies,
you tell me I'm prettier than the
movie stars. We go to the best
restaurant in town and you tell
me I'm better than the chef. You
have this exalted view of me and
I hate it! If you think I'm that
great, there's something wrong
with you!

CHARLES

(very upset)

I don't think you're so perfect.
There are quite a few things
about you I don't like.

LAURA

Name one.

CHARLES

The way you're talking to me
right now.

LAURA

Oh God...

CHARLES

All right. The fact that you
have such a lousy opinion of
yourself.

LAURA

(agitated)

I don't have a lousy opinion of
myself. I have a realistic opinion
of myself. I'm a very ordinary
person. I can't live up to this
goddess thing you have about me.
In fact, I'm worse than an ordinary
person since I left a perfectly
decent man for no good reason.

CHARLES

No good reason! You weren't happy!
That's the only reason anybody
leaves anybody!

Laura bursts into tears.

INT. BATHROOM (PRESENT TIME)

141

Charles puts his foot out, turns on the hot water tap with his toes. He looks INTO CAMERA.

CHARLES

She scared the shit out of me that night. But we made up in the tried and true fashion.

INT. BEDROOM (A YEAR AGO)

142

Charles and Laura are making love passionately, even frantically.

INT. BEDROOM (TIME PASSAGE)

143

She now lies in his arms.

LAURA

Hold me tighter.

He does.

LAURA

Tighter!

CHARLES

Laura, I'll hurt you if I...

LAURA

TIGHTER!

He does, but he's afraid, and he looks worried about it.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (STILL A YEAR AGO)

144

Charles is lying on the couch reading the paper. Laura enters from outside. She seems nervous, distracted. She moves to the closet, hangs up her coat.

CHARLES

How was the shopping?

LAURA

Okay.

CHARLES

Where are the packages?

LAURA

I didn't get anything.

She sits down heavily on the far end of the couch. He nudges her hip with his foot. She pushes his foot away. He tries to burrow his foot under her thigh.

LAURA

Don't.

CHARLES

Okay.

(suddenly
realizing)

You didn't go shopping, did you?

LAURA

No.

(pause)

I went home..

CHARLES

All the way to Providence and
back in three hours and twenty
minutes. The Indy 500.

LAURA

That doesn't help, you know.
I went to see my husband and
my stepdaughter.

CHARLES

(trying for
lightness)

If that's still home, we're in
big trouble.

Laura is silent. Charles breaks out into a sweat.

CHARLES

You're leaving me.

She nods.

CHARLES

No you aren't.

LAURA

I'm sorry. I hate myself for
doing this to you.

CHARLES

Don't do it. Then you can love
yourself for not doing it to me.

She doesn't reply.

CHARLES

Is it because of Rebecca?

LAURA

In part.

CHARLES
Because Ox wants you back?

LAURA
In part.

CHARLES
(bitter)
How many parts are there?

LAURA
It isn't any one thing. It's
a combination of things.

The sweat is pouring down his face. He puts his glasses on the floor next to the couch, wipes his forehead on his shirtsleeve.

LAURA
In a matter of time, you would
have left me. I'm just beating
you to it.

CHARLES
What?

LAURA
One of these days you'll wake
up to the fact that you don't
love me. You love some fantasy
that doesn't exist.

CHARLES
That's ridiculous!

Laura gets up abruptly, starts out of the room. Charles gets up equally abruptly, intending to follow her. Unfortunately, he steps on his glasses. We hear the crunch.

LAURA
Oh no. Your glasses.

CHARLES
Forget the glasses!

But she is stooping down to examine them.

LAURA
It's all right, it's just the
frames.

CHARLES
Forget the fucking glasses!

FOLLOW Laura, with Charles right behind her, INTO:

INT. KITCHEN

Laura opens a drawer, takes out some Scotch tape. She sits at the counter, painstakingly tapes the frames together.

Charles is frantic.

CHARLES

We're so good together, Laura. We have such a good time together. We don't even have to do anything and we have a good time. I love you. I want to marry you. Okay, it'll be tough to get custody of Rebecca, but we'll work on it. So what if he's her father? He's probably a lousy father.

LAURA

He's a good father. He's nice to her.

CHARLES

We can have our own kids, Laura. I'll sell the house and we'll buy a little restaurant and you can be the chef. So what if he got there first? It's not the hundred yard dash. We're talking about a lifetime!

Laura hands him the glasses.

LAURA

These should hold until you get to the optician.

Charles flings the glasses across the room.

CHARLES

Why would you choose somebody who loves you too little over somebody who loves you too much?

LAURA

(softly but
sincerely)

Because it makes me feel less of a fraud. I could never live up to your notion of me.

CHARLES

I'm going to rape you!

Charles is instantly sorry he said this. We see his confusion, his turmoil.

Laura simply looks at him, then walks out of the room.

Charles sits down at the counter. Tears are rolling down his cheeks. He wipes his eyes with the heel of his hand.

INT. BATHROOM (PRESENT TIME)

146

Charles still in the tub. He looks INTO CAMERA.

CHARLES

She left that night. It'll be
a year on March nineteenth.

He puts out the cigarette in the water, lets the butt float there. (The scene is faintly redolent of Clara in the tub.)

INT. SPARE ROOM - DAY

147

Charles, dressed for work, comes into Sam's room, wakes him.

CHARLES

Listen, Sam, I couldn't sleep
last night and I'm feeling
crummy.

SAM

What happened?

CHARLES

I started thinking about Laura
and how stupidly I behaved when
she left, and I was up all night.

SAM

Can't you call in sick?

CHARLES

Just do one thing for me. You
go to the store today and cook
the dinner. I'm leaving a
twenty on the table.

SAM

Don't worry about a thing.

INT. TYPING POOL

148

Charles enters, late for work. Betty is at her desk. Busy with her typing, she doesn't look up. Charles goes into:

INT. CHARLES' OFFICE

149

He hangs up his jacket, yawns. He sits down, yawns again.

He gets up. FOLLOW him INTO:

INT. TYPING POOL AREA

150

Charles moves to the drinking fountain, takes a handful, splashes it on his face.

Betty notices Charles, gets up and crosses to the drinking fountain. Charles doesn't yet see her.

Charles rubs some cold water on the back of his neck, then leans down for a drink. Betty comes up behind him.

BETTY

How do you feel about rumaki?

CHARLES

What?

BETTY

Rumaki. Water chestnuts wrapped in bacon. I know we're planning some dips, but I thought we could also have a selection of hot hors d'oeuvres.

CHARLES

Listen. I had a bad night and I didn't get any sleep and I don't feel like talking about dips and hors d'oeuvres right now.

BETTY

Oh, okay. Shall I come in later?

CHARLES

No.

Her feelings hurt, Betty walks back to her desk. Charles watches her tiredly. Another situation he'll have to get himself out of. He moves back into:

INT. HIS OFFICE

151

and shuts the door. He sits down at his desk, fishes around for a cassette in his drawer.

A knock on the door and then it opens. Patterson enters.

PATTERSON

I've been looking for you since nine, Charles.

CHARLES

I was late today.

PATTERSON

Any special reason?

CHARLES

(too tired to
think of an excuse)

Yes. Because I couldn't get here on time.

PATTERSON

Oh sure, I see. Just wanted
to say the kid is doing better.
Janis Joplin and all.
(circles thumb
and forefinger)
I'll keep you posted.

CHARLES

I wish you wouldn't.

PATTERSON

What?

CHARLES

I don't think your son's sex
life is any of my business, sir,
and I don't want to hear about
it any more.

A pause. Patterson looks angry. Then his expression
changes.

PATTERSON

You've got a point there,
Charles. Integrity. That's
the ticket. I'll let you get
back to work. Want this shut?

CHARLES

Please.

Patterson shuts the door behind him. Charles is astonished.
Feeling better, he starts inserting a new tape into his
cassette player. Another knock on the door. Betty enters.

CHARLES

Hey, Betty...

But Betty simply drops a typed report on his desk, leaves.
Charles sighs.

INT. LOBBY - FIVE O'CLOCK

152

Charles is waiting by the elevator bank. An elevator
empties, he spots Betty coming off.

CHARLES

Uh, Betty? Listen, how about
coming over for dinner tonight.

BETTY

(cool)
I'm a little tired tonight.

Cont.

CHARLES

Hey, come on. I have a friend staying with me and he's cooking and it'll be a mini-party, like a rehearsal for the real thing.

BETTY

Well...

CHARLES

We can discuss the hors d'oeuvres situation.

BETTY

Okay, if you'd really like me to. Oh! Can I get my notebook? It's right upstairs, is that okay? I've got all my lists and certain recipes too. Two minutes!

Betty hurries into an elevator.

Charles moves to the candy stand. He picks up one candy bar, then another, too tired to make a decision.

BLIND MAN

What do you want?

Charles looks at him. Suddenly...

CHARLES

I want to marry Laura. I'd be willing just to live with her. I'd even settle for dating her. That's what I want. Now let's talk about what I have. I have an unemployed jacket salesman in the spare room. I have a mother who won't get out of the bathtub. I have a stepfather who wants me to take disco lessons, a boss who wants advice on his son's sexual problems, and a typist who wants me to give a party so she can make dips.

BLIND MAN

You've been up all night, that always makes everything look worse.

Totally spooked, Charles backs away from the candy stand.

INT. CHARLES' LIVING ROOM

Sam is there smoking a joint with a bearded young guy, J.D.
Charles enters with Betty.

SAM

Charles, the drought is over.

J.D.

Hey man, nice to see you.

Charles doesn't recognize him.

J.D.

J.D.

SAM

The waiter from Tony's Bar.

CHARLES

Oh sure. How are ya? This
is Betty. J.D. Sam. Whose
sleeping bag is that?

J.D.

Mine. Hope it's okay, man.

CHARLES

Sure. Sam, could I uh...

He gestures with his head. Sam follows him into:

INT. KITCHEN

CHARLES

How long is J.D. staying?

SAM

A week or two. He got
dispossessed.

Charles searches the kitchen in vain for signs of dinner.

SAM

He's a good guy, Charles, he's
somebody we ought to get to
know. He's had rotten luck.
Somebody slashed the tires of
his car, and then he gets a
Dispossess, but he's so mellow
about it. I dropped by the
bar today for a pick-me-up...

CHARLES

Sam. Where's the dinner?

SAM

The dinner.

CHARLES

The food. Or did you use up
the twenty at the bar?

SAM

Not entirely.

INT. SUPERMARKET (A LITTLE LATER)

155

Betty is helping Charles buy groceries.

CHARLES

I'm sorry about this, Betty.

BETTY

I don't mind. Your friends
are very charming. Would you
like potatoes with the steak?

CHARLES

Okay.

Betty puts a bag of potatoes into the cart.

BETTY

Are you a commune or something?

CHARLES

No, Betty. In a commune, all
the members share the work and
the expenses. In my household,
I pay for everything.

BETTY

You're a kind-hearted person.

CHARLES

Yes. I'll get the milk.

Charles goes to the refrigerated cases. As he takes out a
container of milk, he notices a Young Guy drinking from a
carton of milk. The Young Guy looks at Charles, salutes
him with the carton, pinches it together again and returns
it to the case. He walks off.

Charles double-checks to see his carton hasn't been opened.

INT. DINING ROOM

A regular family dinner with Charles at the head of the table.

BETTY

Everything is delicious, Charles.
Very tasty.

CHARLES

Thank you.

BETTY

I can't get over how many men
cook these days.

CHARLES

It's either that or go out.

J.D. is flipping lighted matches at the ceiling fixture.

BETTY

Oh what a darling doll house!

She means the miniature A-frame now resting on the sideboard.

BETTY

It looks just like the one
Laura used to live in.

SAM

Very sharp, Betty.

CHARLES

(suddenly realizing)

Wait a minute. What do you mean,
used to? Did they move?

BETTY

She did. She moved out. She
seemed pretty unhappy about it
though on account of the little
girl. Did you ever meet the
little girl? She brought her
to work one day.

Charles gets up. He is trembling.

CHARLES

She can't have moved. Where
did she move to?

BETTY

I forget the name of the street.

J.D.

Oh-oh. I'm not sure that one
went out.

BETTY
(pushing a pitcher
of water toward him)

Here.

J.D. stands on his chair, then on the table, but he's not tall enough to reach the light fixture.

Sam gets up on the table, J.D. hands him the pitcher, Sam pours it into the fixture. It begins dripping over the side.

During this, Charles is still querying Betty.

CHARLES
You're kidding. You have to
be kidding.

BETTY
I didn't know you knew her so
well.

CHARLES
Sam, Laura left him and she
didn't call.

SAM
(still pouring)
She'll call.

BETTY
Did I say something wrong?

CHARLES
No, I just had no idea she
wasn't still with him.

Betty is starting to look at Charles peculiarly, but he's too agitated to notice.

CHARLES
What happened?

BETTY
Oh look, the water's dripping
on the steak.

CHARLES
What happened?

BETTY
I don't really know. She just
said she'd left him and moved
into this apartment. I didn't
want to press her.

CHARLES

Is there a phone. Do you have
her number?

Sam, on the table, is looking down at Charles, clearing his
throat. Charles glances up at him. Sam shakes his head.
But Charles can't stop.

BETTY

It's unlisted. I've got it
somewhere.

CHARLES

Where? Can you give it to me?
Have you got it with you?

After a pause, Betty nods. She has the number with her.

INT. LIVING ROOM

157

Betty is getting her coat on as is Sam.

SAM

Keys in the car?

CHARLES

Yeah. Thanks, Betty.

BETTY

You're welcome.

CHARLES

Sure you don't want to stay
awhile?

BETTY

Good night.

She walks out.

CHARLES

What's the matter with Betty?

SAM

What do you think?

CHARLES

I wasn't rude, was I? Did I
say something rude?

SAM

You made it plain which one
you liked, let's say that.

Cont.

CHARLES

Oh God. Poor Betty. Make it
up to her, will you, Sam?

SAM

I'll try.

Sam goes out.

Charles looks at J.D. who is lying on the couch smoking
another joint.

CHARLES

J.D., don't come in the kitchen,
okay?

J.D. nods contentedly. Charles goes into:

INT. KITCHEN

158

Charles shuts the kitchen door. He looks at a scrap of paper
with Laura's number on it, goes to the phone, dials.

CHARLES

Don't blow it. Don't blow it.
Hello?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. THE WICKER STREET APARTMENT

159

A young Woman answers the phone.

FRANCES

Yes? Hello?

CHARLES

Who is this?

FRANCES

Who is this?

CHARLES

Is Laura there?

FRANCES

(thinking he
sounds peculiar)
Who's calling please?

CHARLES

Charles. Who are you?

FRANCES

I live here.

CHARLES
Oh. Well what about Laura?

FRANCES
She lives here too.

CHARLES
Can she come to the phone?

FRANCES
I think so. Laura?

CHARLES
She thinks so. Christ.

Laura comes to take the phone from Frances. She is partially dressed, finishes pulling on her sweater, putting on jewelry, etc., as she talks.

LAURA
Hello?

CHARLES
Laura, what happened?

LAURA
That's a good question, isn't it?

CHARLES
Talk to me. What's going on?

LAURA
How did you get my number?

CHARLES
Betty.

LAURA
Oh. Well, I left Jim, and I'm staying here with my girl friend for the time being.

CHARLES
Why didn't you call me? What are you doing?

LAURA
I'm getting ready to go out for a drink with a friend.

CHARLES
But you have left him? You've left for good?

LAURA

Yes. Look, this isn't a very good time for me to talk to you. I have to think about things. I can call you.

CHARLES

When?

LAURA

Well, another time. When I feel more like talking.

CHARLES

Who are you having a drink with? You'll be talking then.

She laughs. Charles is pleased.

CHARLES

I've got to see you. You've got to tell me what's going on.

LAURA

Charles, I don't. I don't mean to sound nasty but I'm not in the best mood now and I don't feel like sorting everything out in a second just so you can know.

CHARLES

Can I come over?

LAURA

No, I'm going out.

CHARLES

Then tomorrow. All right?

LAURA

If it means that much to you.

CHARLES

It does. I love you.

LAURA

(sighs)
Okay. Tomorrow night at eight.

CHARLES

Wait a minute. Where do you live?

LAURA

Oh. 140 Wicker Street,
Apartment 3B.

CHARLES

140 Wicker Street, Apartment 3B,
got it. Okay, see you tomorrow.

He hangs up.

INT. BEDROOM - LATE NIGHT

160

Charles sits up in bed, a yellow pad on his lap. He is writing out instructions to himself.

CHARLES

One. Don't blurt out I love you.
Two. Don't beg her to come back.
Three. Don't tell her she's beautiful.
Four. Don't act desperate.

INT. BATHROOM - MONTAGE - MORNING

161-
163

A. CHARLES IS IN THE SHOWER

He stands very still, lets the water beat down on his head.

B. CHARLES SHAVING

His movements are slow and deliberate. He practices his approach to Laura.

CHARLES

Look, Laura, I know I made you crazy the way I acted. I didn't give you enough privacy. I was difficult to be around. I was jealous and possessive. Mainly because I was always afraid you were going to leave me.

(wipes off the
excess shaving
cream)

It'll be different this time.
But I don't want a halfway deal.
No more dropping you off two blocks from the office and that kind of stuff. I'm going to treat you right and I want you to treat me right.

C. CHARLES IS NOW DRESSED

looking neater and more together than usual. He looks at himself once more in the mirror, then leaves the bathroom.

INT. LIVING ROOM

164

J.D. is asleep in his sleeping bag on the couch. Charles wakes him.

CHARLES

You have to get up. Right now.

J.D.

Oh. Okay. How come?

CHARLES

I'm taking you somewhere.

J.D.

Where?

CHARLES

Anywhere.

J.D. starts to doze off again. Charles yanks the sleeping bag (with J.D. in it) onto the floor.

J.D.

Hunh?

CHARLES

J.D., I don't want you here anymore.

J.D.

Oh.

SAM

Charles?

Charles turns to see that Sam has entered the living room.

CHARLES

Get some clothes on, Sam.

SAM

(forlorn)

I don't have anywhere else to go, Charles.

CHARLES

I'm just sick of those miserable pajamas.

With Sam following behind him like a very tall puppy dog, Charles walks into:

INT. KITCHEN

165

Charles, followed by Sam, moves to the refrigerator.

SAM

I can stay?

CHARLES

You can stay.

SAM

I was worried there for a minute.
I thought you were kicking me
out too.

CHARLES

You can stay here until you get
a job which you start looking
for tomorrow.

Charles intends to drink some orange juice from the carton
but the carton is empty. He tosses it into the sink.

SAM

Tomorrow?

CHARLES

Today you get the house cleaned
up. And go to the store and get
stuff. We're out of everything.

SAM

You'll leave the car?

CHARLES

No.

SAM

Then how am I supposed...

CHARLES

Work it out, Sam. You were
Phi Beta Kappa, remember?

SAM

Did you call Laura?

CHARLES

I'm seeing her tonight at eight.

SAM

Don't let her fuck you over.

CHARLES

Don't worry.

INT. TYPING POOL

166

Betty is on the phone as Charles enters. Relieved, he moves
quickly past her and into:

INT. CHARLES' OFFICE

167

He hangs up his jacket, sits down and gets ready for work.

Through the open door, we can SEE Betty hang up the phone. She looks in at Charles, gets up, comes into his office. He sees her coming.

VOICE OF CHARLES

Oh God.

He stands.

CHARLES

Betty, I want to talk to you.
I'm really sorry.

BETTY

So am I. I didn't understand
what you were doing. I better
shut the door.

(shuts the door)

And that's why I acted the way
I did. I just wanted to say
thank you.

Charles' eyes widen. What's she talking about?

BETTY

I mean the way you brought me
and Sam together without telling
us so that neither of us felt
any pressure.

CHARLES

Sam.

BETTY

I think he's one of the most
sensitive persons I've ever met.
We talked until two in the morning,
did he tell you? We're so alike,
it's uncanny.

CHARLES

(wants to save
her from further
rejection)

Yeah, listen Betty, here's the
thing about Sam. He's great,
he's my best friend, but he's
had a rough time, losing his
job and all...

Cont.

BETTY

He told me.

CHARLES

...and while I'm sure he
likes you very much...

BETTY

(smiles shyly)

Thank you. I like him
too.

CHARLES

...I mean, this is not such
a hot time in his life, and
he might not be as...

(searching for
the right word)

...well, I don't know how much
you can count on him at this
particular time.

BETTY

Well of course I don't know
him as well as you do, but
we're going to remedy that
beginning tonight when he
comes for dinner.

CHARLES

You asked him for dinner
tonight?

BETTY

I just hung up the phone.

CHARLES

What did he say?

BETTY

(the shy smile)

He'd love to. Could I ask
you if he has any special
food preferences?

Cont.

CHARLES
(stunned)
None that I can think of.

BETTY
He seemed to enjoy the steak
last night but I wouldn't want
to give him steak two nights in
a row.

CHARLES
Try chicken.

BETTY
Chicken. Oh thank you, Charles.
I'm going to go consult my
notebook. And thanks again
for everything.

CHARLES
Sure.

Betty leaves. Charles sinks into his chair. He is dumb-founded.

Betty comes in again and gives him a phone message slip.

BETTY
Oh, I forgot. Your stepfather
called before you came in this
morning.

She goes out again. Charles reads the message aloud.

CHARLES
'Your stepfather called. He said
he got it and you will know what
'it' is. But he can't find
Turtle Wax. If you find some on
your travels, please buy and he
will reimburse you.'

Charles starts laughing.

INT. FLORIST'S - AFTER WORK

168

Charles selects yellow tulips in a pot. The Florist begins
wrapping it for him.

116

INT. HARDWARE STORE

169

The MAN behind the counter is taking down three cans of Turtle Wax.

CHARLES

Do you gift wrap?

MAN

Gift wrap the Turtle Wax?

CHARLES

Yes.

MAN

That's a new one.

EXT. CLARA'S AND PETE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

170

Charles drives up, gets out with the gift-wrapped package of Turtle Wax. He walks up to the door, sets it inside the screen, rings the bell. He gets back into the car.

We see Pete answer the door, pick up the package, tear off the paper. His face lights up.

INT. CHARLES' CAR

171

He sees Pete's reaction, smiles to himself as he pulls out.

INT. LAURA'S BUILDING ON WICKER STREET - EIGHT P.M. 172

The sound of the buzzer as Charles lets himself in, moving AWAY FROM CAMERA TOWARD the elevator. He carries the tulips.

INT. THIRD FLOOR CORRIDOR

173

Charles is coming TOWARD CAMERA, looking for 3B and repeating his litany.

VOICE OF CHARLES

Don't blurt out I love you, don't
beg her to come back, don't tell
her she's beautiful, don't act
desperate.

He locates 3B, rings. Laura comes to the door. She smiles.

LAURA

Hi. Come in.

INT. WICKER STREET APARTMENT

174

He hands her the tulips.

CHARLES

You're sort of attractive.
These are for you.

Laura is puzzled.

CHARLES

I remember you don't like me
to tell you you're beautiful.

Laura bursts out laughing. She tears off the florist's paper.

LAURA

Tulips! They're lovely! Oh,
Charles, thank you! I love them!

She seems so genuinely pleased that Charles is starting to
feel pretty good.

Frances enters from the bedroom area with an armful of books.

LAURA

Frances, this is Charles.

FRANCES

Hi, I think we spoke on the
phone.

CHARLES

Yeah, right. Hi.

LAURA

Look what he brought.

FRANCES

Oh tulips! They're beautiful!

LAURA

Aren't they?

Charles beams.

FRANCES

I'm on my way. Is it still so
cold out?

CHARLES

Yeah. No. To tell the truth,
I didn't notice.

Everyone laughs.

FRANCES

Nice meeting you.

LAURA

Have a good class.

Frances exits.

LAURA
She's in graduate school.

CHARLES
Oh.

LAURA
I'm glad to see you. Can I
get you something to drink or
some coffee or something?

CHARLES
Now right now, thanks.

They sit down.

CHARLES
Coming in, I started remembering
that dessert you used to make
with the chocolate and the oranges.

LAURA
I remember the one you mean. You
can come over sometime and I'll
make it for you.

CHARLES
What are you talking about,
'sometime?'

A little silence. Charles gets panicky.

CHARLES
Aren't you coming back to me?

Laura's mood changes instantly.

LAURA
I'm not going to do anything.
I'm going to think about things
and try to make the right choices
for once.

CHARLES
Was going back to your husband
the wrong choice?

LAURA
Definitely.

CHARLES
So maybe leaving me was the wrong
choice, too.

Cont.

She doesn't say anything.

CHARLES

Don't you remember how much
fun we had?

She nods.

CHARLES

Remember the chair? Your chair?

LAURA

(smiles)
Is it still there?

CHARLES

Sure it's still there. You
think I'd let anything happen to
it?

LAURA

I was just curious.

CHARLES

Remember the trampoline?

LAURA

I remember everything. It
was nice.

CHARLES

Then come back to me.

LAURA

I don't know. I'm not going to
do anything for the time being.

CHARLES

When will the time being be over?

She shrugs.

CHARLES

Is there somebody else?

LAURA

Nobody I'm serious about.

CHARLES

Who?

LAURA

I went out with somebody a
couple of times.

CHARLES

Who?

LAURA

A taxi driver. I went out with him for a couple of drinks.

CHARLES

Two times?

LAURA

Yes. Two.

CHARLES

That's all?

LAURA

Yes.

CHARLES

Where did you meet a taxi driver?

LAURA

In his taxi.

CHARLES

You're kidding! He picked you up?

LAURA

I don't want to get into an argument. I'm feeling very low. I couldn't make my marriage work. I've lost Rebecca. I can't find a job. My whole life has fallen apart and I don't want you to start in on me.

CHARLES

How am I supposed to feel? You got in a goddamn taxi and you let the driver pick you up?

LAURA

So what?

CHARLES

That's awful. It's incredible. Taxi drivers don't pick up great women like you. Look at yourself. God, Laura.

LAURA

I can't cope with you. Go home.

Cont.

CHARLES

I hate that taxi driver!

LAURA

You're all hot and bothered about some taxi driver and I wasn't even interested in him! Why don't you hate me for walking out on you and making you miserable? Instead of which you persist in being crazy about me and making me feel terrible about it. Please go home. I mean it.

CHARLES

When will I see you again?

LAURA

I'll call you.

CHARLES

Can I call you?

LAURA

Please don't. I need time. I promise you I'll call you.

She goes to the door, opens it. Charles has no choice but to pick up his jacket and leave. As he goes out...

LAURA

Thank you for the tulips.

He doesn't answer. She shuts the door.

INT. CORRIDOR

175

Charles walks to the elevator, rings for it. It arrives, he gets on.

INT. LOBBY OF WICKER STREET BUILDING

176

Charles gets off the elevator, proceeds toward the door, opens it. Suddenly he closes it again, turns around and goes back to the elevator. He rings for it, it arrives, he gets on.

INT. CORRIDOR

177

Charles gets off the elevator, walks down the corridor to 3B rings the bell.

Laura comes to the door. She is puzzled, but she lets him in.

INT. WICKER STREET APARTMENT

Charles' manner is different. Gone is the desperate intensity. He is calm and self-assured.

CHARLES

No, Laura, we aren't going to do it that way. I'm not going to wait for you to call. I'm not going to wait for you to think things over. I just spent a year doing that and I almost went crazy. And I have no intention of going crazy. I want a life. I want you. I love you. I'll do anything in the world to make you happy. But you'll have to make up your mind tonight.

Laura is staring at him, listening closely.

CHARLES

So what is it, yes or no?

Laura is silent.

He nods. He leans over, kisses her gently on the cheek.

CHARLES

Good-bye, Laura.

He leaves the apartment.

Laura walks to the door, locks it. She seems stunned.

INT. CHARLES' CAR

as he drives up his street and pulls into his drive.

INT. HOUSE

As Charles lets himself in, he hears the phone ring. He races to the kitchen, grabs it.

CHARLES

Hello? Hello?

But it's too late. There is no one at the other end. Charles hangs up.

FOLLOW Charles as he goes around the house turning on the lights. The house is immaculate...Sam did his job.

Charles returns to the dining room, stares at the miniature A-frame.

123

INT. HALLWAY

181

Charles is pulling down the door leading to the crawl space. He lets the little staircase down, climbs up with the miniature A-frame, deposits it in the crawl space. The phone rings.

Charles almost breaks his neck as he backs down out of the crawl space, jumps down off the stairs and get to:

INT. KITCHEN

182

before the phone stops ringing.

CHARLES
(breathlessly)
Hello?

INTERCUT:

INT. PHONE BOOTH ON STREET ACROSS FROM THEATRE 183

Sam in the phone booth, Betty outside waiting for him.

SAM
You're home.

CHARLES
Yeah.

SAM
How did it go?

CHARLES
It's over.

SAM
Oh no. What happened?

CHARLES
Nothing. It's just over. Where are you?

SAM
In a phone booth. We're going to the movies but maybe I should come home.

CHARLES
Go to the movies.

SAM
You sure? You okay?

CHARLES
Yeah. Did you call before?

SAM

Yes, but there wasn't any answer.

CHARLES

The house looks great, by the way.

SAM

I know. I'm the perfect little housewife.

CHARLES

(smiles)
See ya later.

SAM

Well...I might stay over.

CHARLES

No kidding. Good for you.

SAM

Yeah. She's nice. I'll call you tomorrow. I'm sorry about Laura.

CHARLES

Yeah. Have fun.

Charles hangs up.

Sam leaves the phone booth; he and Betty head across the street to the movies. With Sam so tall and thin and Betty so short and plump, they make an amazing-looking couple.

Charles is where we left him at the kitchen phone. FOLLOW him as he wanders through the house turning the lights off. He stands in the darkened living room for a moment, then turns and goes into his:

INT. BEDROOM

184

Charles empties his pockets. His keys go on the dresser top along with his wallet. He sorts out his change, puts the pennies into a large glass penny jar. He seems sad but resigned...as if he always knew in his heart of hearts that he wouldn't get Laura back.

EXT. CLARA'S AND PETE'S HOUSE - DAY

185

Charles pulls up the drive, goes into the house.

INT. CLARA'S AND PETE'S HOUSE

186

Charles is walking through the bedroom...which is a cyclone as usual...to the bathroom.

CLARA'S VOICE

(o.s.)

Hurry!

Not hurrying, Charles enters the bathroom. Clara is in the tub in a nightgown of electric purple.

CLARA

I'm in pain. My neck. I can hardly move my neck, Charles.

Charles nods.

CLARA

I've been trying to soak the pain away.

Charles nods.

CHARLES

Yeah. I can't help you today, Mom. You'll have to get out of the tub by yourself.

CLARA

I can't! I'm in agonizing pain!

CHARLES

Then just stay in the tub. I can't help you.

Clara shrieks, thrashes around in the tub.

Charles turns, walks out of the bathroom. The sounds of the fit Clara is throwing in the tub are very loud.

Charles goes slowly down the stairs and into the dining room. He finds an empty Scotch bottle and a half a bottle of sherry on the sideboard. He pours himself a glass of sherry. His hand is shaking. We still hear wild noises from the bathroom.

VOICE OF CHARLES

Woman drowns in bathtub while callous son drinks sherry.

Suddenly the noises from the bathroom stop. He turns his head toward the staircase. Why is it so silent?

He can't go through with it. FOLLOW him OUT of dining room. He flies up the stairs and into:

INT. BEDROOM

Clara is just pulling on a dry nightgown. She gets in bed.
Charles watches incredulously.

CLARA

I didn't empty the tub.

Charles moves into the bathroom, reaches into the tub, pulls the plug. The purple nightgown is a wet heap on the floor.

He throws it over a towel rack to dry, goes back into the bedroom. He looks at Clara.

CLARA

Are you getting married?

CHARLES

What? Why would you think that?

CLARA

I'm going to sleep.

CHARLES

I'm not getting married. How are you feeling?

CLARA

I'm not dead.

CHARLES

I'm glad.

CLARA

You were a good baby.

CHARLES

(smiles)

And it's been downhill ever since. Where's Pete?

CLARA

Riding around in his new death car.

CHARLES

You want anything before I leave?

CLARA

Young people don't want to get married anymore. Do you remember your father?

CHARLES

Of course I remember him.

CLARA

He had a heart attack on a bus
at the age of thirty-nine.

CHARLES

I know.

CLARA

I'm fifty-three and I haven't
died yet.

CHARLES

That's good. I want you to live
a long life.

CLARA

Thank you, Charles. You're as
good-looking as your father was.
Do you still have a job?

He nods.

CLARA

Then why can't you find a girl?

CHARLES

I'll work on it, Mom.

Clara closes her eyes, Charles leans down, kisses her on
the forehead. She smiles, her eyes still closed.

INT. OPTICIAN'S (A LITTLE LATER)

188

The GIRL at the counter is young and pretty.

CHARLES

Can you fix these while I wait?

GIRL

Sure. Have a seat.

Charles sits down, pretends to thumb through a magazine, but
he is looking at the Girl. She has taken his glasses into the
back room and is now coming out again.

Charles goes back up to the counter.

GIRL

It'll be a few minutes.

CHARLES

Yeah, I wanted to ask you something.
Do you believe in marriage?

GIRL

What?

CHARLES

I mean, are you married?

GIRL

No. What is this, what I think it is?

CHARLES

No, my mother was just saying young people don't want to get married today.

GIRL

And you're taking a survey.

CHARLES

After a fashion.

GIRL

(giggles)
Why don't you ask my boyfriend.

CHARLES

Where is he?

GIRL

In the back fixing your glasses.

CHARLES

Oh.

GIRL

Yeah.

Both laugh.

CHARLES

Got a sister?

She laughs, moves away to help another customer.

CHARLES

She thinks I'm joking.

EXT. PARK (LATER)

189

Charles is jogging. He starts at an easy pace but soon picks up momentum until he is sprinting. He races around at top speed. He is trying to tire himself out.

EXT. PARK (TIME LAPSE)

190

He is now on a bench getting some sun.

A pleasant-faced, middle-aged WOMAN comes up to the bench.

Cont.

WOMAN

May I share your bench?

Charles opens his eyes, looks at her.

CHARLES

Sure.

She sits down, takes out some knitting.

WOMAN

Not much sun.

CHARLES

I know. I'm just trying to
avoid going home.

She laughs agreeably.

WOMAN

It's been a long winter.

CHARLES

You said it.

A quiet, peaceful moment as the Woman knits and Charles
relaxes in the late afternoon sun.

INT. CHARLES' CAR - AROUND SIX P.M.

191

It's dark out as Charles pulls in the drive. He is relieved
to see a light in the kitchen. Sam must be home. Charles
gets out of the car.

INT. LIVING ROOM

192

as he enters.

CHARLES

Sam? Sam?

No answer. Charles throws his jacket down, goes into:

INT. KITCHEN

193

What he sees makes him stop dead in his tracks.

Laura is standing at the stove cooking.

LAURA

Hi.

Charles simply stares at her.

Cont.