

"D.O.A."
by
Charles Edward Pogue

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FADE IN:

BLACK SCREEN

WE HEAR BREATHING...erratic, heavy, strained. AND FOOTSTEPS...unsteady Footsteps scuffling across moist and mushy terrain. SCUFFLE, SLOSH. SCUFFLE, SLOSH. SCUFFLE, SLOSH. Everynow and then the laboured breaths become a GROAN. Slowly the BLACKNESS...

DISSOLVES TO:

EXT. POLICE STATION - DEXTER CORNELL'S POV - NIGHT

...a blurry kaleidoscope of multicoloured, shimmering glitter. Slowly, it comes INTO FOCUS. It is a city street, all decked out in Christmas regalia. Decorations are strung over wet, snowy streets. Every lamp post and storefront proclaims the holiday season. Every city tree and shrub twinkles with a rainbow of lights.

WE HEAR A GRUNT OF PAIN and the Christmas card vision BLURS again. When FOCUS returns a second later, the view is the damp, dirty slush of a shovelled sidewalk.

AND A PAIR OF FEET. A man's feet. It is from his POV the feet are seen. It is from his POV that everything is seen, as the feet start to move again, the scuffed and water-stained shoes shuffling through the mush of old snow. SCUFFLE, SLOSH. SCUFFLE, SLOSH. We still hear the man's fatigued, tortured breaths as he looks up again, moving toward a building down the street.

As his destination looms closer into view, we see a SIGN over the door. SNOW hangs on the sign, obscuring several of the bas relief letters, but one WORD is quite distinct -- POLICE.

INT. POLICE STATION - FRONT HALLWAY - NIGHT

...as the wind WOOSHES AND SLAMS SHUT the GLASS DOORS of the police station with a loud, rattling BANG. THE CAMERA ABRUPTLY SWINGS FROM THE DOOR TO A SHAMBLING FIGURE OF A MAN AND FOLLOWS HIM as he makes his way down a dark, dismal hallway, its dingy bleakness accented by cheap, cardboard Christmas decorations stuck to the wall with scotch tape.

The man is our friend from outside...of the gasping breath and staggered step. He totters down the hall weakly, occasionally bracing himself against the grim-green wall. He is seen only from the back, stooped and huddled in his overcoat. He turns a corner...

INT. POLICE-STATION - RECEPTION AREA - NIGHT

Bare florescent tubes cast an ugly, yellow hue over the reception area of the station. It's a quiet night. A DERELICT sits on a bench drunkenly confused and unaware. A couple of uniformed POLICEMEN stand by a coffee machine, shooting the breeze. ANOTHER sits behind the reception desk, writing. The staggering man, back still to CAMERA, weaves toward the desk. He winces as he approaches and suddenly doubles over with a sharp spasm of pain. His hands clutch at the desk for support. He slumps against it,

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knocking a small Christmas tree perched there off-balance and to the floor. The startled desk sergeant jolts up.

DESK SERGEANT

Hey!

The other officers, alerted by the commotion, rush over and help the stricken man to a bench.

OFFICER #1

Whoa there, buddy, you better sit down.

The desk sergeant has come around and filled a paper cup from the water cooler. He hands it to the weak man, his face still obscured by the shadows of the hovering officers.

DESK SERGEANT

Here, mister, drink this.

The man grabs the water and gulps it down, crumpling the paper cup in his fist. With a sigh, he leans his head back against the wall. It is our first real look at DEXTER CORNELL...DEX. He's in his early forties, but could still pass for late thirties. Ordinarily, he'd be considered a nice-looking man...nothing exceptional, but it's a good face. Ordinarily. Now it's chalky white, beaded with perspiration. Dark circles shade his eyes. Beard -stubble dots his jaw and chin. There are several cuts and bruises on his face.

DESK SERGEANT

Geeze, bud, you look dead. .

Cornell's eyes narrow and he stares at the sergeant with strange intensity, making the officer nervous.

DESK SERGEANT

What can we do ya for?

Cornell speaks with difficulty, in breathy gasps.

DEX

I...I want to see Detective Cobb...or...

(searches for a name)

a...Ulmer...Detective Ulmer...

DESK SERGEANT

(suspiciously)

Yeah?...What about?

Pause.

DEX

(taut and strained)

A murder.

The desk sergeant looks to his fellow officers, then back at Cornell.

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DESK SERGEANT

(still suspicious, also curious)

Who was murdered?

Cornell stares unblinkingly up at the three policemen. They stare back, waiting for his answer. He gives it.

DEX

I was.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT

Dex sits in a drab, sparsely furnished room. A table and a few straight-backed chairs. More green walls and bad light. He's flanked by two plainclothes detectives, COBB and ULMER. Both have a world-weary integrity about them. Jaded and cynical; prosaic, a bit unimaginative, but honest.

Ulmer is the larger and more impatient of the two. A receding hairline and an increasing waistline. A suit that looks like slept-in Sears off-the-rack. He paces agitatedly back and forth, glaring resentfully at Dex.

Cobb, slender and calm and older, straddles one of the chairs, his arms folded over the wooden back, meditatively puffing a cigarette. His eyes never leaving Cornell's face. Dex pushes a damp lock of hair off his sweaty forehead. As he does, a broken piece of chain flops out of his overcoat sleeve. The chain is attached to a HANDCUFF clamped on Dex's wrist. Ulmer fingers the chain, examining it with casual irritation.

ULMER

(sour and surly)

Nice of you to put in an appearance,
Cornell, we'd about given you up for...

He stops, dropping the chain, with embarrassed ill-ease. Dex smiles up at him grimly.

DEX

You'd be right.

Ulmer flushes and turns away. Cobb coolly smokes his cigarette.

~~COBB~~ Ulmer

(calm and easy)

Not quite. Made it here, didn't you?

DEX

Yeah...I'm here...dead on arrival...

Ulmer snaps back around angrily.

ULMER

That's not funny, dammit!

DEX

You've got no sense of irony, Ulmer.

CONTINUED

D.O.A.

ulmer
Tech
TECH

CONTINUED

Ulmer silently fumes, awkwardly embarrassed by all this. Cobb, on the other hand, takes it in stride. He offers Dex a cigarette. Dex takes one.

~~COBB~~

(lights Dex's cigarette)

Yeah, well, you're just one more on the pile, Cornell. Let's not forget the parade of corpses you've left littered behind you...

ULMER

...Five last count...

DEX

Make it six.

Pause. Ulmer and Cobb exchange a glance, reacting to the latest update in the tally. Dex takes a drag from his cigarette.

ULMER

(menacingly)

Who?

DEX

(wearily rubbing his eyes
with his palms)

I'll get to it. But I better start at the beginning and clear up a few misconceptions.

Dex inhales on his cigarette. It sets off a spasm of severe coughing.

~~COBB~~

You all right?

(Dex nods)

Get you anything?

Cornell shakes his head no, covering his mouth as he coughs. The coughing subsides. And he pulls his hand back. There's blood on his palm and lips. Both Cobb and Ulmer notice it. Dex drops the cigarette on the floor and crushes it out with his shoe. He gives another slight cough, rises unsteadily and glances over at the table. A TAPE RECORDER sits there.

DEX

(weakly, gesturing to
the recorder)

That thing work?

~~COBB~~

Yeah...sure...

(turns it on)

Look, you...tell it anyway you like, Cornell...

Cornell goes over to the window.

DEX

Thanks.

CLOSE ON DEX

He stares blankly out the window. The lights of the city and the holiday decorations reflect in the glass pane, creating a bizarre mosaic of colour across his tense face. Snow has begun to fall, sticking to the cold glass. His breath steams the pane. THE CAMERA MOVES INTO THE STEAMY WINDOW. ALL WE SEE OF CORNELL is HIS MIRROR IMAGE in the window pane, slowly being obscured by the snow, the steam, and the light patterns that play in the glass.

DEX(OS)

It's started to snow again...

DISSOLVE TO:

DEX'S CLASSROOM - CLOSE-UP - WINDOW - DAY

...as snowflakes glide past the window. A pile of the white softness nestles on the sill. THE CAMERA PANS AS...

DEX(OS)

(reading)

"His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe..."

THE PANNING CAMERA moves through the classroom across a BLACKBOARD where it holds a moment, FOCUSED on a WORD scrawled in white chalk..."THE DEAD".

DEX(OS)

(continuing; reading)

"...and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead..."

The passage is punctuated with a LOUD SNORE, followed by several TITTERS OF LAUGHTER. THE CAMERA FOCUS BROADENS TO INCLUDE the name, "JAMES JOYCE", also written in chalk, under "THE DEAD". Then Dexter Cornell walks INTO FRAME in front of the blackboard, gazing up from the book he holds in reaction to the snoring interruption.

Dex looks healthier than we saw him last...properly professorially rumpled. Tweed jacket, dishevelled hair, reading glasses perched on his nose, a cigarette dangling from his mouth.

DEX'S POV

...scanning the classroom, a group of college students, focusing on the sleeper -- SLOANE, an athletic twenty year old, his mouth hanging open, drooling. He snores again and several of his classmates giggle.

BACK TO SCENE

...as Dex, ignoring the sleeper, closes his book and continues his lecture, moving to the window.

DEX

So "snow" becomes Joyce's symbol of unity, linking the worlds of the living and the dead.

Dex opens the window and scoops up a handful of snow.

D.O.A

-a really
wonderful

unruly

from
TECH

The window is on the ground floor. From it, we can see the CAMPUS, particularly a SMALL FROZEN POND in the b.g. which seems to be the center of some activity. WOODEN BOOTHS have been constructed around the pond and decorated with Christmas trim. There are also several elaborate SNOW SCULPTURES in the area, a couple still being worked on. A high MOUND OF WOOD AND KINDLING has been piled for a bonfire. A HUGE BANNER strung across two trees explains all these festive preparations. It proclaims, "GREEK COUNCIL CHRISTMAS CARNIVAL."

DEX(OS)

...SNOW -- the unifying link...

BACK TO SCENE

Dex sits on the sill molding his handful of snow into a well-packed BALL. He holds it up for the edification of his class.

DEX

(continuing)

...comprised of water -- traditional symbol of life...and ice, representing death...

(Sloane snores again)

Much like Mr. Sloane, at the moment...

As the class snickers, Dex pitches a perfect strike with his snowball... scoring a direct hit into Sloane's gaping yawn. The sleeper awakes, sputtering out a mouthful of snow. The class howls. Dex smiles with benign amusement.

DEX

Visions of sugarplums, Mr. Sloane? Christmas break's not here yet.

SLOANE

(sheepishly)

Excuse me, Professor Cornell, I was up kinda late.

DEX

Wrestling with James Joyce, I trust?

SLOANE

Huh?

DEX

(to the class)

And Joyce won, two falls out of three.

(class laughs)

Nothing to add then on the snow imagery in "THE DEAD, I take it?

SLOANE

Huh?...a...

Sloane frantically flips through his text book. Dex drifts back to the window, as another HAND shoots up, waving in eager impatience. It is that of NICHOLAS LANG, an extremely good-looking, almost pretty young man.

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DEX

(amused tolerance)

Didn't think we'd escape hearing from the recent Mainwaring scholarship recipient on this. Yes, Mr. Lang?

LANG

(rattling it off with confidence)

Doesn't snow also symbolize Gabriel Conroy's moment of self-realization where he confronts his own emotional sterility through which he experiences liberation from his own ego?

ANGLE FAVOURING DEX

During Lang's statement disguised as a question, Dex has been sitting at the window sill, building himself a miniature snowman. As Lang finishes, Dex looks up and heaves a mock impressed sigh.

DEX

Whew! That's heavy shit, Nick. Good to see someone's been reading his CLIFF'S NOTES.

The class laughs just as the BELL goes off. Students start slamming books and darting for the door. Dex goes to his desk and gathers up his own things into a soft leather briefcase. An attractive young co-ed, dressed in a sorority pledge outfit, SYDNEY FULLER, pauses tentatively at his desk on her way out. Dex catches her lingering there.

DEX

Yes, Miss...?

(can't remember her name)

SYD

(shyly)

Fuller...Sydney Fuller...back row...

(hesitantly)

Ah...I...I was wondering...

She embarrassedly thrusts out a BOOK at him. Dex takes it from her, shaking his head in amused recognition.

DEX'S POV

The book is old. The dust-jacket torn and yellowed. It's entitled, "THE VIEWLESS WINDS", by Dexter Cornell. Dex's hand flips it over. On the back of the jacket is a photo of Dex -- much younger, a late sixties hairstyle, decked out in the garish fashions of the day.

BACK TO SCENE

Dex holds the picture up for Sydney and smiles. She smiles shyly back.

DEX

Hope lapels never get that wide again.

CONTINUED

SYD

Could you sign it please?

(nervously)

I've been trying to work up the nerve to ask you all semester.

DEX

(laughs and sits at his desk)

No need to be timid; always glad to oblige a fan. Always nice to know I still have a few.

SYD

(more relaxed)

Oh, I am. That's why I signed up for your course. I've read all five of your novels.

DEX

(taking a pen)

Glutton for punishment, huh?

SYD

They're wonderful. Wish you hadn't stopped.

Dex looks up at her, a distant, cool look in his eyes.

DEX

Haven't stopped...just...stalled...

(opens front flap of book)

First name again?

The warmth and intimacy have evaporated. Syd realizes she's made a faux pas.

SYD

Sydney...with a "y" instead of an "i".

LANG(OS)

Speaking of great works of literature, the reviews in on mine yet?

ANGLE TO INCLUDE NICK LANG

Nick has sauntered up to the desk. His question has been addressed to Dex, who looks up from his writing to give Nick a confused glance.

LANG

My independent project. You said you'd have it graded this week.

DEX

Ah...the epic tome...

(hesitantly)

Yeah, well, week's not over yet.

Dex finishes his inscription and, closing the book, starts to collect his things.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

LANG
(disappointed)
You don't have it?

DEX
End of the week, Nick.

He starts to head out the door. Nick follows. Sydney, totally ignored, stands at the desk and picks up her book.

SYD
Oh, professor...
(Dex turns)
Ah..thanks...

DEX
Sure...

He's out the door, Nick hard on his heels. Syd's left alone in the room.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY

Lang pursues Dex down the hall...

LANG
Well, what do you think of it so far?

DEX
(hedging)
A...weighty...

LANG
As in deep and profound...

DEX
As in pages. Lot of trees must have died for that thing.

LANG
Hopefully not in vain. Come on, Professor, you're the only one who's seen it so far. Your opinion's important to me. I've spent the whole semester sweating on that thing.

DEX
Hugo spent sixteen years grinding out "LES MISERABLES".

LANG
Yeah, but his grade-point average didn't depend on it.

DEX
Neither does your scholarship. So what's the rush?

CONTINUED

LANG

(irritated and impatient)

Didn't like it?

DEX

Didn't say that.

Dex comes to an elevator, pushes a button, the door opens, and he steps in.

NICK

How about a hint to tide me over. Any comment at all...

DEX

(ponders a moment)

...Nice typing...

The elevator door closes and Dex escapes the frustrated Lang.

INT. MEN'S ROOM

Dex enters a men's room, spying a MAN at one of the sinks, staring vacantly at the water rushing from the faucet into the basin. Dex recognizes him...It is HAL BENNETT, a young colleague of his.

DEX

Something gone down the drain?

Hal looks up, surprised by the voice. Seeing Dex he cracks a tight nervous smile.

HAL

Certainly hope not. What have you heard?

DEX

(ignoring the question)

Little tense, Hal? Not to mention looking absolutely shitty.

As Dex goes over to the urinal, Hal splashes cold water on his face, then examines himself in the mirror. He's looking weary and frazzled. He's slightly on edge and Dex finds it amusing.

DEX

(continuing)

Up all night toiling against the publishers' deadline?

HAL

(sly grin, drying off)

Up all night, consulting my physician.

DEX

(gets it)

Ah...playing doctor with Elaine...

CONTINUED

D.O.A.

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007Tune
TECHJah/w
LPE
Jah/w
SCENE

CONTINUED

HAL

She was on call up at the Med Center
all night.

DEX

And did her beeper go off?

Hal smiles and shoots a basket into the trash can with his paper towel.
Then he grabs another from the rack. Dex zips up.

DEX

Where the Hell do you do it in a hospital?

HAL

Where else? Feet in the stirrups, Hi-ho,
Silver.

Dex shakes his head in weary, amused disbelief and washes his hands.
Hal shoots another paper towel basket, then pulls another from the rack
with distracted energy. Before he can wad it up in a ball though, Dex
takes it and dries his hands with it. Hal nervously fidgets.

DEX

Hafta forsake that wild life once
you're a full professor.

HAL

(nervous laugh; delight)
You son-of-a-bitch! I wondered how long
you were going to keep me in suspense.
He said yes then?

DEX

(smiles)
All but...

Dex shoots his wadded paper towel. It bounces off the rim of the basket
to the floor.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE MEN'S ROOM

...as Dex and Hal come out and start down the hall. Hal is still a
bundle of nervous energy.

DEX

It's not official yet, so it wouldn't
hurt if you showed up at the library
dedication tonight. It'll be your last
chance to brownnose before semester break.

HAL

If you hadn't helped me with the outline
and plot structure, Dex, I wouldn't even
have the book contract. Thanks. And thanks
for putting in the good word.

CONTINUED

DEX

You earned it, Hal.

HAL

Look, I'm headed the other way. See you in the office later. Got a bottle in my desk. We'll celebrate.

Hal takes off at a trot in the opposite direction. Dex turns the corner, proceeding down the hall to his office. A MAN in his middle-thirties approaches him. This is GRAHAME COREY, another English professor. Grahame's glasses and thinning hair suggest an intellectual, bookish air that almost is belied by his height and slightly overweight bulk. There's aggression in that bulk now as he moves toward Dex as though it were the shootout at the OK corral. Dex is aware of the impending confrontation, but sees no way to avoid it, so he plunges on ahead with a weary sigh.

GRAHAME

(not mincing words)

Thanks for the stab in the back, Dex. That promotion was mine!

DEX

Isn't this tirade a little premature, Grahame?

GRAHAME

Don't be coy. The whole damn department knows the dean asked for your opinion and what it was.

DEX

My opinion's not his decision.

GRAHAME

No, but with your recommendation, Hal Burnett will get it.

DEX

If he does, the advance on his first book and publishing date this spring might have something to do with it.

GRAHAME

And what about his classes! You assigned me two of them this semester so he'd have extra time for that damn book. I deserved that full professorship, Dex. I've been here longer...I was next in line!

(desperate)

Christ, I need it...My third kid's on the way. A raise would have been nice...The pat on the back even nicer.

DEX

Grahame, you know academic politics as well as I do. Publish or perish. Always has been, always will be.

CONTINUED

D.O.A.

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insider
Tech
TECH

CONTINUED

GRAHAME

I have published!

DEX

Rehashing old classroom lectures in
obscure literary journals doesn't count.

He starts to leave.

GRAHAME

When was the last time you published, Dex?

It's meant as a cutting remark. It's acknowledged as such...with a
pause and a cold stare.

GRAHAME

(continuing)

There's an interesting article for one of
those obscure journals...An appointment
to an ivy league college with a brilliant
second novel. Full professorship with a
third novel that was a little colourless,
but not bad. Then a fourth and a fifth
that were just careless. But you had tenure
by then and the sixth novel didn't come at all.

DEX

Still five more than you, Grahame.

THE CAMERA STAYS WITH DEX as he turns his back on Grahame and continues
down the hall to his office.

GRAHAME

(shouting after)

Some of us are just teachers, you know, Dex!
We haven't any fucking grand literary pre-
tensions! We just wanna teach! Published
or not, I'm the same goddamn teacher!

Dex has arrived at his office door. The names are painted on the glass
window -- DEXTER CORNELL...and underneath, HAL BURNETT. CAMERA MOVES
IN CLOSE ON DEX'S HAND as he inserts the key into the lock.

INT. DEX'S OFFICE - CLOSE-UP - ANSWERING MACHINE - DAY

The little red light on the answering machine FLASHES...A MESSAGE. A HAND
hits the "rewind" button and A GARBLED VOICE jabbars incoherently as the tape
spins back. The "play" button is punched by a finger and A WOMAN'S VOICE
SPEAKS ON THE TAPE.

VOICE

(on tape)

Dex...Gail...The papers came today...
Everything seems in order...You just
need to sign them...There's also some
mail here for you...

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

THE CAMERA PULLS BACK on Dex, seated at his desk, listening to the machine soberly. He stares at the PHOTOGRAPH OF A PERT, PRETTY WOMAN on his desk. He frowns and clicks off the machine.

He glances blankly out his window for a moment. The snow's stopped, but it blankets the sill and everything in view. A blinding sheet of whiteness.

Dex shakes himself from the hypnotic emptiness outside and shuffles through a stack of papers on his desk. He comes across a thick-bound MANUSCRIPT. He reluctantly opens it to the title-page.

DEX'S POV - THE MANUSCRIPT

It's entitled "BIGELOW" and underneath is "A NOVEL BY NICHOLAS LANG". This is Lang's independent project.

BACK TO SCENE

Dex rifles wearily through the pages with his thumb. He sighs, shakes his head and, grabbing a pencil off his desk, MARKS the titlepage.

ON TITLEPAGE OF MANUSCRIPT

Dex has emblazoned the paper with a GRADE...an "A" in prominent red pencil.

BACK TO SCENE

He closes the manuscript and throws it on the desk. A SCREAM suddenly disrupts the solitude of the office. Dex jerks upright and whirls around at the sound. As he does, A FLAILING BODY, hurtling downward from above, careens against Dex's office window with a sickening THUD, cracking the pane, smearing a BIG CRIMSON SPLOTCH on the glass, then plummets out of sight.

It's all so fast, Dex's frozen in shock for a moment, then springs up and rushes to the window, looking out, straight down.

DEX'S POV - THE GROUND BELOW

A crowd already gathers about the crumpled form, four stories below. There are cries of shock and horror. The snow around the body is stained scarlet. Dex recognizes the corpse. It is Nick Lang!

CLOSE-UP - DEX'S EYES

...as they widen in recognition...

DEX'S POV

...on the broken form of Nick. THE CAMERA ZOOMS IN AND TRACKS BACK simultaneously on the dead man, giving the viewpoint a spiralling sense of vertigo.

BACK TO SCENE

...as Dex whirls back dizzily from the window. Nauseous, he gasps for breath, clutching his desk for support. Doing so, he accidentally knocks Nick's MANUSCRIPT off the corner. THE CAMERA FOLLOWS its descent

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to the floor, where it lies, its front cover flipped open revealing the red "A"...A SIREN SOUNDS....

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DEX'S OFFICE - POV FROM WINDOW - DAY

Through the blood stained, cracked pane, we SEE an ambulance has arrived on the scene. Lang's covered body lies on a stretcher. Official types hover about. Police keep bystanders at bay.

DEX(OS)

Pull that down.

WITH A CLATTER, A VENETIAN BLIND drops in front of the window, obscuring both view and bloodstain. A TREMBLING HAND MOVES INTO FRAME, holding a BOTTLE OF PLAIN-WRAP SCOTCH. Shaky fingers open the lid, then drop it.

HAL(OS)

Shit!

CAMERA FOLLOWS the lid as it rolls over to a desk chair where Dex sits. He leans over and picks up the lid, the CAMERA PULLING BACK as he hands it to Hal by the window. Hal looks a little queasy. He turns to the window, back to Dex, as he pours them drinks.

DEX

Why...?

Hal turns back and hands Dex a coffee cup full of booze.

HAL

Time of the year for it, isn't it? Holiday depression and all that.

(shudders involuntarily
and gulps at his drink)

DEX

Pretty grim.

(sips his Scotch, makes a face)
So's this...

HAL

(drinks)

Economics. Next semester I'll be able to afford a better brand.

DEX

(musing)

....after everything he's overcome. A kid with a dead-end life given a golden opportunity and he made the most of it. Dean's list. Mainwaring Scholarship. Brains. Looks. Popularity. Out of the gutter to the top of the world only to jump off.

CONTINUED

D.O.A.

HAL

The top of the world can be lonely and scary sometimes. A trap with no escape but down. Maybe it finally got to him. Your father murders a man and the victim's widow finances your education. Too much, too soon...Too much change, too much success, too much to prove, too much to handle in too short a time...

DEX

(shakes his head in weary
mystification)

He was asking me about his grades only this morning.

HAL

(as though a possible solution)
Worried about 'em, maybe?

DEX

Naw, it was like he couldn't wait to find out...
(picks up Lang's manuscript)
This thing here....

Hal takes a look, notices the grade.

HAL

Liked it, huh?

DEX

Didn't read it.

Hal stares at him in surprised curiosity.

DEX

Don't mean to affront your academic sensibilities, but I'm not wading through some undergraduate's three-hundred page attempt at a novel, I don't care how smart he was...

HAL

How'd you arrive at an "A"

DEX

Ambitious.

HAL

Yeah...what a waste. Maybe you should have read it.

He starts to drop the manuscript into the trash, but Dex stops him.

DEX

(shrugs)

Oh...maybe I will...

With a smile of good-natured amusement, Hal relinquishes the manuscript to Dex.

ON DEX

...as he slips the manuscript into his briefcase.

DEX

At least he went out with his four-point intact.

CAMERA PULLS TIGHT as Dex brings the Scotch to his lips, draining the glass...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GAIL'S HOUSE - LIVING-ROOM - CLOSE ON DEX - NIGHT

...as Dex brings another glass down from his lips, this one also drained, a thick residue of egg-nog clinging to the sides.

DEX

More nog, less egg.

CAMERA PULLS BACK TO INCLUDE GAIL...the woman from the photo on Dex's desk. She's about his age, though better preserved. The two are in the living-room of her house, presently in the throes of yuletide adornment. A partially decorated Christmas tree stands in one corner. Boxes of ornaments and other decorations are strewn on the floor. Dex, reading glasses perched on nose, sits in a comfortable, lived-in armchair. A STACK OF MAIL in his lap. Some of it opened. Mostly Christmas cards. Gail takes his glass and goes to a well-stocked bar where sits a punch bowl of egg-nog. As she fills Dex's glass and spikes it with rum, Dex opens more mail. Another Christmas card.

DEX

(reading the card)

...Uncle Charlie...Yours or mine?

GAIL

Yours...

DEX

Ah..thought he was dead.

GAIL

(hands him his nog)

No...The dead one's mine.

Dex involuntarily shivers, upset, and downs the egg-nog in a gulp. Then hands the glass back to Gail.

GAIL

Didn't mean to shock you. He's been dead a year and a half.

DEX

No...it's just that I saw a death on campus today. A doozy. Student of mine did a swan dive right past my office window.
(opens another card)

GAIL

(finding the image distasteful)

Oooh!

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

DEX

Yeah, real "Oooh".

(changes subject)

We sending out joint Christmas cards this year?

GAIL

I already sent mine out.

DEX

I guess not...Oh...I almost forgot...

(reaches in his briefcase)

Got you a present.

He pulls a pretty, obviously professionally-wrapped, package from his briefcase. Gail, surprised, comes over with Dex's egg-nog.

GAIL

Oh, Dex...Can I open it now?

DEX

Sure...not like I'll be here for Christmas dinner, is it?

GAIL

(hands him another drink)

Here. One for the road.

DEX

Subtle hint to exit?

GAIL

(opening her present)

I'm exiting. Stay, if you like. Make yourself at home. After all, you are.

DEX

(curious)

Hot date?

(Gail says nothing,
just opens the gift)

Didn't think you dressed like that just to decorate the tree...Anybody I know?

GAIL

(opening the box)

Stop sounding like a husband.

DEX

Sorry. Thought I still was one.

GAIL

A mere technicality.

(brushing aside the tissue packing)

Oh, Dex!

Gail, with a pleased gasp, pulls the gift from the box. It is an object d'art...A METAL SCULPTURE OF A FERRIS WHEEL. She places it on the coffee table. It's an intricate, delicate piece of work. The wheel spins and the little cars rock back and forth.

CONTINUED

DEX

That one I'll ride with you.

This is apparently something private between them. Gail stares at Dex in curious appraisal.

DEX

You don't like it.

GAIL

(it's obvious she does)

Of course I do...It just doesn't seem like something you'd think of...it's lovely...

She glances up at him lovingly, obviously touched. Dex smiles, pleased that she's pleased. Gail realizes she's becoming susceptible and abruptly rises, heading for the fireplace mantle.

GAIL

(changing the mood)

...Much nicer than what I got you...

DEX

Lump of coal?

She collects some PAPERS from the mantle and gives them to Dex. They're legal-looking documents -- divorce papers, to be precise. Dex glances at them and frowns.

DEX

I was close. Perfect end to a shitty day.

GAIL

(resumes tree-decorating)

Now, now. 'Tis the season to be jolly.

(amused)

"You better not pout, you'd better not cry..."

DEX

(annoyed)

Glad you find it a laugh riot. Maybe I'd take it a little better if you acted just a little hurt, Gail. You know, a small tinge of regret that the last ~~nineteen~~^{two} years together wasn't just ho-hum...

GAIL

(serious)

Only the last few...I hurt, Dex. You don't know how deep or how long I've hurt.

DEX

This the "Where are the snows of yesteryear" speech?

GAIL

Pardon the cliche, but they were the happiest years of my life.

CONTINUED

DEX

Wildly romantic. The dingy cock-roach infested efficiency. You working in that bookstore for minimum wage all day and, at night, trying to figure out another way to make spam taste edible.

GAIL

And none of it mattered because you believed in what you were doing. We may not have had a pot to piss in then, Dex, but you had passion and purpose and it showed in your work.

DEX

And got us where we are today.

GAIL

Fat, complacent, and unproductive.

DEX

(exploding)

I'm just stalled!

GAIL

(taking her coat from the couch)

You've been stalled for five years, Dex...

Only J.D. Salinger can rest on his royalties.

DEX

Hugo took sixteen years to write "LES MISERABLES"!

GAIL

Trying to beat his record?

She starts to bolt out into the hallway. Dex grabs her.

DEX

(upset)

Don't run out on me, goddammit. Please... talk to me...

He sits her in a chair.

DEX

(plaintive, wanting to know)

For Christsakes, Gail, I don't understand what I did to you?

GAIL

You did it to yourself...

(starts to cry)

God, Dex, you were so goddamn good! And you just...gave up! I've waited around this long thinking you were just sleep-walking and would wake up. But you can't. You're not asleep. You're dead. Dead, Dex!

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

DEX

(stung by the remark)

...and you just buried me...

GAIL

(bitterly)

You buried yourself, wrapped yourself up
in a shroud of academic mummification.

DEX

What the Hell's wrong with teaching?

GAIL

You were a writer. Sorry, Dex, I lied
when I said better or worse. I won't
stick around and watch someone I love
just...wither away.

She heads for the front hall.

DEX

Gail...

Stopping her, he kisses her. She's taken by surprise, but succumbs,
then calmly breaks it.

GAIL

Don't...

DEX

Have to...Mistletoe.

He points to a sprig directly above their heads. Both laugh.
Then Gail gives him a light, wistful peck and pushes away.

GAIL

I gotta go...Sign those papers before
you leave...And thanks for the gift.
It's really lovely.

Before she can cry again, she disappears into the hall. The front
door slams. Dex goes to the bar and, grabbing the rum, carries it
back to his chair. He sits, pours a liberal dose of booze into his
glass and drinks, staring with wistful sadness at the ferriswheel on
the table. He leans forward and spins the wheel, the tiny cars rock
to and fro. Dex drinks, the CAMERA PULLS IN on the ferriswheel going
round and round...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LIBRARY WING - CLOSE-UP - PAINTING - NIGHT

...the spinning ferriswheel becomes a MAD SWIRL OF BRILLIANT COLOUR,
It is a PIECE OF ABSTRACT ART mounted on the wall. WE HEAR THE STEADY
BUZZ OF CONVERSATION.

CAMERA PULLS BACK ON DEX, a little worse for drink, examining the
painting in bleary-eyed curiosity. His hair is tousled, a cigarette
dangles from his lips, it's tough to tell whether his face is red from

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

the cold or the booze.

Hands stuffed in his pockets, he unsteadily maneuvers himself directly in the path of a doorway in order to get another perspective on the painting. As he bends over to examine it closer, he almost collides with a TALL ELEGANT WOMAN, dressed entirely in black. Dex jerks up, bracing the wall for support and beams a silly grin.

DEX

Sorry...

(referring to the painting)

I may not know what I like, but I know art. This ain't it.

Dex gazes up at the woman's face. Despite the drawn expression of distracted distress, it is an attractive face. A handsome woman in her mid-forties...as we'll later learn, MRS. MICHAEL MAINWARING... She's not amused by either Dex or his dubiously witty badinage. She glances at him in remote disdain with wet, red-rimmed eyes...eyes that have apparently been crying...and brushes past him. Dex watches her go...into a COCKTAIL CROWD OF PROFESSORIAL MEN AND WOMEN. The room is book-lined with several display cases.

A small riser serving as a podium and a microphone have been set up at the back, in front of a veiled plaque on the wall. We're in the about-to-be-dedicated library wing. Waiters with trays of drinks and hors d'oeuvres rove the room.

ON DEX

...as he grabs a drink from a passing tray and plunges into the crowd, acknowledging various "Hello's" and "Hi, Dex" with a smiling nod or wave and catches snatches of conversation as he aimlessly "mingles".

HARRIED PROFESSOR

Yes, but if I don't get anymore students next semester, they'll drop the course.

COLLEAGUE

Well, Frank do we really need a course on "MODERN MYTHOLOGY -- THE COMIC BOOK"?

Dex moves on.

IMPASSIONED PROFESSOR

...we must divest our South African holdings...

Dex nudges through more bodies and more chatter.

FEMALE PROFESSOR

...Oh, he's a pontificating, boring old poop...

Someone backs into Dex, jostling his drink and partially spilling it on his shirt. A HAND reaches out to steady Dex's arm and glass.

GRAHAME(OS)

Oh...excuse me...

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

The SPEAKER abruptly stops. Dex looks up to see who he's run into -- Grahame Corey! Grahame abruptly removes his hand from Dex's and stalks off into the crush of bodies...Dex, watching Grahame go, wipes at his wet shirt, then noticing his glass still has some champagne in it, fizzing nicely, he downs it.

INT. LIBRARY MEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Dex staggers into the library men's room, depositing his cigarette in his plastic champagne glass and the glass into the wastebasket on the way to the urinal. Another MAN, BACK TO CAMERA, stands next to him. As Dex unzips, he casually glances over and laughs, recognizing the fellow next to him.

DEX

We've got to stop meeting like this.

The man next to him abruptly looks up...it's Hal.

HAL

(surprise)

Dex!...a...what...

His question trails off as he stares curiously at Dex.

DEX

Mind not staring? I've got a shy bladder. What's the matter, Hally. You look like you've seen a ghost...

HAL

Just your wife. She know you're here?

DEX

She's here?

Hal nods and flushes.

INT. LIBRARY WING

Gail stands, holding a cocktail, next to a sleek, willowy blonde who wears glasses. This is ELAINE WELLES...Hal's Elaine. While half-listening to Elaine, Gail is scanning the room as though she were looking for someone.

ELAINE

Didn't know you were still attending faculty functions, Gail?

GAIL

(still scanning the room)
The invitation came to the house. Thought it would be a chance to see folks I don't see much anymore.

CONTINUED

ELAINE

(aware of Gail's searching)
Anyone in particular?

DEX(OS)

You've found him.

ANOTHER ANGLE

The women turn to see Hal supporting a slightly weaving, drunkenly grinning Dex.

HAL

Look what I picked up in the john.

DEX

Yeah...ain't it awful what you can get
from a toilet seat these days?

(to Gail)

Hi, Sailor, new in town?

ELAINE

Hello, Dexter.

She shoots a questioning glance at Hal who shrugs sheepishly. Gail eyes Dex with sad, weary tolerance. Then furtively glances in the direction of the podium where several people have gathered...including Mrs. Mainwaring.

GAIL

Enjoy your eggnog, Dex?

DEX

Still not enough nog. Elaine, flag me
down one of those.

He points to a waiter carrying a tray of drinks behind her.

GAIL

God, don't encourage him.

Too late. Elaine's already reaching back for one. She can't quite get to the tray and nudges a man behind her to fetch one for her. He does. It's Grahame Corey again! He hands Elaine the drink and watches as she hands it to Dex.

DEX

Thought you had a date.

GAIL

Sign those papers?

DEX

(drinking)

You know I've stopped writing.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

GAIL

Don't get "stalled" on this one, Dex.
Writers' block gets expensive with my
lawyers.

ELAINE

(peacemaker)

Now, now. No sniping, you two.

There is a TAPPING on the microphone, as the COLLEGE PRESIDENT, flanked by a couple of FACULTY MEMBERS and a somber Mrs. Mainwaring, prepares to speak.

PRESIDENT

If I could have everyone's attention,
please! Despite...

(mike reverberates)

A...despite the unfortunate incident on
campus today...I'd like to thank you all
for showing up...

GAIL

(whispers)

What incident?

ELAINE

(whispers back)

Suicide.

GAIL

Oh...yes...

ON PODIUM

...as the President continues...

PRESIDENT

...and especially thank our benefactress,
Mrs. Michael Mainwaring, who graciously
insisted we not cancel on such short
notice. This new wing and the literary
treasures it will hold was long the dream
of her late husband...

(to Mrs. Mainwaring's imperiously
impatient glance)

...er, I...could go on, of course, but...a
...owing to the situation, we'll just pro-
ceed with the dedication. Mrs. Mainwaring...

He relinquishes the microphone to her. There is polite applause,
as she takes a deep breath before she begins to speak.

BACK ON DEX AND THE OTHERS

Gail still surveys the podium obviously looking for someone.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

MRS. MAINWARING

(hesitant)

Thank you, Doctor...As you know, I was
to share these dedication honours with
Nicholas Lang...

Mainwaring halts abruptly, composing herself once more before she continues.
Gail still scans the podium, now with some concern.

ON MAINWARING

...as she continues, with strained deliberation....

MAINWARING

Four years ago, many people didn't understand why I arranged for the son of my husband's murderer to come to this school. But Nick was not accountable for the sins of his father and somehow it seemed he deserved a chance. In those four years, Nick has not only proved worthy of the opportunity given him but capable of making his own, just this week receiving the Mainwaring Senior Scholarship -- awarded solely on academic merit...

(stops, then proceeds with difficulty)

Tonight was not only to honour my husband and his dream, but also to honour Nick and his triumph over the past...

(falters)

But sometimes the past is...inexorable...and...

She is unable to continue. Choked with emotion, she turns from the microphone. The President solicitously comes up to her.

BACK ON GAIL AND THE OTHERS

...as the crowd murmurs quietly...

ELAINE

(whispers)

You should have seen his body when they brought it into the Med Center.

GAIL

(slightly uneasy)

Who?

ELAINE

Nick Lang, the student who jumped.

DEX

Erstwhile student.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

PRESIDENT

(coming to the mike)

Mrs. Mainwaring would like me to inform you that tomorrow evening at this time in the Laboratory Theatre of the Fine Arts Building, there'll be a memorial service for Nicholas...

GAIL

(hushed intensity)

What?

DEX

I told you. Remember? The Flying Wallenda off the English Building.

HAL

(squeamishly)

Jesus, Dex!

PRESIDENT

(continuing from the podium)

...where we can all properly pay tribute to this fine you man...

DEX

...Plummetted right past my window. Had a front row seat.

HAL

Dex!

Gail is quietly falling to pieces.

GAIL

(stunned, quiet shock)

He's dead?... He's dead...!

The conversation stops. Everyone looks up at Gail. She stands frozen in rigid, stoic belief.

GAIL

Oh, God. Oh, God...No!

Her cry becomes a guttural, hysteric wail, startling the assemblage. Those on the podium whirl about to witness the commotion...including Mrs. Mainwaring.

DEX

(sobering)

Gail!

GAIL

(staggering through the crowd)

It's not possible!

DEX

Gail?

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

Gail jerks away from Dex. Tears flood her eyes. Her breath comes in moaning, whimpering gasps.

GAIL

No! It's not possible. I came to hear him speak. He was supposed to be here. He couldn't have...Nicky...Nicky...

She sinks to the floor on her knees. As she weeps her grief, Dex hovers over her in silent, dismal confusion. He gazes up distractedly to see Mrs. Mainwaring on the podium, staring down at them, a disturbed wildness glinting through the austerity of the gaze.

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Elaine sits in the back seat of Hal's car, consoling a distraught Gail who weeps on her shoulder. Hal stands outside the driver's side with Dex.

DEX

I'm going with you.

Elaine, visible from the window, frowns at Hal and shakes her head in an emphatic "NO".

HAL

We'll take care of her. Leave it to Elaine. I'll fill you in later.

DEX

But...

HAL

Dex...please...don't complicate it...
And don't hurt yourself

Hal gets in the car. Dex stares at Elaine through the window. Gail's face is buried in the plush fur of Elaine's coat. The car starts up, pulls out, and drives off. As Dex watches them go, another CAR slowly drives past -- A BLACK ROLLS ROYCE. The passenger inside stares through the window up at Dex. He meets her gaze of cold, penetrating appraisal. It is Mrs. Mainwaring. Her Rolls pulls off into the street, leaving a frustrated and desperately bewildered Dex alone in the parking lot, his breath bouncing across the cold night air in little icy puffs.

INT. BAR - DEX'S POV - NIGHT

The frosty puffs of breath become...a RECORD spinning on a JUKE BOX. LOUD ROCK MUSIC blares from it. It joins a cacophony of BAR NOISES. Clinking glasses. Pool cues striking balls, the rattle-clang of pinball machines, laughter, and the drone of a dozen different conversations.

THE POV swerves with a lurch from the juke box to a sea of booths and tables and a long bar, all jammed with life, hazy through a gauze of cigarette smoke atmosphere. The patrons are mostly college-age. A campus pub. THE CAMERA drunkenly weaves through the crowd to an empty stool, settles there and FOCUSES on the CUSTOMER one stool over.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

She's a PRETTY YOUNG GIRL, over made-up -- heavy mascara, blatant lipstick -- an attempt to look older. She's probably not twenty. The hair is well-coiffed. Stylish punk-chic. She wears expensive fashionable clothes.

She's also very drunk. SIX MARTINI GLASSES sit on the bar in front of her. Two of them empty. The other four enticingly await consumption. Her open PURSE also sits on the bar with a WAD OF BILLS peeking from it, big enough to choke the proverbial horse. At the moment, she's vainly attempting to light a cigarette dangling from her mouth with a gold lighter. Click! Click! Click! no flame.

WE HEAR THE STRIKING OF A MATCH...A MAN'S HAND ENTERS FRAME...and holds a LIGHTED MATCH in front of DRUNK GIRL'S FACE.

ANOTHER ANGLE

...as Drunk Girl looks up at the keeper of the flame. It's Dex, seated on the stool next to her. He's almost as drunk as his counterpart, drunker than before.

DRUNK GIRL

...Thanks...

DEX

My pleasure.

Dex tries to hail the busy BARTENDER as he passes...without success. Drunk Girl slides one of her unsipped martinis over in front of him.

DEX

Thanks.

DRUNK GIRL

My pleasure.

(gestures to glasses)

More where that came from.

DEX

Drinking to forget?

DRUNK GIRL

To oblivion...What sorrow you drowning?

DEX

Maybe I drink just because I like it.

DRUNK GIRL

(shakes her head no)

Always a sorrow...Lost job, lost hope,...
lost love...

The girl is suddenly overwhelmed by melancholy and, laying her forehead on the edge of the bar, she starts to softly sob. Dex sets his glass on the bar and leans over her with awkward concern.

DEX

Say, you...you okay?

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

Her head still resting on the bar, she twists around and looks up at him through her tears. The she jerks her head up and grabs her martini.

DRUNK GIRL

Still a few drinks short of oblivion.

DEX

Meet you there.

Dex turns to fetch his drink, finding a BLACK-GLOVED HAND wrapped around the stem-base.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Dex's glance follows the black-gloved hand up a black-sleeved arm to the face of a YOUNG MAN. A face that is both rugged and pretty at the same time. A face most would find handsome. Yet the clear grey eyes peering from under the brim of a black chauffeur's cap belie a hint of cruelty.

For a chauffuer, he's a bit too well-dressed. The suit is a properly austere black, but the cut's a little too European-chic. French shirt cuffs, diamond cuff links, and the carnation in the lapel as well as the florid scarlet pocket handkerchief are all a little too flashy to be formal and official. The diamond ear-stud in his left lobe and the luxuriant, curly black mane that cascades from under the cap give the impression of a gigolo more than a chauffeur. This is BERNARD.

Dex points to his glass.

DEX

Mind, pal...I'm trying to catch up with the lady.

Bernard slides the glass over to Dex. And speaks. In an English accent.

BERNARD

Afraid you'll be drinking alone, sport...
Lady's going home.

The chauffeur coolly gazes at the Drunk Girl with his piercing grey eyes. She stares back in aggravated displeasure and with a slight sense of fear.

DEX

Chauffeur?

DRUNK GIRL

Keeper...Finally tracked me down, did you, Bernard?

BERNARD

Don't I always, Miss? You weren't there. Your mother's a bit upset.

DRUNK GIRL

Makes two of us.

BERNARD

Come on now...She's anxious to see you.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

DRUNK GIRL

Can't wait to gloat, eh?

Bernard starts to gather up her things. As he grabs the purse, Drunk Girl jams the lighted end of her cigarette vindictively into the back of Bernard's wrist. Bernard's face tenses. Dex nearly falls off his stool in shock.

DEX

Hey!

BERNARD

Drink up, sport, and mind your business.

Bernard is calm and deliberate. Even as he's telling Dex to "Drink up". he firmly but coolly lifts the girl's cigarette-wielding hand from his wrist. He smiles a tight cold smile at her, never acknowledging any pain, even though the cigarette burn has left a nasty purplish welt on the back of his wrist. The girl meets his own penetrating gaze with a brazen, defiant one of her own.

BERNARD

(a soothing threat)

Come on, now...

As he reaches for her, the Drunk Girl takes a clumsy swing at him, missing by a mile, and weaving woozily, swooning in Bernard's arms and passes out. Dex clumsily climbs off his stool to assist, but Bernard stops him.

BERNARD

Drink up, sport.

(lifts the girl up in
his arms)

Everything's under control.

He walks out of the place, the girl cradled in his arms. Dex watches them go in a perplexed stupor and, with a curious shake of his head, turns to do as he's bid -- drink up -- and bumps into a young girl, dressed in a sorority-pledge uniform, her arms full of HANDBILLS that she's been posting...and which go flying everywhere when she and Dex collide.

THE CAMERA FOLLOWS the cascade of paper to the floor, FOCUSING ON ONE. It proclaims its message in festive green and red ink and bold type, "GREEK COUNCIL ANNUAL CHRISTMAS CARNIVAL -- GAMES, FOOD, FUN, PRIZES - JOIN THE FESTIVITIES." Other pertinent info...places, dates, and times... appear in smaller type.

SYD(OS)

Say, why don't you watch it.

A HAND grabs the bill and snatches it off the floor. The pledge... SYDNEY FULLER...COMES INTO FRAME, kneeling down, gathering up her handbills.

DEX(OS)

I'm sorry...

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

Dex lurches INTO FRAME, also kneeling, trying to help Syd.

SYD
Oh...Professor Cornell.

DEX
(can't remember her name)
Ah...Miss...a...

SYD
Fuller...Sydney...oh, say, wasn't it awful
about Nick Lang. What a shock.

DEX
Just one of many...

The mention of Nick brings back everything to Dex. Worried, distracted, dizzy with drink, Dex lumbers to his feet and braces himself against the bar on his elbows, head in hands, clearly disturbed and disgruntled

SYD
Professor...Is there anything I can do
for you?

Dex looks over at the concerned, sympathetic girl. He slides one of the leftover martinis on the bar over to her.

DEX
Yeah...Have a drink with me...

INT. SYD'S DORM ROOM - CLOSE-UP - DEX - DAY

Dex lies nestled in a pillow, a blanket pulled up to his beard-stubbed face. He is asleep. The sound of rustling curtain blinds arouse him to torpid awareness...A FLOOD OF LIGHT cascades across his face and he groans and blinks his bleary eyes.

DEX
(muttering, half-asleep)
Gail?

His eyes pry open halfway. He looks up at...

DEX'S POV - SYDNEY

Sydney, hovering over him. She smiles down.

SYD
After spending the night with a girl,
you'd think you'd get the name right.

BACK TO SCENE

Dex struggles sluggishly to prop himself up on his elbows to find himself in a strange bed in a strange room -- obviously a student dormitory room.

CONTINUED

D.O.A.

03
+
Gail
LATS
Scene

CONTINUED

DEX

Miss...Fuller...

SYD

Sydney..."y" instead of "i". We've gone past formalities, don't you think?

Syd goes to the mirror on the back of the door to fix her hair. She's dressed and doing final primping. Dex, still half-asleep, gazes about the room, confusedly. He scratches his head.

DEX

What...happened...

SYD

The drink we had became several more in several different bars...Remember?

DEX

No...

He sits up in bed. He still has on the clothes he was wearing yesterday. Except his coat. It's slung over the desk chair with his overcoat. He winces with pain and clutches at his stomach.

SYD

Stomach still a little queasy, huh?
You almost puked in the elevator coming up here.

Dex gazes out the window. The only thing visible from it is sky.

DEX

Just where is here?

SYD

Eleventh floor of the freshman girls' dorm.

Dex looks at her appalled. She smiles and, going over to a kettle on a hot plate, prepares two cups of instant coffee.

SYD

You insisted on walking me to my door. More of a stagger than a walk. And you should have seen us trying to get past the front desk unseen.

DEX

Guess I was pretty drunk...

SYD

You were...

DEX

Look...I'm sorry...I...

CONTINUED

SYD

No apologies or guilt required, Professor.
What you're thinking, didn't happen...

DEX

No? I have a vague memory of some kisses
and a pass being made.

SYD

Two kisses. And I made the pass. Was
pretty drunk myself. How do you take
your coffee?

DEX

Black.

SYD

You were very gracious in turning me down.
Said I was very pretty, then muttered something
about rules and ethics concerning professors
and co-eds.

(brings him his coffee)

And about the quantity of alcohol affecting
performance...All the while trying to make
a graceful exit.

DEX

But I didn't exit.

SYD

You passed out.

(wistfully)

So your honour and my cherry are still
intact.

DEX

Sound disappointed.

(Syd says nothing, just
sips her coffee)

You are very pretty.

SYD

Good thing we're both sober now.

Setting her coffee down, Syd picks up her school books and a stack of
the flyers she was distributing last night and heads for the door.

SYD

I've got to get these flyers posted before
class or my sorority will treat me to my own
personal Hell Night. Shower's in there. And
don't worry about my roommate, she dropped out
after the first month.

DEX

(rising)

Hey, listen...Ohh!

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

He suddenly doubles over with pain, clutching his stomach with one hand and the wall for support with the other.

SYD

You okay?

DEX

(smiles weakly)

Just the morning-after...I...I just wanted to say, I don't remember clearly a Hell of a lot after that first drink. But I do remember you being very sympathetic and consoling. Thanks.

SYD

Thanks for seeing me home. If you don't want to wear a dress outta here, you'd better try the back stairs...By the by, you're a nice kisser.

She exits. Dex sips his coffee, then wobbles unevenly over to the desk, sitting in the chair. Groggy and weak, he cracks the window, breathing the fresh air. Then he makes the mistake of looking straight down.

DEX'S POV - OUT THE WINDOW

...the campus is sprawled out below and the city beyond. Everything blanketed in snow. THE CAMERA PANS STRAIGHT DOWN to the square below.

Warmly bundled students -- no more than tiny dots...bustle about the geometric configurations of the walkways and snow-covered lawn. Suddenly, the CAMERA ZOOMS IN WHILE TRACKING BACK, accentuating the dizzying extremes of the height.

BACK TO SCENE

...with gasping breath, Dex jerks back from the window and collapses back in his desk chair. Fumbling in his coat pocket, he pulls out cigarettes and a lighter. He lights one. Coughs. Winces. Grabs his stomach. Yanks a kleenex from a box on the table. Mops his sweaty brow with it.

Then he sees the telephone. He picks up the receiver, begins to dial, then hesitates. Then continues dialing. WE HEAR RINGING through the receiver. Three, four times. Dex is about to hang up when it's picked up in mid-ring. A VOICE, INDISTINCT, BUT FEMALE, queries, "Hello..."

DEX

Gail?...Dex...

INT. GAIL'S LIVING-ROOM - DAY

Gail sits in the same easy chair we saw Dex sitting in last night. On the coffee table in front of her is Dex's Christmas gift -- the ferriswheel. A BOTTLE OF PILLS sits next to it. Gail's in a bathrobe. Her eyes are red and puffy from crying. The blinds are drawn and the house is dark. The Christmas tree, half-decorated, stands somewhat forlorn and threadbare. We faintly hear Dex as she listens on the phone.

CONTINUED

GAIL

(into phone, flatly)

...Well as can be expected...Elaine gave me some kind of sedative...and some pills...

(picks bottle up)

I don't know..valium or something...

ON DEX

...as he speaks into phone...

DEX

(awkward, hesitant)

Gail...I...feel a little off-balance here...

(sincerely)

I'm sorry...

ON GAIL

GAIL

Sorry for the way you found out. Wasn't anything vindictive in it. I didn't tell anyone...Guess I was embarrassed.

He was so...so young...

(she's about to cry,

instead she rattles on to keep from doing so)

I met him at a poetry reading...We got to talking; he asked me out for coffee. I didn't find out till later he was one of your students...It was funny when I did, because...because....I suppose some shrink could have a field day with this...he reminded me so much of you when you were that age...It wasn't love or anything, Dex. He just made me feel...like I hadn't felt for such a long time...

(she breaks down)

Look, Dex, I really don't feel like talking now...

(she's choked with sobs)

ON DEX

...can't stand to hear her cry...

DEX

Gail...Darling...

ON GAIL

...stemming the tide of tears with a soggy handkerchief.

GAIL

I can't believe it, Dex...He had no reason... no reason...

She tries to get under control...noticing Dex's briefcase by the chair.

CONTINUED

GAIL

(picking up the briefcase)

Look, you left your briefcase here last night. And you didn't sign those papers...

(he says something)

No, Dex...not today...please...

ON DEX

Her pain is painful for him.

DEX

(tenderly)

But you shouldn't be alone right now...

(her protest is indistinctly

heard over the phone)

Okay, okay...Not today... but if you...

(pause)

...Gail...I love you...

ON GAIL

...some papers have spilt from the briefcase. One of them Nick Lang's manuscript. Gail curiously examines it...

GAIL

(sadly, but kindly)

I know, Dex...I know...

INT. SYD'S DORM ROOM - ON DEX

...as he hears the click of the receiver. He absently fumbles for another cigarette and just as absently sticks it in his mouth. He strikes a match. It doesn't light.

As he rips another from the matchbook, his fingers suddenly jerk and his face tenses in anguished suspense. He emits a short, sharp cry and the cigarette drops from his lips. Dex doubles over, clutching his stomach as though a stabbing pain was lancing through it. He collapses down in the chair and OUT OF FRAME...leaving us staring out the window at the bleak, grey sky.

INT. HOSPITAL EXAMINING-ROOM - CLOSE-UP - WINDOW - DAY

It's the same bleak, grey sky...but the window's different. AN ELDERLY DOCTOR -- DR. RYAN -- steps in front of the window, filling the FRAME IN CLOSE-UP. He wears a HEAD MIRROR and, in it, we see a DISTORTED REFLECTION of Dex's face.

RYAN

Say "ah" again...

DEX(OS)

Ahhh....

In the mirror, we see Dex's mouth open in compliance as the doctor probes with a tongue depressor.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Ryan frowns, removes the depressor, throwing it in a wastebasket. We're in a hospital examination room. Dex sits on the edge of the examining table, shirtless. Ryan examines his eyes.

DEX

Can I have some more water?

Ryan goes to the water cooler and taking a paper cup from the dispenser fills it.

RYAN

Thirsty, huh?

He hands the cup to Dex. Dex drinks.

DEX

Morning-after cottonmouth.

Dex smiles. Ryan does not.

DEX

(slightly uneasy)

Didn't think I'd be running the whole medical gauntlet for a little hangover and a belly ache, Doc.

RYAN

(evasively casual)

Never hurts to be sure. I'll check those test reports.

He exits. Dex scratches his throat in annoyed irritation, swallowing three or four times. Hopping down from the table, he goes to the water cooler, refilling his paper cup, downing the water, refilling it and drinking again. He rumples the cup and tosses it into the wastebasket.

CLOSE ON WASTEBASKET

...as the crumpled paper cup lands at the bottom of the container, empty save for the earlier discarded tongue-depressor.

INT. HOSPITAL EXAMINING ROOM - CLOSE-UP - WASTEBASKET - DAY

...there are several more paper cups in the wastebasket, littering the bottom. We HEAR A LIQUID GLUG-GLUG and the CAMERA PANS TO THE WATER COOLER. WATER BUBBLES gurggle inside the clear container. WE PULL BACK finding DEX, now dressed, finishing filling another paper cup from the cooler. He downs it greedily, crushing the cup and impatiently tossing it away. He glances out the window. The sky is even bleaker, greyer. He starts to pace in frustrated agitation...then whirls around expectantly as he hears the sound of the door opening.

DEX

About time...

D.O.A.

LAB
P.C.M.
SCENE

ANOTHER ANGLE

Dr. Ryan enters with Elaine...Hal's girlfriend. She's dressed in her doctor whites. Dex is surprised to see her. Both Doctors are as somber as morticians. Elaine holds a BEAKER OF LIQUID in her hand.

DEX

Elaine?

RYAN

Yes...a..Doctor Welles is a specialist,
Mr. Cornell.

DEX

(fearfully irritated)

Spec...What the Hell's going on, Elaine?

She looks at him, then at Dr. Ryan.

ELAINE

The blinds, please, Doctor.

Ryan goes to the window and draws the blinds. It seems to take him forever as Dex just tensely stares at Elaine, sensing something terribly wrong but afraid to speak. Once the blinds are down, Elaine switches off the lights. But the room is not pitched into total darkness...
for the contents of the beaker Elaine holds GLOWS!

AN EERIE YELLOW LUMINESCENCE emanates from it, etching along Dex's taut anxious face as he intently gazes on the beaker.

DEX

(with nervous trepidation)

What...what is it?

ELAINE

A toxic luminous solution...And it's
in your body, Dex.

Pause. Dex's eyes never leave the glowing beaker.

DEX

Toxic?

ELAINE

Highly...

ON DEX

...as he absorbs the news...he looks back at the beaker....

DEX'S POV

The beaker's glowing light plays along the somber, concerned faces of Elaine and Ryan -- like two spooky jack-o-lanterns out in the dark.

Suddenly the faces BLUR and the glowing light wavers and spins, filling the SCREEN...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL EXAMINATION ROOM - CLOSE-UP - EXAMINING LAMP

...MORE LIGHT...Not spinning...the stable, intense harshness of florescent light...WE HEAR A GROAN...

ELAINE(OS)

Thatta boy, Dex.

CAMERA PULLS BACK TO REVEAL the light is an overhead lamp, shedding a white spotlight over the examining table where Elaine watches Dex, a sprawled prone figure there, slowly come to. The rest of the room is still dark.

DEX

Wha...?

ELAINE

You fainted...

Dex slowly, rockily, sits up on the table...looking about him, trying to get his bearings.

DEX'S POV - THE DESK

The BEAKER of luminous toxin sits on a desk, still glowing, though not quite as brightly in the now semi-dark room.

BACK TO SCENE

...as Dex turns his gaze from the beaker, remembering now...TOXIC LUMINOUS SOLUTION. HIGHLY POISONOUS.

DEX

Oh, yeah....

Elaine approaches with a HYPODERMIC NEEDLE.

ELAINE

Remember everything?

DEX

I've been poisoned.

ELAINE

Yes, Dex...

DEX

How...?

ELAINE

(hesitates)

The...the alcoholic content in your body suggests you got it in some liquor.

There's something more, but she can't bring yourself to tell him.

ELAINE

Look...I'm going to give you a sedative.
It'll help relax you.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

Dex passively submits as Elaine rolls up his sleeve and starts to prepare his arm for the injection.

ELAINE

(continuing)

Dr. Ryan is arranging a room for you...I tried to get Hal. He must be in class. Thought maybe he should break the news to Gail...

DEX

You gonna pump my stomach?

ELAINE

What?

DEX

Isn't that what you do? Pump the stomach. Give an antidote or something?

Elaine just stares at Dex helplessly. This is going to be harder than she thought.

ELAINE

(slowly, measured, with difficulty)

Dex, I don't think you understand. That poison has been in your system for at least twelve hours. Probably more. It's been absorbed into your vital organs. It's too late for a stomach pump. And even if there were an antidote, it'd be too late for that.

A slow panic creeps into Dex's eyes as he suddenly realizes the full import of what's just been said.

DEX

Whattya mean? Whattya telling me?

ELAINE

I'm sorry...

There is a long pause. All we hear is Dex's laboured breathing as he stares wildly down at the floor.

DEX

How long?

ELAINE

Depends...How much was ingested, the systemic conditions of the individual, amount of exertion...

DEX

(savagely)

How long?!

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

ELAINE

Another day...two at the most...

DEX

(rises, disbelief)

It's a mistake. You made a mistake!

ELAINE

No mistake, Dex!

She points to the beaker. Dex stares at it, it's ominous presence stopping him short. He sinks back down on the table, his fingers tangle through his hair in dejected torment.

ELAINE

(weary anguish)

No doubt about it.

DEX

I'm thirsty.

ANGLE ON WATER COOLER

...as Elaine approaches it, filling a paper cup with water for Dex. When she turns back, her eyes search across the room with concerned surprise.

ELAINE'S POV

...the examination table is empty. Dex is gone.

EXT. COLLEGE CAMPUS - ON BENCH - DAY

Dex sits huddled in his overcoat on a bench nestled under some trees out on the campus. His hands are stuffed in his pockets; he shivers from the cold, staring at nothing in particular, lost in bleak thought.

It is late afternoon. The daylight is dirty and dark, greyer, grimmer than before. AN OBJECT suddenly falls from above, distracting Dex's somber reverie. He looks down abstractedly for the intrusion to his meditation.

A LEAF has fallen into his lap from one of the trees above. A brown, withered crisp corpse of a leaf. Dex's picks it up by the stem, staring at it. A BREEZE starts to blow. Dex closes his fist about the leaf. It cracks and crumbles. He opens his fist. The brittle leaf is now shattered little fragments, quickly swept along on the wind, as it whirls about, whispering a whimpering dirge.

The whisper escalates into a HOWL, a mournful keening, as the wind whips up stronger, blowing flakes of snow across Dex's face.

He looks up above him. Up at the trees hovering overhead.

OVERHEAD ANGLE

...as Dex glances up, the CAMERA PANS BACK from his face. BACK. Through the twisted, barren branches of the trees. Back, as though it were the Heavens themselves looking down. Down on the gnarled skeletal limbs of the trees, stripped of their green life. Down on Dex. Imprisoned beneath the crisscrossed branches, growing ever smaller as the CAMERA continues to TRACK BACK...He rises from the bench, still looking upward... isolated, insignificant...a small dark speck of life surrounded by the desolate white nothingness of the snow.

Then the tiny figure of Dex bolts out from under the oppressive, towering shadows of the trees...out across the snow...racing madly through it, as though desperately trying to escape its empty white oblivion. Silent in the snow. The only sound the wind -- moaning like a thousand souls in Hell.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

We are on a busy downtown street, the height of the holiday season. The hollow howl of the wind is overwhelmed by a cacophony of NOISE. THE NOISE OF LIFE.

The swish of traffic on the wet, slushy concrete, squeaking brakes, revving engines, an occasional car horn. The bustling of the crowded sidewalks, filled with shoppers. Rustling packages, murmured conversations, punctuated by laughter and shouts. Tinkling Salvation Army bells. Dozens of carols blaring from dozens of storefronts, all in jarring discord with each other and the occasional ghetto-blaster of a passer-by.

Storefronts and streets are all decked out in their holiday finery. The festive decor and brilliant lights seem to hold the grey drabness of the late afternoon at bay, exuding comfort and warmth and Frank Capra optimism.

But through the contented sea of humanity rolls a turbulent wave. Suddenly among the bobbing mass of faces we see Dex, plunging madly through the crowd. Running full tilt, overcoat tails flapping behind him. His face is distorted with terror as he wildly bumps people, shoving them aside, oblivious to their imprecations and stares. Occasionally he slips on the slick sidewalk, but he never loses his footing entirely and runs on.

He rushes up to a street corner, crashing through several people waiting for the light to change. Dex, heedlessly, bolts out against the light, zigzagging through an onslaught of traffic, forcing one CAR to slam on the brakes and skid to a stop just short of him. The justifiably irate DRIVER blasts his horn, shouting from his window.

DRIVER

Kill yourself, asshole!

Dex stares with wide-eyed wildness at the driver and races on.

EXT. ANOTHER STREET - DAY

Dex scrambles on, huffing and puffing, his breath jarring out of his mouth in steamy puffs. There is no sense of direction or destination. He runs blindly, as though merely coursing through the teeming life that surrounds him, he can somehow cling to his own. Somehow escape the inevitability of his own dire destiny.

EXT. ANOTHER STREET CORNER - DAY

...as Dex comes careening around it, drenched in sweat. Exhausted. He clutches his stomach in pain. A sharp spasm makes him gasp. He leans against a newstand for support.

DEX'S POV - NEWSTAND

Hung on clips above the stand are COPIES OF LIFE MAGAZINE...the word springs out at Dex. LIFE. LIFE. LIFE...His POV turns from it only to confront TIME MAGAZINE fanned out on the counter. TIME. TIME. TIME.

ON DEX

...turning from the newstand to a store window...all done up with the final scene of A CHRISTMAS CAROL...puppet figures of Tiny Tim perched on a mirthful, repentent Scrooge's shoulder and the Cratchitts all beaming as they sit down to Christmas dinner. A BANNER proclaims the sentiment, "GOD BLESS US, EVERYONE". Dex jerks his head away.

DEX'S POV - SIDEWALK AND STREET

...panning all about him, witnessing other signs of life...things never noticed before...subtle, perhaps even mundane little moments...now fraught with new meaning, devoured with new awareness...a father holding his son up to see the electric trains in a store window. A young couple who manage to smooch despite the obstacle course of packages they carry. A man greedily munching a hot dog. Carolers singing across the street. Parents pushing their child along in a stroller. The baby is bundled in his winter duds and his plump, red face grins curiously up at Dex.

Suddenly a bell tolls the hour. Dex's gaze swerves. To a BELLTOWER peeking over smaller building tops.

BACK TO SCENE

Dex gazes up at the tower. The bells clang loudly. Their ringing seems to fill Dex's head. He leans wearily against the newstand and closes his eyes, the bells drowning out all other noise.

EXT. GAIL'S HOUSE - DEX'S POV - DAY

...the ringing church bells become the sharp, persistent BUZZ OF A DOORBELL. The SCREEN is filled with an ARRAY OF DIM, COLOURED DOTS

THE CAMERA PULLS BACK. The coloured dots are Christmas tree lights. The silhouette of the tree is detected through the gauzy curtains hung in the picture window of a house.

ANOTHER ANGLE - ON DEX - DAY

...the window's been seen from Dex's POV. Exhausted and weary, he slumps in the front entryway of a suburban house, his finger stuck to the door buzzer.

DEX

Gail!

He stops ringing the bell and peers through the front window again.

DEX'S POV

...through the veil of curtains, the lighted tree and a dying fire in the fireplace can be seen. A DIM, INDISTINGUISHABLE FORM suddenly obscures the fireplace light. Something is dropped on the fire and the flame shoots up momentarily.

Then A GROAN IS HEARD. The shadow by the fire retreats. A THUMP is HEARD.

BACK TO SCENE

Knowing someone is there, Dex mounts the front stoop again and knocks on the door.

DEX

Gail. Open up.

The response is a MUFFLED CRY. A CRASH. THUMPING AND BUMPING. Dex tries the door handle. It's unlocked. Dex enters.

INT. GAIL'S HOUSE - FRONT HALL

Dex enters the entrance hall, closing the door.

DEX

Gail? You all right?

The living-room opens off the entryway and Dex peers into the gloom of the room beyond.

DEX'S POV

The dim firelight and the speckled glow of the treelights barely pervade the stygian darkness of the living-room.

DEX

Gail?

Someone or something is moving toward him.

ON DEX

...moving tentatively toward the shadowy figure.

DEX'S POV

A woman lurches out of the darkness at him. IT IS GAIL. A FLOOD OF BLOOD streams down her face from a large GASH in her forehead. Her eyes are wide with stunned terror; her mouth agape, as though attempting to scream. As she staggers forward, her arms grope out for Dex. She holds a TORN BIT OF PAPER in one of her clenched fists.

BACK TO SCENE

The injured woman collapses in an astonished Dex's arms, her bloodied cheek pressing against his own. Another shock follows hard upon this one. A GLOVED, OVERCOATED ARM shoots out of the darkness, raised above Gail and Dex, poised to strike. The weapon it wields is Dex's Christmas gift to Gail -- THE FEERISWHEEL -- now battered and dented, several of the little cars broken off.

ON DEX

...staring in stunned horror....

ON THE HAND

...as the ferriswheel it clutches comes sweeping down in a deadly arc...

BACK TO SCENE

...as the metal sculpture CRACKS against the back of Gail's skull with deadly impact. The force of the vicious blow sends Gail colliding forward against Dex and throwing both to the floor.

ON DEX

...on the floor, clinging to Gail's limp form still on top of him in some sort of grotesque embrace. Her blood is splashed across his face. He moans in incoherent shock. The shadow of the ATTACKER falls across the jeopardized couple.

DEX'S POV

...looking up through the BLOOD. The dark, indistinguished form of the attacker is faintly made out above him. The metallic glint of some object is caught in the fireglow...an object hurtling downward toward him.

BACK TO SCENE

Still clinging to Gail, Dex rolls, whirling across the carpet away from the descending blow. Boxes of Christmas ornaments crunch beneath them. The assailant is thrown off-balance by the vigorous force of the blow and stumbles into the shadows of the room.

Dex careens into the stereo by the Christmas tree, striking the control panel. The lights to the panel pop on and a RECORD stacked on the turntable drops and starts to spin. The needle arm descends on the platter. MUSIC, played at an abominable level, screeches in Dex's ears. It's Christmans Carols, specifically, --"I'll Be Home for Christmas."

Dex, dazed, shakes himself, then Gail, trying to revive her.

DEX

Gail! Gail!

She is unconscious and her limp form doesn't respond. Dex staggers to his feet. Suddenly from behind him, he hears a noise, he wheels around in time to see the Christmas Tree come careening down on top of him, knocking him back down to the floor and slamming his head against the cold stone of the fireplace hearth, enmeshing him in its piney branches. Glass bulbs and ornaments pop and all the tree lights go out.

The dwindling fire is now the only source of light in the dark room. The flames dance and undulate, their bouncing light performing a chiaroscuro ballet along the shadowy walls of the room.

ON DEX

Blood oozes from his forehead where he's hit it against the hearth-brick. Gail's blood also smears his face; he's drenched with sweat. His breath comes in strained gasps. The stereo blares out its yuletide melody.

STEREO

I'll be home for Christmas. You can count on me...

Dex struggles beneath the tree, but the blow to his head has made him dizzy and weak. He hears a GROAN. It is Gail somewhere nearby. Dex glances through the tree needles.

DEX'S POV

...through a haze of blood and blurred vision, Dex sees the assailant hovering over Gail's prone form. His arm, holding the bloodstained ferriswheel, sweeps back and then down.

ON DEX

...gasping a strained cry as he hears the SICKENING CRUNCH. He weakly struggles from under the tree. He's rapidly losing consciousness. He slumps against the hearth.

DEX'S POV

...as it slips IN AND OUT OF FOCUS. The shadowy attacker moves toward him from across the room. The metal ferriswheel, gripped in his gloved hand, glints in the firelight.

ON DEX

...groggy, alertness slipping from him, he gropes clumsily along the hearth, his searching fingers clutching one of the fireplace tools -- the POKER. As he torpidly turns to confront his attacker, A LOUD BUZZ cuts through the grating decibel level of the stereo. THE DOORBELL! Loud and persistent.

The assailant stops at the sound...then abruptly flings the ferriswheel at Dex. It just misses his head and bounces off the hearth. The sound of the doorbell is followed by VOICES outside.

ULMER(OS)

Mrs. Cornell? It's the police. What's going on in there.

DEX'S POV

...blurry and indistinct. The shadowed form races out of the living-room and disappears into the hall.

ON DEX

The doorbell is accompanied by KNOCKING now.

ULMER(OS)

Mrs. Cornell? Are you all right? Please open the door, ma'am. It's the police.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

using the poker as a prop, Dex tries to rise to his feet, but lurches unsteadily forward and falls to the floor. He lies there, exhausted, succumbing to the inviting, enticing unconsciousness. His breath slows to the even rhythm of sleep. His eyelids waver and droop. The knocking, ringing, music, and voices sound very far away now, blending together into one irritating hum.

ULMER

Mrs. Cornell?

DEX'S POV

Framed in the eerie firelight, Gail's prone body lies sprawled, unmoving, by the fallen Christmas tree. Gail. In the mad struggle for his own life, Dex had completely forgotten about her.

BACK TO SCENE

Consciousness ebbing from him, Dex weakly crawls to his wife's still form. Her pretty face is bruised and cut, lying in a pool of crimson. Dex gazes on her in anguished torment. He cradles her in his arms, awkwardly trying to wipe the sticky scarlet from her cheek.

DEX

(pained whisper)

Gail...Gail...

Her eyelids flutter halfway open, then close again and her head flops over. Dex pats her cheek, a desperate, feeble attempt to revive her.

DEX

(his speech slurred)

Gail...

ULMER(OS)

(to a companion)

Take a look in the window.

Dex can no longer resist oncoming sleep. Exhaustion and his wounds overwhelm him. His eyes blink furiously, the heavy lids begin to drop like curtains.

DEX'S POV

...the pale, still face of his wife as his hand rocks her head back and forth.

DEX(OS)

(plaintively, slurred)

Gail...Ga...

Her face BLURS. The image SHAKES, but remains blurred. Then it is swallowed up entirely in blackness.

BLACK SCREEN

In the darkness, we HEAR VOICES.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

ULMER(OS)
(in repugnant disbelief)
Holy Christ!

COBB(OS)
Hey, this guy's alive.

WE HEAR A GROAN.

COBB(OS)
Come on, buddy, wake up! Come on!

Slowly a PICTURE emerges from the BLACKNESS.

INT. GAIL'S HOUSE - DEX'S POV - NIGHT

From black...to blurry grey...to cold white...cold, deathlike white, splashed with stark crimson...Gail's pale cheek rouged with blood. She lies there so still...

DEX(OS)
Gail...?

ON DEX

...groggy, helped to his feet by two plainclothes detectives...we've seen them before...COBB AND ULMER.

DEX
(coming to)
I'm ...I'm all right...Help her...

COBB
Wish we could, mister...

Dex stares at the men in confusion, the truth of the statement clobbers him right between the eyes. He buckles at the knees and the police support him as he stares down at Gail's still form in stunned shock.

INT. GAIL'S LIVING-ROOM - CLOSE-UP ON HOSPITAL STRETCHER - NIGHT

A BODY lies underneath a covered stretcher. It is suddenly lifted up and THE CAMERA PULLS BACK TO REVEAL TWO PARAMEDICS CARTING THE CORPSE OFF. It passes the stoic numb face of Dex...his eyes are moist and red...Tinged with confused grief and a perturbed sense of unreality.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Dex sits slumped in his easy chair, watching the aftermath of a murder investigation. The police have come and, for the most part, gone. A few remain, packing up equipment.

On the coffee table in front of Dex an array of evidence is methodically laid out, appropriately marked and tagged...a small CRUMPLED PIECE OF BLOODY PAPER, THE DIVORCE PAPERS, THE FIREPLACE POKER...and Dex's Christmas present...THE FERRISWHEEL, now mangled and bloodstained, covered in a plastic bag.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

Dex hardly notices. He's staring down at the TAPED OUTLINE ON THE FLOOR -- the outline of Gail's corpse. The living-room is a mess. The capsized Christmas tree. Broken ornaments and lights, shards of shattered glass everywhere. Furniture has been shifted and knocked askew.

Hal and Elaine are present. Hal stands by Dex, a sympathetic hand on his shoulder. Elaine stands across the room talking with Cobb and Ulmer in hushed inaudible tones. At one point, Ulmer, the more sour-tempered of the two, looks over at Dex with ill-concealed suspicion.

COBB

(to Elaine, conference over)

Yeah...Thanks, Doctor...

He and Ulmer move over to Dex. Cobb leans against a bookshelf and lights a cigarette, as the last of the investigation team leave. A PATROLMAN approaches Ulmer.

PATROLMAN

All through in here for now, sir.

ULMER

Okay. Wait outside....

The cop takes his leave. Cobb, apparently oblivious to everything, still leans against the bookshelf, calmly puffing his cigarette, leafing through a copy of Dex's novel, THE VIEWLESS WINDS. Ulmer knits his brow in aggravated thought, heaves a sigh, and turns to Dex.

ULMER

Never saw his face. Not once.

DEX

(lost; quiet, absently)

No...I told you. It was dark.

ULMER

Not even a glimpse?

DEX

No...I told you...

ULMER

Yeah...you told me. Any reason why anybody wanna kill your wife?

DEX

(shaking his head, eyes fixed on the outline)

No...

ULMER

Any reason you'd wanna kill her?

Dex looks up for the first time. His eyes, dazed and lifeless a moment ago, now glower with resentment.

CONTINUED

D.O.A.

O.S.

fuch
tech

CONTINUED

DEX
(low and emphatic)

No.

Ulmer picks up the crumpled piece of paper off the coffee table and hands it to Dex.

ULMER
Ever see this before?

DEX'S POV

...as he smooths out the creased paper...A TORN, CHARRED FRAGMENT, MOTTLED WITH BLOOD...the lower corner of a page...But there is no writing on it...nothing that could identify it...

BACK TO SCENE

Dex looks up bewilderedly from the ripped stained paper at Ulmer.

DEX
What is it?

ULMER
Hoping you'd tell me. Found it clenched
in your wife's hand.

Ulmer strolls to the fireplace and kneels by the grate, shifting his hand through the soot.

ULMER
(continues)
My guess is the rest of it's this pile of
ash here...

Dex just stares at Ulmer in blank confusion. Ulmer rises, wiping the soot off on his overcoat.

ULMER
Correct me if I'm wrong. You and the wife
had a little tiff about the boyfriend this
afternoon...

DEX
Wrong...

ULMER
(kicks at the ash in grate)
...Maybe you found some love letters
or something. Tossed 'em in the fire...

DEX
Wrong.

ULMER
(ignoring him)
...She tried to stop you, but only
managed to get this page...
(holds the paper up)

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

DEX

(very agitated)

Wrong, wrong, wrong!

ULMER

...Things escalated, got a little outta hand...

DEX

(rises)

Nothing got out of hand!

ULMER

(gestures to room's disarray)

Just decking the halls?

DEX

(hotly)

I explained that! This the best your prosaic, petty, little mind can come up with? Believe me if I was going to eliminate one corner of a jealous triangle, it wouldn't have been Gail. It would have been Nick Lang.

ULMER

Good. That was my next question.

There is a long pause. Dex exchanges a confused glance with Hal and Elaine. Cobb is still complacently reading.

ULMER

In fact, that's why we're here. Wanted to see your wife about Lang's death. Heard it came as something of a shock to her.

~~HAL~~ Dex

(angrily)

What is this?...Nick Lang....

ULMER

(interrupting)

...didn't jump off any roof. He was pushed.

Ulmer's words have their effect. More stunned silence. More stunned glances.

ULMER

Too many footprints in the snow up there. Too many scuff marks and too much shoe polish by the edge of the roof. Nickie was dragging his heels about going over. And when he did go, he ricocheted all the way down the side of the building. A suicide usually manages to jump clean. Also his apartment was broken into sometime yesterday.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

HAL

What's that got to do with anything?

ULMER

(shrugs)

Not sure...Nothing seemed stolen. Maybe someone was looking for him.

(at Dex)

...maybe somebody found him...

Dex stares at Ulmer in passive resentment. Hal leaps to his defense.

HAL

Dex was in our office when it happened...

ULMER

You see him there?

HAL

Well...I...This is bullshit! Lang was dead before Dex even knew Gail was seeing him. He didn't find out about it till last night.

ULMER

So he tells you.

DEX

(flatly)

It's true.

ULMER

And convenient. Just like the murder of your student and your wife who happened to be carrying on behind your back. All a little too damn convenient.

Ulmer's words sink in. Dex sits in a perplexed daze, trying to fathom the whole bizarre day. It's all crashing in on him. Overwhelming him. Then the other bombshell is dropped.

COBB

Especially considering your own murder, Mr. Cornell....

Dex wheels about to confront Cobb. The detective still leans against the bookshelf, reading Dex's book. Ash dangles from his cigarette.

DEX

(hoarse, apprehensive whisper)

What are you saying?

COBB

(looking up from the book)

Remember reading this when it first came out...Still holds up...

CONTINUED

DEX

(tense sarcasm)

Swell. I'll leave it for you in my will.
It oughta go up in value once I'm dead.

(vehement outburst)

What do you mean...My murder?

COBB

(calmly)

Surely you knew. I mean that stuff you
swallowed's not that easy to come by.
Industrial plants, chemical warehouses,
hospitals might have it. But you don't
just buy it over the counter. Dr. Welles
will tell you that. And it doesn't just
casually end up in your drink.

ULMER

Someone usually puts it there.

Dex looks questioningly to Elaine, who sheepishly avoid eye contact.

ELAINE

It's...it's true, Dex...You ran out before
I had a chance to tell you any of this...

(to Cobb and Ulmer)

You guys got a great bedside manner. Do
you seriously think he came all the way
here after getting the news he got at the
hospital just to pick a fight with his wife?

ULMER

Maybe...Maybe that little check-up helped
him figure it all out.

Ulmer stands by the punch bowl of egg-nog on the bar. It's been left
overnight and looks it. The burly detective examines Dex's drained
glass from the other day.

ULMER

Stopped by here for a little Christmas
cheer yesterday, right?

DEX

Wha...what are you getting at?

ULMER

My, aren't we naive? Time for another
geometry lesson, Professor. The
Jealous Triangle...with a new hypotenuse.
You pushed Lang off the roof, later wifey
served you up a holiday mickey.

(holds up glass)

Next morning, you awake with a tummyache
and find out the nog was spiked. So you
show up on the doorstep for a little revenge.

CONTINUED

DEX

Talk about a little too convenient.

COBB

There are variations on a theme. Maybe Lang poisoned you first, you pushed him and then killed your wife.

ULMER

Try any combination you like...all boils down to one answer. You were trying to kill them, they were trying to kill you...

COBB

Everybody wins..

ULMER

Everybody loses...

DEX

(getting scared)

Look, I told you who killed my wife.

ULMER

Yeah...The little man who wasn't there. Well, I got a problem with that.

DEX

What?

COBB

Why.

DEX

Why?

ULMER

Why.

DEX

(angrily)

Why what?

ULMER

Why what...motive? Your story makes a good mystery maybe, but not a hell of a lot of sense. Now our way, we've got motives in this murky little menage out the wazoo...Jealous husband, jealous boyfriend, discontented philandering wife, unsigned divorce papers...

DEX

I see... good mystery to bad melodrama, huh?

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

ULMER

My prosaic, petty little mind, I guess.
But then it's a prosaic, petty little
world, isn't it?

Ulmer takes out a pair of HANDCUFFS. Dex allows him to snap one of the cuffs on his wrist, then suddenly jerks away and leaps out of the chair.

DEX

No...Look, you're right. My murder and
the others are too coincidental not to be
connected. They must be! But I'm not your guy!

ULMER

Says you. Come here!

Ulmer advances. Dex retreats, appealing to Cobb.

DEX

For God's sake, what reason do I have to
lie? I thought a dying man's confession
was worth something.

ULMER

When you start confessing something, maybe
it will be.

COBB

Calm down, Cornell, I know you're upset...

DEX

(wildly)

Damn right, I'm upset! It's very discon-
certing to find out I'm a murder victim
and suspect all in one day!

(to the advancing Ulmer)

Stay away from me.

Ulmer doesn't. Dex swings wildly with his handcuffed arm. The loose cuff strikes Ulmer a glancing blow across the face.

ULMER

You son-of-a-bitch!

The detective deflects Dex's flailing arms and with a rough shove, slams Dex to the floor. Dex groans in pain and both Hal and Elaine rush to him:

HAL

For Christ's sake, the man's sick!

ULMER

He's also under arrest.

Despite his disgruntled demeanour, Ulmer is chagrined. Hal helps Dex to his feet. Elaine has fetched a hypodermic from her medical bag.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

ELAINE

This will help the pain, Dex.

As she reaches for Dex's arm, he grabs her and, wrenching the hypo from her, sticks the needle to her throat. There is the expected confusion.

ULMER

(drawing his gun)

Hey!

HAL

Dex!

ELAINE

Dex, please, what are you doing?

DEX

(backing to the hall)

Getting out. I'm innocent and I'm going to prove it.

ULMER

Off to a great start. Resisting arrest and taking a hostage.

DEX

Sorry. Don't have time to stand trial.

ULMER

(moving forward)

If he sticks you with that thing, can he hurt you?

ELAINE

Yes! If he sticks it in the wrong place. Get back!

Dex moves the needle up in front of her eyeball.

HAL

Get back! Get back! For Christ's sake, Get back!

The cops back off, Dex backs into the Hall toward the kitchen. Once gone, the cops move into the hall.

INT. HALL

...as the cops move cautiously into the hall, Hal behind them. From behind the closed kitchen door comes Elaine's voice.

ELAINE

(from the kitchen)

Don't come in here!

INT. KITCHEN - CLOSE-UP - ELAINE'S FACE

...the needle held up in front of it. But the expression on Elaine's face is relatively calm, even though she still shouts warnings to the police on the other side of the door.

ELAINE

Stay out!

CAMERA PULLS BACK. We see the reason for her nonchalance. She's holding the hypo herself! She turns to Dex, on his way out the kitchen door

ELAINE

(whispers)

You're right. The whole thing smells.
Good luck, Dex.

DEX

Thanks. Hold 'em as long as you can.

ELAINE

(nods; shouting for cops' benefit)

Stay out! Stay out!

Dex flees out the door.

INT. SYD'S DORM ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

THE CAMERA'S CLOSE ON A CLOSED DOOR IN A DARK ROOM. From beyond the door, WE HEAR LAUGHTER AND GIRL'S VOICES.

VOICE #1

(amused)

Wow! Fredericks's of the North Pole? Classy.

VOICE #2

Especially the pointy shoes.

There are more laughs and some wolf-whistles.

VOICE #3

Subtle make-up.

VOICE #1

Bozo the Clown Collection.

SYD(OS)

Yeah, yeah. Ha. Ha. The Carnival tonight.
All the Chi Omega pledges have to wear them.

VOICE #2

Good. You won't be the only stupid-looking one.

More laughter. A KEY is stuck in the LOCK, the DOORKNOB twists, then the door cracks open and light slices across the darkness. Sydney steps in with an armload of books.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

59

And we see the reason for all the laughter. She's dressed up like a CHRISTMAS ELF. Tights and a red leather jerkin. A little skirt with snowball puffs, dangling from the hem. Pointy hat and shoes. Her face is made-up like a cartoon character; big, round circles of rouge on her cheeks, heavy lipstick. Kewpy-doll eyes. The overall effect is "BABES IN TOYLAND". She closes the door and yanks off her silly hat, shaking her hair free. She flips on a nearby light switch. The light in the bathroom comes on, bleeding out into the main room.

Suddenly A HAND comes into view, its wrist shackled with a dangling HANDCUFF...and CLAMPS over Syd's mouth. Stunned, Syd muffles a cry and her books go flying to the floor. Dex's face ENTERS FRAME and Syd's startled eyes dart from the handcuffed wrist to him.

DEX

(cautioning)

Don't scream!

He removes his hand from her mouth. Syd sighs, leaning against the door.

SYD

(composing herself)

What are you still doing here? I thought you'd be gone.

DEX

Was. Came back. Wanted to see you.

His tense face is close to hers, his strangely keyed-up gaze piercing her own. Syd realizes something's off-kilter. The handcuffs are particularly bothersome.

SYD

(nervously)

Ah...I'm flattered...

(clinking the dangling cuffs)

But I'm not into anything kinky. Besides, I thought there were rules about professors and co-eds?

She tries to move, but Dex restrains her by clamping his handcuffed hand on her shoulder. He keeps it there.

DEX

Didn't seem too worried about them last night.

SYD

(looking at the hand on her shoulder)

Last night I was feeling no pain.

DEX

Neither was I...

(grim tension)

...last night...

There is definitely something wrong here and Syd knows it. She eyes the handcuffs suspiciously.

CONTINUED

D.O.D.

Yik
please
LAB
Lab 39-61
SCENE
Scene 59-61

CONTINUED

SYD

You been drinking again?

Dex's other hand grabs Syd by the arm and, by the expression on her face, he's squeezing too hard.

DEX

(shakes his head "no")

Dead...sober...

Suddenly he jerks her roughly toward one of the beds, his face contorting into a sullen mask, his eyes exploding with angry fire.

DEX

(a cold firm demand)

Why?

Syd is stunned by the violence of the moment. She cannot respond to his question, only stare at him in speechless surprised fear.

DEX

Why?!

SYD

Why what?

He throws her roughly on the bed.

DEX

(harshly)

Why did you murder me!

Syd's mouth drops in flabbergasted shock. She can't believe what she's just heard. Her fear turns to irritated disbelief.

SYD

Are you mad?

DEX

I'm not exactly pleased about it!

He throws her roughly back against the mattress and hovers over her menacingly. Syd's irritation rapidly transfers to fear again. She looks like she's about to cry out, but Dex's hand shoots out and encircles her throat...The cold steel of the handcuffs clamped on his wrist brushes against her neck.

DEX

Scream and I'll break your neck...Who are you, Sydney with a "y" instead of an "i"? You sit in the back of my class anonymously all these months. Never a peep out of you. Nothing more than a tight sweater and a great pair of legs in the last row. A disembodied name in the grade book and on test papers. Then yesterday you suddenly pop up all over the place in my life and today I have no life! Why? Who are you?

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

SYD

Professor, please, you're hurting me!

DEX

You hurt me!

SYD

(crying)

Please, please...What are you talking about?

DEX

I'm dead and you did it!

SYD

What do you mean? What do you mean?

The girl is near hysterical. Her bewilderment and fear are so blatant that Dex releases her, straddling her prone form, staring down at her in confused doubt. Her body heaves with racking sobs. Despite his adamant suspicions, Dex is not so sure now. He slowly rises from the bed.

DEX

(desperate)

It had to be you.

Syd glances up at him through her tears. Her garish make-up is running down her cheeks. She looks like one of those sad-eyed clown paintings. Though confused and frightened herself, she senses the tortured torment Dex is in.

SYD

Professor, please...I don't understand...
What's wrong...?

Dex wheels on her in wild, almost maniacal, desperation.

DEX

It had to be you!

But he's no longer certain. The girl's mystified, tear-stained face proclaims her innocence. She huddles on the bed, afraid to move.

DEX

(confused)

Who else...could have...? Had to be...

Suddenly, Dex's face contorts with pain. He clutches at his abdomen and, groaning, falls back on the opposite bed. Syd sees her chance and bolts for the door.

ANOTHER ANGLE

She yanks the knob, pulling the door open. just then, behind her, comes a WHIMPER OF PAIN and a THUD. She hesitates at the door, then turns to see...

...Dex slumped against the side of the bed, gasping for breath, arms wrapped about his stomach...Syd stares at him, realizing his pain, pitying it. She closes the door...

~~DISSOLVE TO:~~

INT. SYD'S DORM ROOM - LATER - ON WINDOW - NIGHT

Night has finally fallen, though it doesn't look much different than the pitch-black afternoon. It's started snowing again and the soft flakes drum silently against Sydney's dorm room window. A desk lamp is on and its glare reflects in the glass, giving it a mirrored effect. In the glass we see Dex sitting on the bed. Syd leans over him, handing him a glass of water, which he greedily gulps down.

SYD

(sarcastically)

Sure you don't want me to drink first.
Make sure it's safe.

CAMERA PANS from the window to Dex and Syd.

DEX

Okay, I deserved that.

Syd regrets her inappropriate jab and sits beside Dex on the bed.

SYD

No, you didn't. I'm sorry.

DEX

I am. you just seemed the logical suspect...
The drinking marathon last night and all...

SYD

Miss Scarlet with the wrench in the conservatory. You invited me out on the binge, remember? It's not like I enticed you....

DEX

(rises agitatedly)

Okay, so I'm no Sherlock Holmes...
Forgive me, I've never died before...
I'm not thinking too clearly...All I
know is somebody killed Nick and my wife...
and that somewhere last night that same
somebody slipped me the fatal cup of
hemlock...And you've got to help me find them!

SYD

Me? Wait a minute...

DEX

I don't have any to spare...Don't you
understand? You're my only link. You've
got to be my memory...Help me retrace our
steps...Where we went, sat, who talked to us,
served us our drinks...

SYD

Whoa! You're no Sherlock Holmes; I'm
certainly no Dr. Watson. You need the
police.

She heads for the phone. Dex intercepts her.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

DEX

That's the last thing I need. My credibility with them's pretty well shot for the moment, thank you very much.

SYD

I'll explain things to them.

She reaches for the phone. As she does, Dex clamps the open handcuff down on her wrist and jerks her away from the phone. She falls to the floor amid her spilt books.

DEX

No cops! We're doing this my way.

EXT. CAMPUS - ON SKY - NIGHT

We see nothing but black sky, dotted with specks of swirling snow. The wind whistles, mournful and low.

SYD(OS)

This is kidnapping, you know?

DEX(OS)

Think I'll get life?

THE CAMERA SLOWLY PANS DOWNWARD. We pick up treetops. It continues downward. The conversation also continues.

SYD(OS)

Stop pulling!

DEX(OS)

Then keep up!

THE CAMERA'S PANNING THROUGH THE TREES, past branches laden with snow. Buildings can be seen in the b.g. Finally we pick up Dex and Syd, still handcuffed together, as they move through an arbour'd walkway on campus... Syd being yanked along by a determined Dex. The snow drifts about them, crunching under their feet. Syd shivers in the cold.

SYD

I feel like the goddamn "DEFIANT ONES".

DEX

I'll be Tony Curtis. You can be "Sydney" Poitier. With a "y" instead of an "i".

SYD

My sorority will blackball me when I don't show up for the Carnival tonight.

DEX

Yeah, well, dying's sort of fucked up my social calendar too. Ain't it a bitch?

Properly chastened, Syd blushes with chagrin. She's also red from the cold, shivering.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

DEX

You're freezing.

He starts to remove his overcoat.

SYD

(protesting)

No...please...besides...

She holds up their shackled wrists to illustrate the coat won't come off. Dex is undeterred.

DEX

We'll improvise.

He turns the sleeve on his shackled arm inside out, then slides it up Syd's arm. He throws the overcoat, also inside out now, over her shoulders. It's way too big for her. She looks ludicrous. Dex can't help but suppress a laugh. Syd is not amused.

SYD

Thanks...as if I didn't look dumb enough already...

DEX

(putting her free arm in the other sleeve)

It'll keep you warm.

SYD

And what are you going to do...

DEX

Catch my death, I suppose...

Dex shrugs good-naturedly and shoots her a grin. She bursts into tears, plopping down in the snow, sobbing.

DEX

(kneeling beside her)

Hey! Hey! What's wrong?

SYD

You're asking me? How can you make jokes? It's terrible. Terrible! What's happened to you. And I'm sorry and I'd like to help you, but I can't handle this...

(angrily)

It's all so fucking weird...I don't know what I'm doing here. I'm scared, confused, and cold.

DEX

(comforting)

That makes two of us.

Syd wipes her nose on one of the floppy sleeves.

SYD

(sniffling)

And I have to go to the bathroom.

EXT. ANOTHER PART OF THE CAMPUS - NIGHT

Dex stands shivering in front of a snowman. His handcuffed arm stretches around behind the snowman's shoulder. Dex looks straight ahead, trying to look nonchalant, as a young couple, bundled for the weather, walk by, offering him a curious glance.

DEX

(impatiently)

What are you doing? Writing your name in the snow?

SYD(OS)

(from behind the snowman)

Please...This is embarrassing enough... I didn't ask to be dragged into this, you know...Aimless barhopping. No plan. No idea who or what you're looking for? Little vague, isn't it? Not to mention being totally out of your depth.

DEX

(angrily)

At least it's something!

(desperately)

Something! I won't sit back doing nothing and watch the time run out...I can't... not anymore...So unless you've got any better ideas, we'll stick with the "lost weekend" last night...

SYD

(pops up from behind the snowman)

Yeah? Well, you were nine sheets to the wind before you ever met me last night. How do you know someone didn't slip you the mickey earlier?

Syd sees the lightbulb go on over Dex's head, just like we do, and realize she's triggered something.

SYD

What is it?

DEX

(grim smile set on his face)

If Frosty's through with his shower, let's go.

*Indy
scene*

EXT. GRAHAME COREY'S HOUSE - ON FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

A HAND bangs a BRASS DOOR KNOCKER insistently. Inside, we HEAR A VOICE.

JANE(OS)

Coming! Just a second!

The KNOB turns and the door opens slightly. A PREGNANT WOMAN in her mid-thirties opens it. She's an intelligent-looking woman...a little plain at the moment, but probably fairly pretty when she's made-up. This is JANE COREY, Grahame's wife. She stares out at the people on her front stoop with a frown.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

JANE

What are you doing here?

ANOTHER ANGLE

...to include a grim Dex and a self-conscious and confused Syd.

DEX

I wanna see Grahame, Jane.

JANE

(starts to close the door)

Well, he doesn't want to see you.

Dex pushes the door back open and barges into the front hall, yanking Syd along.

DEX

I'll bet he doesn't.

INT. GRAHAME'S HOUSE - FRONT HALL

...as Dex charges down the corridor toward a lighted room off the hall.

JANE

(following)

Get out of this house, Dex!

SYD

Professor, wait a minute. What are...?

Dex comes to the dining-room entrance where he's met by Grahame who's been distracted from his dinner by the commotion. Behind him, seated at the table is a BOY of about seven and a GIRL about three.

GRAHAME

Honey, what the Hell...?

(sees Dex)

Dex!

DEX

Surprised to see me up and around?

He hauls off and hits Grahame square on the jaw.

JANE

No!

SYD

Professor!

INT. DINING ROOM

Grahame goes flying backward, careening into the table, then to the floor, taking half the family dinner and dishware with him. His son leaps up, frightened. The girl claps her hands in surprised delight.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

DAUGHTER

Daddy Boom-Boom!

SYD

Professor...No, no...Don't!

Too late! Dex, despite Syd's attempt to restrain him, is down on the dazed Grahame, shaking him like a terrier shakes a rat.

DEX

It was you, Grahame, wasn't it? Last night? Casually bump into me. Drop something in my drink, and "Ripe Old Age" doesn't appear in my obituary.

He cuffs him. Jane and Syd, shouting and protesting, try to pull him off. The children are both crying now. The boy, thinking Syd part of the assault on his father, hits at her with his spoon. It's wild hysteric confusion.

JANE

Get off him! Get off!

SYD

Stop it, professor, stop it! He didn't...
He couldn't...

As Grahame moans in pain, Syd and Jane finally manage to pull Dex off. The little girl, wailing, goes to her father.

DAUGHTER

Daddy, Daddy!

Grahame, slowly recovering, grabs the child and hugs her to him.

GRAHAME

It's all right, baby. Daddy's all right.

Winching, he struggles to his feet. Dex struggles in the restraining grasp of the women.

SYD

He didn't do it, Professor! He didn't! I was in his class at the time of Nick's death. Don't you see? Don't you see, He couldn't!

Dex turns to her in stunned confusion, surprised to hear this news. Another theory down the tubes. He stares in muddled desperate anxiety at an equally befuddled, leery Grahame.

JANE(OS)

Hello, Police?

ANOTHER ANGLE

Jane is on the phone. Dex starts, but Grahame beats him there and takes the receiver from her. She tries to get it back, but Grahame hangs it up. Jane falls apart, weeping against her husband's chest.

CONTINUED

JANE

(to Dex, angrily)

How could you? He always respected you.
Isn't it bad enough you destroy his
self-esteem and pride at work? Do you
have to hurt and humiliate him in his own
home, in front of his children?

Grahame quiets her with a tender, caressing pat. His daughter whom he
still holds, nestles between them. Their son stands at their side.

GRAHAME

(calm, confident in the
warmth of his family)

I don't know what your problems are, Dex.
I don't want to know...Just leave us alone,
huh? Get out of our home and leave us alone.

Dex stares at the family, huddled loyally together and realizes how
patently ridiculous his suspicions now seem. He's embarrassed and ashamed.

DEX

I'm sorry...I didn't...I'm so...sorry...

He turns and flees out of the room, Syd helplessly follows after.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE GRAHAME'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Dex tears across the street, dragging Syd with him, heedless of traffic
and irate car horns that blast at him. CAMERA STAYS with them as they
move across to the campus grounds on the other side of the street. Dex
runs wildly, in panicked flight, as though straining with all his might
against the clammy, chilling grip death has on him. He's near the end
of his tether.

SYD

Are you crazy? Barging in there like that?
It's bad enough what happened, but what if he
had been the murderer? We could have been killed.

DEX

I already have been!

SYD

Slow down! Where the Hell are you going now?

DEX

Back to the bar theory!

Suddenly, a SIREN WHINES, THE RED AND BLUE FLASHING LIGHTS OF A POLICE CAR
are seen as the vehicle speeds down the street in a spray of slush. Dex,
gripped with sudden fear, pushes Syd down in a snowbank, then dives on
top of her. The police car barrels on past, obviously headed for another
destination. Dex, shivering, rises and yanks for Syd to do so too.

CONTINUED

Lab / Tech
LAB TECH

DEX

Come on! Get up! Get up!

SYD

(rattling the handcuffs)

No! It's bad enough I have to be your Siamese twin. I'm not going to be your tag-team wrestling partner.

DEX

Get up!

SYD

No! Listen to me! You can't go around half-cocked, punching a confession out of everyone who may or may not have given you a drink, it's stupid!

DEX

(losing it)

Shut up!

SYD

(shouts him down)

Listen to me! You won't solve anything rampaging around like some maniac, wild and unfocused, grasping at straws.

DEX

(plaintive anguish)

They're all I've got!

That's it. The climax. Panic sweeps down into pained weariness. He plops down in the snow, head bowed in his hands. the wind whips up. He indistinctively shivers in the cold. Syd turns up the collar of his sports jacket.

SYD

Look, I can only imagine what you're going through, but you've got to calm down. Think rationally. Logically. There's got to be a reason behind all this.

DEX

That's the question I've asked myself a hundred times today. What's the reason? Why me? Look at me...I'm not the kinda guy you murder. Oh, I could get killed by a mugger, I suppose, or a drunk driver, even some psycho with a high-powered rifle. Murder by happenstance. By fluke. Sure. But I'm not your basic premeditated victim. No-body plots to murder somebody like me...a rumpled, middle-aged English professor whose bright flame of promise burned out years ago...

(MORE)

CONTINUED

DEX

(CONT'D)

I've comfortably slumped into nondescript placidness like it was a welcomed old easy chair. Secure and cozy in blissful insignificance. A simple, dull, passionless fellow.

SYD

That's not true, Professor. You're a wonderful teacher.

DEX

"Those who can, do. Those who can't, teach."...You're missing the point. Passion's the point. Passion makes murderers...Greed, jealousy, love hate... Intense, extreme emotion...I don't incite that kind of response. There's nothing about me to desire or envy or want. I ignite no fires, give off none. I constitute no threat. How can I make enemies? I make no impression. there's no point to killing me...

SYD

But someone did...Are you sure your wife couldn't...

DEX

(adamant sharpness)

No! I was giving her the divorce...No... after nineteen years, you just know someone...She wouldn't even if she had a reason... She had none...

SYD

Neither did I...Neither did Professor Corey.

Dex winces with embarrassment at the reminder of Corey.

DEX

(ashamed)

God; the poor, miserable son-of-a-bitch...

SYD

And neither of us had a reason to kill your wife or Nick Lang. And maybe that's where you should be looking.

DEX

Huh?

SYD

Maybe you've been going at this the wrong way. Maybe instead of trying to find out why you were...
(hesitates on the word)
killed...You should be trying to find out why they were...

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

Dex looks up at her, meditatively mulling this over.

EXT. FINE ARTS BUILDING - CLOSE-UP - PLACARD - NIGHT

A PLACARD is posted on a glass door. It reads, "NICHOLAS LANG MEMORIAL SERVICE." Underneath, in smaller print, is "Laboratory Theatre" and then the date and time. Suddenly the sign is obscured as a figure moves in front of it and opens the door. PULL BACK to reveal the front steps of a campus building. Many people are entering through the glass doors and disappearing into a THEATRE AUDITORIUM inside.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Dex and Syd briskly appear on the sidewalk out front, the latter being dragged by the former. As Dex starts to mount the steps, Syd resists.

SYD

I can't go in there like this.

DEX

It was your idea. A good one. A murder brought Nick to this school in the first place.

SYD

Huh? How? What happened?

DEX

Four years ago, Nick's father got caught burglarizing the Mainwaring Mansion. He shot old man Mainwaring.

SYD

No kidding? I didn't know that!

DEX

Not exactly something you stick under your picture in the yearbook. The guy would have shot Mrs. Mainwaring too, except a servant came in and wrestled him for the gun. It went off, killing him.

SYD

The servant?

DEX

Nick's father! Nick was under age and made a ward of the court. Then Mrs. Mainwaring made him one of her philanthropic causes. Saw he got his high school diploma and agreed to finance his college education.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

SYD

You think this all has something to do
with Nick's past?

DEX

More of a past than Gail or I ever had.
Let's go pay our respects.

As Dex turns to go up the stairs, A HAND clamps on his shoulder from
behind and forcibly drags him into a clump of bushes by the steps.
Dex wheels violently around, expecting the worst and ready for a fight,
only to discover....

ANOTHER ANGLE

...it's Hal!

DEX

Hal!

HAL

Are you crazy? What are you doing here?

DEX

What are you?

HAL

I just came from giving your two cop pals,
Tweedledum and Tweedledumber, a guided
tour of our office. I think I convinced
them that, short of the police station,
it's the last place you'd go...Now it
might be the safest place for you. They're
looking all over for you, Dex. Even
Campus Security's been alerted.
(noticing Syd)

Who's this...

Dex holds up their shackled wrists.

DEX

Santa's little helper. Been very
helpful too.

HAL

You find something out?

DEX

Yeah, I'm not getting any younger. Do
you mind...

He starts for the stairs again. Hal restrains him.

HAL

Dex, how can I help?

DEX

By staying away, Hal. I've got more
people involved in this than I want.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

HAL

Must be something I can do.

DEX

(smiles)

Yeah...Tell Grahame Corey there'll definitely be a position opening up for him next semester.

Leaving Hal confused and concerned, Dex and Syd disappear into the building.

INT. LABORATORY THEATRE - NIGHT

The small theatre is packed with mourners and the memorial service is in full swing. Several people sit in chairs on the stage -- obviously SPEAKERS. A BESPECTACLED OLD PROFESSOR at the podium onstage is speaking in a sonorously dour monotone.

OLD PROFESSOR

...a mother who abandoned him in infancy,
a father who's only legacy was the stigma
of his terrible crime...One would like to
think that Nick found the home he never
knew here at this school...

As the Professor speaks, THE CAMERA PANS the audience -- mostly students and faculty-types -- FOCUSING IN on Dex and Syd, standing in the back. Also nearby, at the exit door, stands A BLACK DRESSED, BLACK VEILED WOMAN. But the wispy sheerness of the veil does not conceal her features...It's Mrs. Mainwaring. Others stand in the back, eying Dex and Syd, suspiciously, particularly Syd in her inappropriate attire. She self-consciously tries to hide behind Dex.

DEX

Previews of coming attractions...As if I
wasn't depressed enough....

Several bystanders give Dex and Syd a sharp glance. Syd tries to retreat further behind Dex.

SYD

(whispering)

Do you mind? We're getting enough stares
as it is.

DEX

Promise mine won't be this maudlin...
And come better-dressed to it, huh?

Mainwaring turns sharply to the pair. Her imperious gaze penetrates the gauze of the veil, making her meaning obvious -- "Shut up". Dex sees Mainwaring and recognizes her.

ANGLE ON STAGE

...as the Old Professor continues...

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

OLD PROFESSOR

...judging from the turnout tonight,
I'd say he had...It was a pleasure
to have Nick in my Shakespeare class.
And, perhaps, only the Bard can explain
his unexplainable choice...

(quoting)

"To sue to live, I find I seek to die,
and seeking death..."

ON DEX AND SYD

Dex, affected by the words, quotes quietly to himself along with the professor.

OLD PROFESSOR & DEX

(Dex, quietly to himself)

"...find life...Let it come on..."

Then WEeping...soft and restrained, but audible...Dex and Syd turn to the sound. It is Mrs. Mainwaring, dabbing underneath the veil with a lace handkerchief. Dex slowly starts to press through the crowd to her. But something else grabs his attention.

ANGLE ON STAGE

As the Professor goes back to his seat, A YOUNG WOMAN, who we couldn't see, seated behind the podium, rises. We've seen her before though. So has Dex. She's the DRUNK GIRL who shared her martinis with him. Her face flush and puffy, she hesitantly approaches the podium to speak. She seems upset and distracted, as though about to cry.

DRUNK GIRL

Thank you, Professor...Nick would have...

(falters)

Nicky...

The girl's voice trembles and her tenuous composure unravels. She bursts out in racking sobs. The Old Professor, not yet seated, moves back to offer comfort and assistance.

OLD PROFESSOR

My dear...

The Drunk Girl angrily jerks away from his solicitude.

DRUNK GIRL

(bitterly)

Wrong play, Professor! ROMEO AND JULIET.
That's what you should be quoting...

ANOTHER ANGLE

Several others on the stage stand up and move with tentative concern... as the girl loses more control and gets more wound up. Mrs. Mainwaring slowly moves down the aisle.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

DRUNK GIRL

...Star-crossed lovers and all that...
Nicky was...

The girl suddenly sees the black figure of Mrs. Mainwaring, standing with regal, austere solemnity in the back of the aisle, staring unwaveringly up at her. The girl freezes in her tirade, trying to match the veiled stare, but her eyes are filled with confused fear and with a sharp short cry, she turns and bolts off into the wings. There is an immediate HUBBUB among the mourners.

ON DEX & SYD

He has watched the girl's commotion in fixed stunned silence.

DEX

(whispered intensity)

That girl...that girl! I know her...
She gave me a drink last night!

SYD

Cookie Mainwaring?

Upon hearing the name, Dex whirls around to where Mrs. Mainwaring is... or rather, was. She's now storming out the exit doors.

INT. THEATRE LOBBY - DEX'S POV - NIGHT

Mrs. Mainwaring stands at the curb by her black Rolls Royce, exchanging words with her chauffeur. The lady is obviously upset. The chauffeur gently takes hold of her, trying to soothe her. He holds her close, his comforting gestures going way past those of succor, becoming the caresses of a lover. The woman does not resist the advances; they seem to calm her. The chauffeur ushers her into the driver's seat of the Rolls and she drives off. We recognize the chauffeur -- BERNARD. All this has happened much faster than it takes to describe. Bernard heads up the steps of the building.

DEX(OS)

This Cookie one of the Mainwaring
Scholarship Mainwarings?

ON DEX & SYD

...watching out of the glass doors. Dex has also recognized the Chauffeur. In the b.g., People are exiting the theatre and the building.

SYD

(shrugs)

I guess so...I hardly know her. She
sits next to me in Art History.

As Bernard enters and heads for the theatre, Dex starts for him, but abruptly retreats, yanking Syd back with him into a pay phone alcove off the lobby. Bernard enters the theatre.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

SYD

Hey, wha...!

Dex ssshes her, picks up the receiver to the phone, turning to the wall as he sticks it to his ear. Syd suddenly sees the reason for this curious behaviour. A CAMPUS SECURITY GUARD strolls by. Noticing Syd's outlandish garb, he stops, eying her suspiciously. Syd smiles and gives a feeble wave.

SYD

Sorority...

The Guard nods with knowing weariness and, with a sigh, moseys down the hall. The coast clear, Dex darts across the foyer, Syd in tow, and disappears once more into the theatre.

INT. BACKSTAGE DRESSING-ROOM - NIGHT

Cookie sits in a backstage dressing-room on a cot, her back slumped against the wall, drinking from a pint bottle. Bernard hovers over her, lighting the marijuana cigarette between her lips.

BERNARD

Mum's not exactly overwhelmed by your little display.

He brushes back a lock of her hair from her sweaty brow with his black-gloved fingers. Cookie jerks away and takes a hit off her cigarette.

COOKIE

Expecting a sermon, was she?
(starts to cry)

It's all her fault. It never would have happened if she hadn't driven him away.

She chokes back a sob with a slug from her bottle.

DEX(OS)

This a private wake or can anybody mourn?

ANOTHER ANGLE

Dex and Syd stand in the doorway. How long they've been there is anybody's guess. They enter, Syd reluctantly, holding hands to hide the cuffs.

DEX

After all, the mourn the merrier.

COOKIE

(not amused by the pun)
Who are you?

DEX

Your drinking buddy from last night
(to Bernard)
How's the wrist?

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

BERNARD

(recognizing Dex, grins)

Hullo, sport...

COOKIE

I don't remember you.

DEX

You weren't in much condition to remember anything. Nick Lang the sorrow you were drowning last night?

Cookie glares at Dex, suspicious of his jaunty brazenness. Then she notices Syd, hiding behind him.

COOKIE

I know you. Art History. Sydney Fuller, right?

SYD

(embarrassed)

Uh..yeah, Cookie...

COOKIE

(amused at Syd's get-up)

Quite becoming. You're a very snappy dresser, Sydney.

DEX

(bringing the conversation back)

Pretty fond of Nick Lang, I gather.

Cookie shifts her gaze back to Dex. Bernard rises up, sensing something's not right here.

BERNARD

It any of your business?

COOKIE

(snaps at him)

Mind your own, Bernard.

(to Dex haughtily)

I loved Nick!

DEX

(an edge to it)

Just a little? Or a lot?

BERNARD

(menacing, clenching his
black-gloved hands)

I don't think...

DEX

Don't brag about it.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

COOKIE

(curbing Bernard)

Shut up, Bernard!

(to Dex)

I loved Nick.

BERNARD

What are you talking to this guy for?

COOKIE

(defiant)

Shut up!

(to Dex)

And Nick loved me!

DEX

Among others.

Cookie's thrown by the comment, she whirls on him in a sudden jealous, paranoid fervour of suspicion.

COOKIE

What do you mean by that? Nick loved me!

He did! What do you know about him?

DEX

I know he was murdered.

Cookie stares at him in blank, stunned shock.

BERNARD

(pokes a gloved finger in
Dex's chest)

Enough, sport.

Not for Dex. He can see the fear...the stark neurotic fear mounting in every taut line of Cookie's now-sobering face...her wild, wide eyes.

DEX

Maybe you were quoting the wrong play.

Maybe it should have been OTHELLO. "Beware the green-eyed monster"...and all that...

BERNARD

Enough! I don't like what you're driving at, sport.

DEX

I don't much care...sport.

Bernard delivers a violent jab with his black-gloved fist into Dex's stomach. Dex is propelled back by the force of the blow and falls to the floor, bringing the shackled Sydney down with him. As Syd tries to recover from the surprise of the fall, Dex lies there writhing in intense pain. Bernard hovers over him.

BERNARD

Maybe that'll make you care.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

Just then, Cookie bolts out the door. Bernard, startled, takes off after her.

BERNARD

Cookie!

He's out the door.

BERNARD(OS)

Cookie!

SYD

(to Dex)

Are you all right?

DEX

(gasping)

Get up! Get up!

He struggles to his feet, pulling Syd up with him.

INT. BACKSTAGE SCENE SHOP

The dressing-room opens out onto a backstage SCENE SHOP connected to the STAGE. As Dex and Syd come out into the dark shop, a METAL DOOR CLANGS SHUT WITH A RESOUNDING ECHO. Dex turns, seeing a glowing GREEN EXIT LIGHT at the far end of the shop.

DEX

This way.

He all but drags Syd across the shop, still clutching his stomach in pain. Suddenly, A CLUSTER OF HIDEOUS FACES loom out of the dark in front of them. Syd screams and jumps back. No need. They've run into some stored costumes. The faces are a COLLECTION OF AFRICAN TRIBAL MASKS evidently used in some production. Dex yanks Syd and they move on past several clothing racks. As they do, one of the MASKS suddenly turns and starts to pursue them!

Moving along parallel behind the costume rack, the mask stalks the unaware couple...or rather someone wearing the mask stalks them. His clothes are effectively hidden underneath a dusty, black cloak, also apparently appropriated from the stored costumes. Suddenly the disguised figure is swallowed up in the shadows.

ON DEX & SYD

....hurrying toward the door. The green exit sign and the moonlight creeping in from the narrow windows near the ceiling provide the only light in the place. Sweat is pouring down Dex's face, the running only aggravating the pain of his recently punched stomach.

He stops, unable to go any further, resting against some stacked flats.

SYD

Are you all right?

DEX'S POV - SYD

...from out of the blackness behind her, THE AFRICAN MASK looms up! Then a GLINT OF SHINY METAL — THE BARREL OF A NAIL-GUN held in the disguised assailant's hands...and pointed directly at them.

BACK TO SCENE

...as Dex grabs Syd violently and whirls her to one side, THE HOLLOW, SPRING-LIKE CLICK OF THE NAIL-GUN SOUNDS. A NAIL pierces through the muslin of the flat sticking into the wood framing behind.

Syd screams as she and Dex spin off into another cluster of FLATS, causing them all to clatter about the two in a mad jumble, knocking them to the ground.

The masked attacker cocks the nail-gun to reload. Syd, still screaming, clumsily scrambles to avoid the menacing tool. Unfortunately, Dex's scrambling the other way. But it works to their advantage. The chain of the handcuffs pulls taut and ends up tripping their assailant.

He falls into the pile of flats. The nail-gun is still half-cocked. Dex sees his chance to get his killer and moves to go after him. But Syd, in a panic, has kept running and the momentum's on her side. The wrench from the tugging handcuff shoots down Dex's arm to his stomach. He winces in agony.

SYD

(yanking the chain)

Run!

In angry retaliation, Dex pulls back on the chain, sending Syd sprawling at his feet. Then, his face full of determination, he wheels back toward his attacker, still fumbling about in the morass of fallen flats. His mask is cracked and dented, one of the horns broken off, but it still conceals his face.

INTERCUTTING SHOTS, as the battle continues...

ON DEX...moving in on the stalker...his face taut...

ON SYD...weeping, still on the floor, scooting along it, clutching Dex's pant leg as he drags her along.

ON ATTACKER...on his hands and knees, extricating himself from the flats...

ON ATTACKER'S MASK...savage and menacing...

ON DEX'S FACE...almost as savage, almost as menacing...rigid with strain, drenched in sweat...but eyes blazing...

ON SYD'S FACE...the make-up smeared by a flood of hysterical tears...

ON ATTACKER'S HAND...snapping up the barrel of the nail-gun...

ON ATTACKER'S MASK...as the hands bring the nail-gun up and take aim...

ON DEX...his eyes widen in sudden, startled fright...

ON NAIL-GUN...as it fires with its springlike sound...

ON SYD...screaming...

ON DEX'S FACE...as a NAIL whizzes past his cheek...leaving a jagged line of blood seeping from the cut....

ON DEX...turning and running...

ON SYD...being dragged along the floor behind Dex...

ON ATTACKER...Reloading as he pursues...

ON DEX AND SYD...both on their feet now, running. A nail clanks on the concrete floor behind them.

SYD
(pointing)
The elevator!

DEX & SYD'S POV...a steel mesh cage elevator near the stage, leading to the grid above....

ON DEX & SYD...heading for the elevator.

ON DEX'S FEET...as the elevator door swings open and he leaps in...

ON NAIL-GUN...firing off another shot...

ON SYD'S FEET...and the flapping tail of her coat as a NAIL pierces it and then imbeds itself in some lumber stacked by the elevator...

ON DEX'S HAND...pressing the "UP" button...

ON SYD...jerked to a stop by her snared overcoat.

ON ELEVATOR...going up...

ON ATTACKER...running toward it...

ON SYD...yanking at her coat with her free hand, while her shackled one rises with the elevator and Dex.

ON DEX...reaching out for her.

DEX
Come on!

ON SYD...yanking at her coat...

ON DEX...lying on the floor of the elevator, grabbing her shackled arm as the elevator rises higher. Another NAIL whizzes by them...

ON ELEVATOR...rising above Syd's head...

ON COAT...as it tears free from the nail...

ON SYD'S FEET...rising in the air...

ON DEX...on the floor of the elevator, holding onto SYD's arm for dear life.

ON ATTACKER...reloading and shooting upward after his prey...

ON ELEVATOR

...as it ascends. Another nail whizzes through the mesh of the cage. Syd's screaming her head off.

ON ATTACKER

...cocking and loading, but his prey has disappeared up into the darkness above him. He races across the stage...to a metal, spiral staircase leading up to the grid. He begins to ascend.

ON ELEVATOR

Syd's free arm is flailing wildly as she tries to catch hold of the bottom of the elevator cage. Dex still holds her shackled arm and is trying to pull her up, when he makes a mistake. He looks down.

DEX'S POV

...the ground, getting farther away. Once again, he experiences that spiralling sense of vertigo...

ON DEX

...as his eyes widen and his face pales. His gaze is fixed below and, in numbing shock, he suddenly lets go of Syd's arm.

INTERCUTTING SHOTS, as Dex loses hold...

ON SYD...screaming as she falls...

ON SYD'S WRIST...as the handcuff chain pulls taut.

ON SYD...screeching in pain...

ON DEX...jerked forward and almost out of the cage...

ON DEX'S FREE HAND...grabbing the edge of the cage, preventing him from pitching out.

DEX'S POV...his outstretched arm and Syd dangling there from the other end of the cuff chain.

SYD

(frantic)

Help me!

CAMERA ZOOMS IN WHILE PULLING BACK, creating the vertigo sensation...

ON DEX...closing his eyes...sweat pouring from his brow.

ON DEX & SYD'S WRISTS...BRUISED, the taut hand cuff chain between them.

ON SYD...looking down, then up, appealing.

SYD

Please! Please! Help me.

ON DEX..powerless...

ON ELEVATOR..as it KER-CHUNKS to an ABRUPT HALT.

ON SYD...struggling to grab hold of the bottom of the elevator.

SYD
(angry, in pain)
Help me!

ON DEX...gasping for breath, almost as though he's hyperventilating.

ON HIS SHACKLED WRIST..as his hand grabs hold of the chain.

ON DEX...with a mighty surge, he pushes off the side of the elevator, propelling himself to the back of the cage.

ON SYD..screaming in pain as she's jerked upward with a violent tug.

IN THE ELEVATOR

...as Dex slams up against the back of the cage and Syd's upper torso comes flying into the open elevator...Her teeth grit with wincing pain as she clutches at her shackled wrist. Dex scrambles to help her, pulling her in the rest of the way. For his efforts, Syd starts to pummel him in an hysterical frenzy, weeping furious tears.

SYD
What's the matter with you! Why didn't
you help?...Ohh, my wrist!

Before Dex can defend himself, A FOOTSTEP CLANKS ON STEEL. Someone's up on the grid.

SYD
(a despairing groan)
Oh, no...no...

She softly weeps. Dex hushes her and quietly opens the gate of the elevator, which leads out onto the grid. Helping Syd to her feet, they both step out on the grillework.

ON THE GRID

...as Dex and Syd move cautiously through a webbing of BATTON WIRES, ROPES, AND DANGLING LIGHT FIXTURES. At one point, Dex looks down.

DEX'S POV

...through the steel grillwork into the inky descending space...and far below, the stage. Again, that spiralling sensation.

BACK TO SCENE

Dex quickly jerks his eyes up, refusing to look down. ANOTHER CLANK, THEN A "SPROING" Syd stifles a scream as something whizzes by, followed by a quick CHINK. A LIGHT suspended from a work rope next to the pair has been pierced by a NAIL. THE CLATTER OF FOOTSTEPS. ECHOING STEEL.

Dex grabs the light. ANOTHER CLANK. CLOSE BY. Dex swings the light fixture in the direction of the sound. There is a THUD, FOLLOWED BY A GROAN AND CLATTERING. The nail-gun comes sliding across the grid almost at Dex's feet. He must have scored a direct hit. He picks up the

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

weapon, inadvertantly looking down for a moment, quickly recoiling back into Syd, bumping her wrist. She hisses with pain.

Then they hear KER-CHUNK. The elevator is starting up! They both run for the sound.

AT THE ELEVATOR

The discarded African mask lay at the edge of the grid and the elevator is descending into the blackness below. A FIGURE huddles in the dark confines of the cage, his features indistinguishable. CAMERA PULLS BACK AS Dex and Syd arrive. Syd bangs the buttons on a post by the open shaft in a futile endeavour to stop the elevator's descent. And Dex does nothing to stop its occupant, for he must look downward to aim. He tries, his hand wavering.

DEX'S POV

...the dizzying view of the descending elevator as it plummets into the darkness below.

BACK TO SCENE

Dex stands there in frozen paralytic fear, unable to move. He hears the elevator stop and the gate swing open. FOOTSTEPS RUN ACROSS THE CONCRETE FLOOR OF THE SHOP...THEN THE METAL DOOR OPENS AND CLANGS SHUT. Dex has blown his chance to get his man. He stares helplessly at the nail-gun in his hand and, in frustrated, impotent anger, flings it out into the surrounding darkness.

INT. SHOP - CLOSE-UP - POWER SAW

...we see the CIRCULAR BLADE of a table power saw. A PIECE OF CHAIN is laid in front of it.

SYD(OS)
(angrily; upset)
Turn it on!

DEX(OS)
Not until you promise!

CAMERA PULLS BACK. The chain is the handcuff chain still worn by Dex and Syd, standing on either side of the saw. Dex is by the switch. Syd is still visibly shaken. She glares sullenly at Dex. He's weary and exhausted. The blood from the gash on his cheek is drying up. Syd's wrist is puffy and purplish-black.

DEX
Look, just until morning. It's got to be Cookie. I mean the drink... and you saw how she took off when murder was mentioned. She's involved or knows something.
(holds up African mask)
And I'll bet Bernard baby was behind the Foster Grants.

CONTINUED

SYD

Fine! You got a suspect!
 (points to the mask)
 You got evidence. You even got a witness.
 Now let's stop the Rambo shit and go to
 the police, for God's sake!

DEX

You want the cuffs off, no police.

Syd looks at him, steaming. Her face is caked with the smeared make-up.
 Her eyes are puffy from crying. She rubs her swollen, bruised wrist.

SYD

Okay. No police.

DEX

Honour bright?

SYD

I promise! Turn it on!

He does, guiding the saw blade through the chain. It slices through
 the metal and Syd jerks her now-free arm up and storms off for the exit.
 Dex turns the saw off.

DEX

Better have someone look at that wrist!

SYD

Sure! Right after I go to the police, you
 fucking madman!

She's out the door. Dex takes off after her.

EXT. COLLEGE CAMPUS

Syd trudges along a snowy path toward the festive lights and the bonfire
 of the Carnival, glistening in the distance down by the pond. WE HEAR
 MUSIC AND MERRY-MAKING. Syd realizes she's still wearing the overcoat
 inside-out and, as she walks, starts to put it on properly.

DEX

(coming up behind her)

Liar, Liar! Pants on fire!

Syd starts to run, but Dex is already too close. The brief chase has
 winded him. He tries to grab her arm.

DEX

Look, just until morning.

SYD

(wildly)

You look! I'm a naive little virgin whose
 idea of excitement was making the senior
 high cheerleading squad.

(MORE)

CONTINUED

D.O.A.

29
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 Loh
 Tech

SYD

(CONT'D)

I'm sorry as Hell for you. I really am.
But I tried to help you and ended up with
a busted wrist and nearly getting killed
for the trouble. I'm going to the police.

She takes off at a brisk clip. Dex, still winded and exhausted, struggles to overtake her, but he's losing ground. Then the pain overwhelms him and, clutching his stomach, he goes into a violent coughing seizure that sends him crumpling in the snow. She stops and turns, witnessing his agony. She rushes to him as he struggles to rise.

SYD

Don't...Just rest a minute. God...please,
let's go to the police. You can't do this
on your own anymore.

Dex looks up at her. Despite the cold, his brow is beaded with sweat.

DEX

I've got to...It's gone way past the police.
It's personal now. Besides murdering...

(hesitates)

Gail...and Lang, the son-of-a bitch has tried
to kill me three times, after succeeding the
first time. It's sort of insult to injury.
I'm dead, but he wants me to die faster.

(angrily)

Well, I'm not gonna die faster. Not till I
have somebody's head and not until I know why.

SYD

It's murder...

DEX

Justice!...And I want it now...While I can
savour it. Quick and exacting and undiluted.

SYD

I don't think I like you like this.

DEX

Yeah, well, I've yet to meet a corpse with a
great personality...

(pause)

I'm sorry about what happened back there in
the elevator. I've got this fear of heights.

SYD

I gathered.

Pause.

DEX

Gail used to be crazy about this old
ferriswheel out at the county fair. She'd
ride it three or four times every year we went.

(MORE)

DEX

(CONT'D)

Alone. She'd always ask me to go with her. I'd always say no. She never made a big deal about it or anything. Never really expected me to. I'd watch from the ground, she'd be having a great time, and I'd think, "Well, maybe next year." But next year, I'd chicken out again. Once I got as far as buying a ticket and standing in line. But at the last moment I couldn't. Gail was great about it. Understanding as Hell...

(pause, then angry regret)

I wanted to ride that damn thing so badly! But I couldn't...Just like I couldn't help you tonight. Just like I couldn't even get a shot off at that bastard going down the elevator shaft. I was afraid...

SYD

You can't help a phobia like that.

DEX

Why not? I mean I was afraid of falling, for Christsakes...of dying, when I'm already dead! Everything was on the line. I had nothing to lose and I couldn't take the chance...

Dex looks out across the snowy campus to the glittering carnival lights ...and life...in the distance. Syd knows he's playing on her sympathy. She also knows it's working.

SYD

I'm not supposed to go to the police so you can prove something to yourself?

DEX

Just until morning...

SYD

(against her better judgement)

Hell, I'll probably be in the emergency room with this wrist until morning anyway.

(Dex smiles gratefully up at her)

Just...Just be care...

She stops, realizing the ridiculousness of what she's saying.

DEX

(kindly)

Sure...you too, huh?

She can't bear to look at him, realizing it may be for the last time. Holding back the tears, she gazes up at the sky...the crisp winter night.

SYD'S POV

...THE SHIMMERING MOON...a clear and white ball hovering far out of reach like a distant, lost promise of justice.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MAINWARING STUDY - CLOSE ON FISH TANK - NIGHT

...the moon becomes a WATER BUBBLE in an oxygen pump. Several tiny bubbles gurgle up around it. WE PULL BACK...the oxygen pump is in an aquarium. Several EXOTIC FISH swim by. Reflected in the aquarium glass is a booklined study, richly but conservatively appointed. Bernard is also reflected in the fish tank glass. He holds Mrs. Mainwaring in his arms, comforting her, her head buried in his shoulder. As Bernard tries to shift the embrace from solace to something more amorous, the woman pulls away.

ON STUDY WALL

...the SHADOWS of Bernard and Mainwaring separate...she paces nervously.

ON FRENCH DOORS OF STUDY

...now the two figures are reflected in the window of the French doors that lead to an outside patio.

MAINWARING

(controlled anxiety)

Murdered...this man told her Nick was murdered?

Bernard, behind her, lays his hands on her shoulder, his face close against her luxuriant black hair.

BERNARD

(soothing)

Don't worry, I'll find her...Don't I always...

MAINWARING

(turning to him)

Find him...

Suddenly someone else can be seen in the glass of the door. But it's no reflection. It's Dex on the other side of the door, peering through the pane, eavesdropping. He's heard everything. He opens the French door and enters.

ANOTHER ANGLE

...as Mainwaring and Bernard turn around at the sound of the door, releasing each other...

DEX

I'll save you the trouble, Bernard.
Wouldn't want it interfering with your
more pleasant duties.

MAINWARING

(recognizing him)

You...

DEX

(closes the door)

Oughta keep this thing locked, anyone's
liable to walk in.

CONTINUED

BERNARD

(approaching him)

That flip lip's gonna be a fat one, sport.

DEX

(standing his ground)

Don't push me, Bernard. I've had a rough night.

Bernard doesn't care. Though Dex tries to block Bernard's FIST, it becomes a MENACING BLUR, making impact with a RESOUNDING CRUNCH.

BERNARD

Then have a bit of a lie-down.

Dex goes careening into an armchair, collapsing against it as the rest of his body sinks to the floor. He's bleeding from his nose and lip.

DEX

Thanks for the chair.

(to Mainwaring)

Such a treasure. Wherever did you find him?

He spies Mrs. Mainwaring's black VEIL in the seat of the chair. He uses it to wipe the blood from his mouth. Bernard slaps him across the face and snatches the veil from him. He and Mrs. Mainwaring hover about him. Mainwaring surveys him with haughty coolness. The room is dark, except for the eerie glow of the several lighted aquariums about the room.

MAINWARING

Professor...Cornell, isn't it? It was your wife who fell apart at the dedication yesterday.

DEX

And your Cookie who crumbled at the memorial service tonight. Seems they shared the same affliction -- Nick Lang.

(tensely)

And Cookie better take care, my wife didn't recover...

Mainwaring's eyes widen in curious concern. Bernard kicks Dex in the stomach. Dex groans and doubles up in pain.

BERNARD

Little soft there, aren't you, sport?

Agitated nervousness is cracking through Mrs. Mainwaring's hard facade as she glares down at Dex.

MAINWARING

What are you jabbering about, Professor?
What do you want? Why have you harrassed my daughter? Broken into my home?

(intensely)

What do you know about Nick Lang?

CONTINUED

This last question's far too anxious and desperate. It alerts Dex's curiosity.

DEX

What do you think I know?

Bernard starts to kick him again, but Mainwaring motions him back.

MAINWARING

I want answers.

DEX

So do I.

COOKIE(OS)

So do I, Mother.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Cookie stands in the study door, keyed-up and on edge, probably drunk. She enters the room, closing the door.

DEX

Hail, hail, the gang's all here.

COOKIE

And I brought a date.

She pulls a GUN from her coat pocket. She points it at her mother

MAINWARING

(cooly, calm)

What are you doing, Cookie?

COOKIE

What did you do, Mother?

Mainwaring shoots a glance at Dex.

MAINWARING

(harsh fear)

What have you told her?

COOKIE

Enough...and it makes sense, Mother.

(to Dex)

She forced Nick to stop seeing me.

MAINWARING

Nick made that decision all by himself.

COOKIE

After you threatened to cut him off financially!

MAINWARING

Isn't that how you kept him around?
Making him think it pleased your mother
and his benefactress to see you as a couple.

CONTINUED

DEX

Didn't it?

MAINWARING

Stay out of this!

DEX

What's the matter? Nick good enough
for your charity, but not your daughter?

COOKIE

Quite the other way around, mister.
Mother's no snob. Her taste in men is
very democratic.

DEX

(with a glance at Bernard)

Downright plebeian, if you ask me.

Bernard makes a tentative move toward Dex with an angry snarl, but
Cookie waves him back with the gun.

COOKIE

Don't bristle, Bernard. You were just
"Lady Chatterly's Lover". Nick was
"Pygmalion".

DEX

(getting Cookie's drift)

Well, well. Grown accustomed to his face,
had she? The plot thickens...

Mainwaring's getting Cookie's drift too. She moves slowly, deliberately
toward her daughter.

MAINWARING

Just what is being twisted about in that
pickled little pea-brain of yours?

COOKIE

(wary of mother)

I saw the way you used to look at him.
Your personal little wonder boy plucked
from the gutter. The ugly duckling you
turned into a swan. It wasn't enough he
be grateful, he had to adore you as well.
You couldn't stand anyone else showing an
interest in him.

DEX

And others did...

Mainwaring glares at Dex in sharp, worried curiosity, wondering just
what he knows, but she doesn't dare ask in front of Cookie. She turns
back to the girl.

MAINWARING

I forbid you to talk this way.

CONTINUED

COOKIE

You forbade me to see Nick too. You were
always jealous of us!

(to Dex)

She flew into a rage when she found out
we'd slept together.

MAINWARING

(furiously)

Shut up!

COOKIE

See what I mean.

MAINWARING

(advancing again)

Cookie, I'm not going to discuss this in
front of everyone...

COOKIE

I am...Inquiring minds want to know...

DEX

(finishing the National Enquirer
commercial)

I wanna know...

You bet. Dex is fascinated by this airing of dirty laundry. Revelation
upon revelation.

MAINWARING

(angrily, moving in)

You little fool! Stop this!

Cookie jabs the gun up in her mother's face, stopping her short. Cookie
lets out a looney giggle.

COOKIE

What's the matter, Mother? Skeletons
in the closet rattling too loudly?

(moving over to Dex)

She's the one who killed Nick!

MAINWARING

(hurt, adamant)

That's nonsense!

COOKIE

(hotly)

Nick wouldn't kill himself.

DEX

He didn't.

Mainwaring sweeps up to Cookie. She is obviously distraught but manages
to keep her controlled demeanour.

CONTINUED

MAINWARING

You're wrong, Cookie, I wouldn't hurt you. Or Nick...
(softly, pleadingly)
Please, give me the gun...Please...

Cookie is wavering, unsure. She starts to softly weep.

COOKIE

You did hurt me! Why couldn't he see me?

MAINWARING

(soothing)
Whatever I did, I did for you, Cookie.
And Nick. He needed his self-respect.
Not more gossip. How would it have looked?
Dating the son of your father's murderer?

Wrong ploy. Angry, Cookie jerks the gun back up, as though she were going to pull the trigger.

COOKIE

Always the scandal, isn't it, mother?
Nick loved me! That's all that mattered.

Mainwaring doesn't flinch. She just coolly stares her daughter square in the eye. Cookie starts to falter under her mother's firm appraisal.

MAINWARING

No...Cookie. Believe me, he couldn't
have loved you...Not the way you wanted.

It's not what Cookie wants to hear. She levels the gun once more at Mother.

COOKIE

No, Mother, not the way you wanted, because
you wanted him for yourself, didn't you?
But he didn't want you, so you murdered him!

Mainwaring, incensed, hauls off and slaps her daughter across the face. Cookie reels more from the surprise of the blow than its impact. Bernard swoops in and grabs for the gun. It drops from Cookie's hand to the floor. Dex immediately goes for it. Bernard, releasing Cookie, pounces on Dex. Cookie dashes for the study door.

MAINWARING

Cookie!

But Cookie is already out the door. Bernard has snared Dex by the collar before Dex can grab the gun.

BERNARD

Don't think so, sport.

Dex spins and swings at Bernard, belting the chauffeur in the chops. Bernard goes down and Dex dives for the gun. But Mainwaring's foot steps upon it before Dex can get it. He stares up the leg into her cold, haughty face. Suddenly, an arm encircles his throat and jerks him up. Bernard again.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

BERNARD

I'll kill you!

He smashes Dex in the gut, sending the man reeling back in blinding pain. Dex staggers and falls to the carpet, slipping into unconsciousness.

BLACK SCREEN

WE HEAR Bernard and Mrs. Mainwaring talking.

MAINWARING(OS)

It's just so...messy...

BERNARD(OS)

There's no other choice...My neck's in this too, remember, and I'm not...

MAINWARING

But we don't even know if he can prove anything. Or even if he knows anything... Couldn't we turn him over to the police. Tell them he broke in, attacked me...?

INT. MAINWARING ROLLS ROYCE - DEX'S POV - NIGHT

A HAZY PICTURE FORMS...AND LIGHT. As it comes into FOCUS, we see its a CAR ROOF LIGHT. THE POV darts about taking in the plush interior of the car. Then the open back door. Beyond it, Bernard and Mrs. Mainwaring stand talking.

BERNARD

(continuing the conversation)

...And have him shoot his mouth off to them? Even if he can't prove anything, you don't want coppers snooping into Nick's past...or yours...

MAINWARING

(frightened by this)

No...Let the dead stay dead...

BERNARD

Good. I'll just...

MAINWARING

Don't tell me. Just do it...And bring Cookie back! When she's like this, she's liable to say anything to anybody...I shouldn't have slapped her...

A GROAN IS HEARD.

Bernard and Mrs. Mainwaring peer into the car. Mrs. Mainwaring's face seems more drawn and weary than before.

MAINWARING

How do you know Nicholas Lang was murdered?

ANGLE TO INCLUDE DEX

...lying in the back seat, his wrists behind him, ankles together, both bound with tape.

DEX

I'm psychic.

Bernard leans in and smacks him across the face with Cookie's pistol which he now holds.

BERNARD

Then maybe you know what's going to happen to you?

DEX

Guess you're going to kill me..
(exasperated mumble)
...again...

BERNARD

What do you know? He is psychic.

Bernard slams the car door shut.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Mainwaring's big black Rolls swishes along the wet, mushy streets. CLASSICAL MUSIC is pouring out of the car stereo and Bernard is HEARD HUMMING along.

DEX(OS)

Well, if I've got to be taken for a ride,
it might as well be in a Rolls.

INT. ROLLS

...as Bernard, conducting along with the music, glances in the rearview mirror, amused.

BERNARD

Aren't you the cool one?

DEX

Might as well be philosophical about it.

BERNARD

That's right. All gotta die sometime.

DEX

Yeah..that's life.

Bernard chuckles. Dex looks out the window, suddenly noticing something.

DEX

Hey! We're on campus!

ON REARVIEW MIRROR

...Bernard's handsome reflection leers out from it.

BERNARD

Didn't think I'd forget your girlfriend,
did you, sport?

BACK TO SCENE

Bernard takes a corner. Dex lurches on the seat.

DEX

She doesn't know a thing.

BERNARD

Expect me to take your word?

DEX

You don't even know where she is. You
don't even know who she is...

BERNARD

Sydney Fuller. I've got a good memory for
names. Campus directory supplied the rest.

Suddenly there is a SWIFT EXPANDING GLOW OF ONCOMING HEADLIGHTS from
behind, THEN THE CLUNK OF METAL SCRAPING METAL, and both Bernard and
Dex are jarred by AN ABRUPT IMPACT.

BERNARD

What the...

There is another SMASH from behind and another jolt.

ON STREET

A RED SPORTS CAR keeps bumping into the back of the Rolls with deliberate
consistency.

IN ROLLS

...as Bernard brakes the car to a stop. There is another BANG and the
SHATTERING OF GLASS as the car behind plows full-force into the abruptly-
stopped Rolls. With a muttered curse, Bernard bolts from the car,
slamming the door behind him.

ANGLE ON DEX

...as he glances out the back window. The DRIVER of the sports car
hits the gas, trying to back up, but the car won't move after that
last impact.

As Bernard approaches, the driver's door springs open and Cookie, drunker
than before, gets out and flings a half-filled pint bottle at Bernard.
He ducks and it splatters against the back window of the Rolls

COOKIE

I hope I killed the bitch!

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

As Dex watches Bernard and Cookie arguing, he struggles furiously with his bonds.

BERNARD

Drinking and driving don't mix, Ducks.

COOKIE

Stay away from me, Bernard!

BERNARD

You left without saying goodbye.

COOKIE

Stay away! I'm not going back there!

BERNARD

Don't bet the ranch, luv...

DEX'S POV

...as Bernard drags the struggling Cookie to the car, she protests loud and abusively. Then Dex's eyes alight on something else. THE BACKSEAT CIGARETTE LIGHTER!

INT. ROLLS

...as Bernard shoves Cookie in and over to the passenger side. Cookie is startled to find Dex in the backseat.

COOKIE

What are you doing here?

Bernard gets in the car.

BERNARD

(sharp glance at Dex)

He's going to the police. Right after I take you home.

COOKIE

(angry)

I'm not going home!

DEX

And I'm not going to the police.

BERNARD

(starting the car)

Shut up, you!

ANGLE ON DEX

...lurching against the door as Bernard pulls sharply from the curb.

DEX

Or what? You'll kill me...?

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

CAMERA PULLS CLOSE ON DEX'S HANDS, still taped behind his back. A SMALL GLOW emanates from some object he holds there -- THE CIGARETTE LIGHTER... pressed against the TAPE which blackens and melts!

BERNARD(OS)

I'm warning....

ANOTHER ANGLE

DEX

(cutting Bernard off)

He is, you know, Cookie. Going to kill me.

BERNARD

Shut up!

(to Cookie)

Don't listen to him!

She's not. Reeling from drink, she sniffs the air in torpid confusion.

COOKIE

Something's burning...

BERNARD

(sniffs)

Hey! What are you doing back there?

As Bernard turns to see, Dex slams the WAD OF TAPE from his wrists over Bernard's eyes.

DEX

It's a surprise! Don't peek!

The tape covers Bernard's eyes and, stunned by the swiftness of the action, the chauffeur loses control of the car.

INTERCUTTING SHOTS, as Dex and Bernard struggle in the out-of-control car...

ON CAR...as it lurches up over the curb, plowing along a snowy campus embankment...

ON COOKIE...as her head STRIKES the dash...knocking her cold...

ON DEX...leaping into the front seat, feet still taped, as the car careens down the hill. His effort's rewarded with a sharp pain in the stomach.

ON COOKIE...unconscious, slumping against the passenger door...

ON BERNARD...clawing at the tape on his face...

ON WINDSHIELD...the landscape bobbing up and down...

ON DEX....in pain, his arm shooting past Benard for the door handle on the driver's side...

ON BERNARD...ripping the tape from his face, snarling viciously at Dex.

ON DEX'S HAND...clicking the door-handle up...

ON BERNARD...spilling out backwards as the door behind him springs open...

ON BERNARD'S HAND...clutching onto the inside door handle...

ON CAR...careening down the snowy hillside; Bernard, half-in, half-out.

ON DEX...shoving Bernard's feet out...

ON BERNARD...his feet flying out of the car. He still clutches onto the door-handle and is being dragged in the snow...

STEERING WHEEL...spinning wildly. Dex's hand grabs it and he pulls himself painfully into the driver's seat, trying to regain control of the car

ON DEX'S FEET...still taped together, madly playing the pedals...

ON COOKIE...her limp body sliding halfway off the seat to the floor...

ON DEX...sweating profusely, crumpled with pain, clutching the wheel. The radio still blares the classical music.

ON BERNARD...still hanging onto the handle of the open door, cutting a swath through the snow with his body...

ON CAR WINDSHIELD...as Dex tries to master the wheel. The car is headed straight for the Carnival around the pond at the bottom of the hill.

ON BERNARD...tumbling wildly in the snow, but still hanging onto the handle.

BERNARD'S POV...shaky, jostled, snow-blurred...a tree is looming up in the path of the car....

BERNARD...eyes widen...he releases the handle, rolling off in the snow...

ON DEX...in a coughing spasm, bouncing about, unable to control the steering wheel...Cookie bounces against him; he pushes her back over.

ON TREE...as the open driver's door hits it and is shorn off by the impact.

ON BERNARD...kneeling in the snow, ducking the driver's door that comes in for a crash landing perilously close to him.

ON DEX & COOKIE...jostling about...

DEX'S POV...the Carnival looming up closer...people shout and scatter...

ON BERNARD...drenched in snow, tromping down through the drifts as fast as he can. His GUN is pulled, his eyes glower with rage...

ON CAR...suddenly bouncing up in the air....

ON DEX...helplessly holding onto the wheel of the airborne car...

ON WINDSHIELD...one of the SNOW SCULPTURES looms up in front of it...

ON CAR...flying into the sculpture, shearing off the top of it...

ON THE CROWD...scattering...

ON CAR....slamming to earth once more, spinning toward the bonfire...

ON DEX...the rough landing sends another spasm of pain through him.

ON COOKIE...her unconscious body flaps about in the seat...

ON BERNARD...still in pursuit...

ON DEX...eyes widening as the bonfire writhes and spits before him.
He yanks savagely at the wheel.

ON CAR...swerving abruptly across the snow away from the fire and
caroming into TWO OF THE BOOTHS by the frozen pond. It sits there,
motor still idling in a jumbled mass of splintered wood and torn banners...

ON BERNARD...firing his gun, as he charges into the stunned crowd...

ON LEFT REAR WINDOW OF CAR...shattered by a bullet...

ON DEX...the pain intense...he grabs the wheel and jumps on the gas with
his taped feet...

ON CAR...lumbering out of the debris with an abrupt jolt...

ON BERNARD...very close now...

ON SYD...in the crowd, watching...dressed normally, sans elf-costume
and make-up...her wrist is in a CAST...

SYD'S POV...recognizing Dex through the open car door...then seeing
Bernard almost upon him...

ON SYD...pushing through the crowd anxiously...

ON DEX...seeing Bernard through the windshield.. He turns the steering
wheel sharply...

ON BERNARD...leaping onto the car as it comes at him, feet on fender,
his free hand clutching the hood ornament...

ON DEX...swerving the wheel sharply right, then left, trying to dislodge
Bernard...

ON COOKIE...her body swerving with the car...she GROANS....

ON WINDSHIELD...Bernard hangs on, slowly crawling up the hood...

ON BERNARD'S FINGERS...clutching the hood edge up by the windshield.

ON BERNARD...pulling himself closer, almost leering at Dex through
the windshield...

ON DEX...still spinning the steering wheel, trying to dislodge Bernard..

ON COOKIE...moaning, slowly coming to...She looks up to see:

COOKIE'S POV...Bernard, hanging on the hood, levelling his gun on the
windshield...

ON COOKIE...as she screams...

ON DEX'S HAND...turning on the wipers. Classical music still plays...

ON BERNARD...pointing the gun, squeezing the trigger...

ON WIPERS...leaping out of the window well across Bernard's knuckles grasping the hood edge. He yells in pain...

ON GUN BARREL...hit by sliding wipers just as it fires...

ON WINDSHIELD...shattered by bullet...

ON COOKIE...the misdirected bullet rips through her shoulder! She screams in pain and stunned terror.

ON DEX...his hands flying from the wheel as he ducks the spray of glass...

ON CAR...spinning out of control onto the frozen lake...

ON COOKIE...Hysterically screaming and thrashing, as blood smears across her chic leather coat from the wound in her shoulder...

ON BERNARD...spilling off the hood onto the ice...

ON SYD...running along side the ice...

ON DEX...pushing the flailing, crazed Cookie away, trying to regain control of the car...as it tailspins wildly about on the ice...

ON BERNARD...kneeling on the ice; stunned, realizing what he's done...

BERNARD

Cookie!

ON WINDSHIELD...the car spins about 360 degrees...through the shattered glass, we see ICE SKATERS scattering in all directions...Then Bernard appears, running toward the car, eyes glaring in wild rage...

ON DEX...seeing Bernard...

ON SYD...also seeing Bernard. She picks up some snow...

ON BERNARD...slipsliding across the ice...

ON COOKIE...her wild panic interfering with Dex's manipulation of the car. He shoves her away, glancing in the rearview mirror...

IN MIRROR...Bernard unsteadily makes his way across the ice...

ON SYD...tosses a SNOWBALL at Bernard...

ON BERNARD... it misses it's mark, splatting in front of him...

ON CROWD...liking the idea and, jeering the gunman, also start to throw snowballs at him.

ON BERNARD...suddenly being pelted on all sides with snowballs...

ON CAR...sliding near the edge of the pond...

ON COOKIE...slumped in her seat, in shock, clutching her wounded shoulder...

ON DEX...still trying to control the car. Suddenly there is a LOUD CRACK!

ON RIGHT FRONT TIRE...it whooshes into the water, as the ice beneath gives way...

ON DEX...jolted, as the right front end of the car lurches downward...

ON CAR...sinking further as more ice gives way beneath it.

INT. ROLLS

...as water starts to seep into the car. The ice-cold water startles the already frightened Cookie. With a squealing whimper, she opens her door and scrambles out, the ice giving way beneath her. She disappears beneath the chilling water.

DEX

No!

Cookie comes up seconds later, splashing in frantic, drunken terror. Dex extends an arm out for her.

DEX

Grab hold!

But Cookie is in too much shock. She flounders about, confused and spewing water. Dex scoots across the seat, reaching out for the girl's flailing fingers.

DEX

Cookie, grab hold!

His fingers almost touch hers when the car jerks and slips further into the ice, pulling Cookie's hand away and her under the water and out of view. Dex, frantic, leans out the door, splashing and groping and pushing aside chunks of ice. But she doesn't surface and the car is rapidly filling with water.

EXT. CAR - NIGHT

...as Syd rushes out on the ice toward the car.

SYD

Professor!

DEX

Get back!

The car groans again and slips another notch beneath the ice. Time to bail out. Dex scrambles from the doorless driver's side, feet still bound. The ice cracks slightly beneath him, but holds. Syd reaches out with her good arm...and Dex grabs hold. She pulls him as he scoots toward her to safety. Suddenly, Syd stifles a scream. Dex follows her gaze. Cookie has floated lifelessly up to the surface, her limp form lodged halfway in the passenger door, her dead eyes agape in all the horror of her last moments. The red blood from her wound mingles with the icy blue of the water.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

Dex turns Syd from the sight and pushes her toward the bank, where she shivers in stunned shock. Dex exhausted, catches his breath and rips the tape off his ankles.

Then shots ring out. Syd starts in fright. They look out on the pond. Bernard, a madman, has scattered the snowballers with a few shots. Now he's headed for them.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Dex drags the still stunned Syd to her feet, moving toward a NEARBY BUILDING...and a concrete staircase that leads to a PATIO PROMENADE off the building, jutting out and over-hanging the pond. It's bedecked with lights and decorations, crowded with more Carnival booths and people.

ON BERNARD

...reaching the sinking car, seeing Cookie inside...floating face down in the icy water that has flooded the interior. With an angry wail, he whirls toward the bank and, spying Syd and Dex near the staircase, fires a shot at them.

ON DEX & SYD

...as the shot RESOUNDS and chips of the staircase fly up.

ON BERNARD

...tearing up through the snow at them.

ANOTHER ANGLE

...as Syd and Dex fly up the stairs, the startled bystanders also scramble and knock one another down in their attempt to flee. As Bernard muscles his way up the stairs, several people jump over the railing to the ground below. All is bedlam.

ON UPSTAIRS PATIO PROMENADE

Dex and Syd run madly past the booths and the fleeing, confused crowd. Bernard's in pursuit. He fires. The bullet whizzes past Syd who screams. Dex, breathless and in pain, suddenly stops, urging Syd forward.

DEX

Run!

She needs no great encouragement. Dex tries to start again, but he's just too tired. Suddenly a look of fierce determination sets in his face.

He wheels to confront Bernard.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Dex moves toward Bernard with cold deliberation. Bernard stops, grins at his good fortune, and starts to level his gun.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

DEX

(defiantly)

Come on, Bernard. Let's see how many
more times you can kill me!

Syd's stopped running, realizing Dex is not with her...She gasps when she sees him. Dex continues to swoop down on Bernard, who has hesitated, confused by Dex's brazenness. He can't quite grasp the idea of the lamb willingly coming to slaughter. He suspects a trick or something.

DEX

Come on! Shoot, dammit! Maybe you can
get it right this time! You know...try, try
again.

Bernard doesn't shoot or try anything. Dex's insane fearlessness is so unexpected and his oncoming charge so abrupt, all the chauffeur can do is stare in open-mouthed, startled surprise. Dex is right on top of him.

DEX

Need some incentive? Here!

He hauls off and punches the utterly baffled Bernard in the face. The chauffeur goes down like a felled ox, the gun sliding from his grip. His perfect nose is bloody. He gazes up at the hovering Dex above. Dex rubs his knuckles. He's not a fighter and it hurts. He kicks the fallen Bernard.

DEX

Come on, Bernard, get up!
(kicks him)
Come on! What's the matter? Afraid of
ghosts?
(kicks him again)
Come on! I can't hurt you. I'm dead!

He kicks Bernard again. The chauffeur's anger subdues his astonished confusion and, with a snarl, he lashes out, his black-gloved fist smashing into Dex's solar plexus.

Dex reels back from the blow, out onto an OBSERVATION DECK from the main patio, careening into the balcony railing, his upper torso dangling over it.

DEX'S POV

...the pond below, a WEB OF CHRISTMAS LIGHTS DECORATIVELY STRUNG BELOW BETWEEN TWO OF THE OBSERVATION DECKS: They are right above the sinking Rolls and the cracked ice...the water looks chillingly cold. FOCUS ZOOMS IN WHILE CAMERA PULLS BACK, giving that dizzying sensation of spiralling endlessness.

BACK TO SCENE

Bernard is on his feet, his killer instinct returned. He wipes the blood from his nose and, glaring, swoops down on Dex, pummeling him with vicious blows from behind and trying to dislodge him and pitch him over the rail into the pond.

BERNARD

Tough guy, eh, sport? Smart guy, huh?

Dex grasp the railing as Bernard tries to pry him loose.

DEX'S POV

...the lights and the water and the sinking car so far below...so frighteningly far below...

ON SYD

...picking up Bernard's gun. She points it at his back...but is too frightened to shoot...standing there in immobile terror. Her hand shaking, tears streaming down her face.

ON DEX

...sweat pouring from him as he hangs on for dear life...

DEX'S POV

...the pond...the lights...the car...all a dizzy BLUR below....

ON DEX

...fighting for control. His teeth clench, his eyes flicker with a sudden firm resolve...

DEX'S POV

...the blurry patterns below stabilize.

ON DEX

...as he lets go of the rail with his hands and reaches back behind him, grabbing Bernard by the back of his coat. With a wail of wild determination, he pulls and flings the man over his back, over the railing into the descending space below.

ANOTHER ANGLE

...as Bernard with a surprised wail comes crashing through the nets of Christmas lights strung between the decks. The strands of lights ensnare him like a spider web and he bounces off the top of the car into the freezing water of the pond. POP, FIZZ go the torn light cords and bulbs.

Bernard, entwined in the wet wiring, jerks convulsively, his mouth agape and his eyes bulging. His limbs bounce like a clumsy marionette as he is painfully electrocuted to death. His body twitches one final time before collapsing in a heap, resting on the car hood, half-in,

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

half-out of the water. As people scream and gather in morbid curiosity, Bernard's wide, lifeless eyes stare upward...THE CAMERA FOLLOWS THEIR GAZE...up to Dex, weary, but erect, looking unflinchingly down from the promenade above...

ON DEX

...as others rush to the deck to get a look at what happened. Dex turns, calm, despite his obvious pain.

He sees Syd, on the verge of quiet hysteria, still holding the gun in her trembling hands. He goes to her and, as he takes the gun from her, she breaks down and sobs convulsively. He pulls the frightened girl to him and leads her away...through the confused crowd, all rushing to the rail to see what happened.

INT. DEX'S OFFICE - CLOSE-UP - GAIL'S PHOTO

...on Dex's desk. Behind it is a half-empty bottle of PLAIN-WRAP SCOTCH... Hal's from the other day. CAMERA PANS BACK. Dex sits at the desk, staring at the photograph. He holds Bernard's gun. Sweat pours from his brow. His eyes are strained and cloudy. There is a calm about him like the calm before a storm.

DEX

(subdued strain)

It's not clean.

SYD(OS)

What?

ANOTHER ANGLE

Sydney, her face flush from crying, sits on the couch, next to Hal's desk. Dex doesn't even turn to her. Both, though outwardly calm, are on edge and the room is rife with unrealized tension.

DEX

(perturbed)

Something doesn't fit. Me. Me. I don't fit. I can guess why Mainwaring would have Nick killed...Even Gail...some warped sense of jealousy...But not me...Where do I figure in? How? Why me?

SYD

What do you want? A signed confession?

The bitter, hard tone in her voice makes Dex glance up at Syd curiously. She springs up from the couch -- a coil of cold hate.

SYD

How many times do they have to kill you to convince you? She's the one! Why are you still playing detective? Looking for it to be all neat and tidy, wrapped up with a nice big bow, when it's obvious! Obvious!

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

She flounces down angrily on the couch.

DEX

What's the matter...?

SYD

(shaking her head in
agitated disbelief)

Oh, you're just full of questions, aren't you?

DEX

(gently)

Syd...

She pulls away from his extended hand, not looking at him.

SYD

(sharply)

Nothing's the matter...

(quiet bitterness)

I just understand you now...that's all...

I understand...

She continues, still not looking at Dex...in a low, quavering voice, fighting for control.

SYD

(continuing)

When we were running through the crowd, I
saw someone wearing this pair of boots...
This unbelievable pair of pink cowboy boots...
And I was thinking as I was running, "My God,
who in their right mind would buy anything
that awful"...Then the absurd realization hit
me -- here I was about to die and my last
thoughts were going to be about this stupid
pair of boots...I suddenly felt...this horrible
...rage...

(getting worked up)

Rage at my fear...at being cheated out of my
life...

Tears trickle down her face as she spews her vehemence. Dex listens in knowing sympathy. He understands the rage she speaks of.

SYD

(continuing)

...that there'd be no beauty or grace or
peace in death...any second a piece of lead
would rip through my body and I'd die
sprawled out in a bloody splotch on cold,
slushy concrete, thinking about an ugly
pair of pink cowboy boots...

She breaks down, sobbing uncontrollably. Dex goes to her, sweeping her quivering body into his embrace, hugging her fiercely to him, clinging to her as though she were life itself. He too begins to weep.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

Her hand comes up to wipe his face, moving caressingly along his cheek. Their wet eyes lock on each other, in intense silent closeness, breathing together in jerky, difficult gasps. Each expectant but hesitant. The tenseness of their ordeal, the raw extremity of their frayed emotions sweeps over them, taunting the spectre of death with the most primal act of life and plunges them into a fervoured sexual excitation.

Dex cups Syd's face firmly, almost savagely in his hands. His lips crush down on hers. Almost immediately he backs off, cowed by some vague, frightened sense of propriety or guilt. But Syd pulls him back.

SYD

(imploringly)

Please....

In a wild rush of adrenalin and instinct, the two hungrily kiss, slowly sinking back on the couch out of view. THE CAMERA PANS AND PULLS IN ON GAIL'S PHOTO...and the gun lying beside it...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DEX'S OFFICE - CLOSE ON GAIL'S PHOTO - LATER

....as a HAND ENTERS FRAME, picking up the gun lying next to the photograph. CAMERA PANS UP TO DEX, staring down at the picture. He glances over to...

DEX'S POV - SYDNEY

...peacefully asleep on the office couch...

BACK TO SCENE

...as Dex sits at his desk, taking a pen and writing on a note pad...

CLOSE ON PAD

...as Dex writes...

DEX(VO)

Dear Sydney...with a "y" instead of an "i"...

Thanks for understanding...

AS THE VOICE-OVER CONTINUES, we...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DEX'S OFFICE - CLOSE ON NOTE PAD

...the NOTE is now completed and lying near Gail's picture...CAMERA PANS TO SYD, still sleeping on the couch, now alone in the office...

DEX(VO)

"for being the one bit of clarity and
sanity in an ever-darkening dream..."

EXT. MAINWARING ESTATE - NIGHT

...its Christmas lights aglow. A POLICE CAR is parked outside...

DEX(VO)

(continuing)

"...when you read this, the nightmare will be over..."

ANGLE ON DRIVEWAY SHRUBBERY

Dex is concealed there, watching the front door...

DEX(VO)

"...the rage spent...and then, God willing, peace..."

THE FRONT DOOR to the house opens and Cobb and Ulmer step out onto the porch with a pale and drawn Mrs. Mainwaring, still dressed in black.

CLOSE ON FRONT PORCH

...as the cops take their leave...

MAINWARING

(cold imperiousness)

Whatever Bernard did, I'm sure, was in defense of himself or trying to protect...

(falters)

Cookie...I told you this Cornell person harassed my daughter earlier tonight... You said he's a murderer...

COBB

No, Ma'am...we didn't say that, exactly.

MAINWARING

(sharply)

Suspect then! As if you needed more proof! Instead of intruding on my grief, gentlemen, I suggest you go find him.

COBB

Yes, Ma'am, we'll...

She enters the house and shuts the door on them.

COBB

(finishing)

...just go do that...

He gives Ulmer a weary shrug and Ulmer gives him a weary sigh. As they head for their car, THE CAMERA PANS TO THE SHRUBBERY...DEX IS NO LONGER THERE.

INT. MAINWARING STUDY - CLOSE ON FISH AQUARIUM - NIGHT

...as the fish glide silently by in the lighted tank...A DOORKNOB TURNS... The study door, reflected in the aquarium glass, opens and Mrs. Mainwaring enters and goes to her desk. She softly sobs....

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

DEX(OS)

"Shall we play the wantons with our woes
And make some pretty match with shedding tears."

CAMERA PULLS BACK TO AN EASY CHAIR, in front of the aquarium, as Dex pops his head around the chair. His face is dotted with sweat...

ANOTHER ANGLE

Dex rises from the chair, moving unsteadily toward the desk. The room is lit only by the glowing fish tanks about the room. Their chiaroscuro patterns play along Mrs. Mainwaring's wan face, as she stares up at the intruder, eerily accentuating her haughty beauty. She starts to open a drawer as Dex approaches. He pulls Bernard's pistol from his overcoat and levels it at her.

DEX

I wouldn't...

MAINWARING

(backs her hand from the
drawer)

Does it really matter, Professor Cornell?
Don't you plan on killing me in any event?

The tears still staining her pale cheeks, Mrs. Mainwaring resumes her cool restraint. Her blunt assessment of his intentions unnerves Dex slightly, forcing him to confront the immediate reality of the moment...that he is actually going to deliberately take another person's life...

MAINWARING

I didn't kill Nick, Professor. Or your wife. Or you.

DEX

Not for lack of trying.

MAINWARING

Surely, you didn't really believe my poor deluded daughter?

DEX

Why not? Older women seem to take a fancy to Nick. My wife. You were certainly generous to him. Maybe he got his scholarship for services rendered.

MAINWARING

(rising angrily)

Don't talk about him like that!

DEX

(hotly)

Why not? Why else would you bust up his romance with Cookie? Tell me! I'd really like to know! What did you think I knew about him? What's in his past you're so afraid of? What was he to you?!

CONTINUED

MAINWARING

MY SON!

The words wrench from her like bitter poison. Dex reacts in dumbfounded silence, staring at her in dazed confusion. Mrs. Mainwaring's imperious facade crumbles. A flood of quiet tears wash down her elegant cheeks. She sinks back into her chair.

MAINWARING

Cookie was his sister...

DEX

(quiet disbelief)

Your son?...But ...But his father...
The man who murdered your husband...

MAINWARING

...Was also my husband. My real husband.
Abandoned, along with Nick, twenty years
ago...The Sixties, Professor...Communes,
free spirits, free love, naive idealism...
Mistakes of youth. Erased, like mistakes
should be...for a better choice...for a
better chance....

DEX

Mainwaring...Why didn't you divorce Nick's
father?

MAINWARING

I wasn't about to lose the security of
the Mainwaring money and name...a name
intolerant of scandal...by revealing
the indiscretions of my past, Professor.

(wistful regret)

But the past isn't left behind so easily.
I don't know how he found me after all
those years, Nick's father...He was
sitting right there when I came in that
night.

(points to Dex's chair)

He'd already told my husband...

(bitter amusement)

...my "other" husband...all about me.
There was a scene. Words. Ugly words.
Whore. Bigamy. Jail...Disinherited.

(abrupt frankness)

I pulled the gun from this drawer and
shot them both dead...The fathers of
my children. It was for the children,
I did it. To protect them. To protect
what was mine.

DEX

The break-in four years ago...just a hoax?

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

MAINWARING

Arranged with the help of Bernard. Even then he'd do anything for me. The gun was placed in Lang's hand...

DEX

And his son in your care...The salve for your conscience...

MAINWARING

My son too. And my only guilt about the past. Even though he could never know the truth, despite the danger of exposure, I wanted him near me, wanted to get to know him, give him the chance I denied him so many years before...

(to Dex)

You never really knew a thing, did you?

(weary laugh)

We've been at cross purposes tonight, Professor. Suspecting each other unjustly.

Dex stands, listening tensely to all this, realizing that if it's true, his last hours have been wasted pursuing a false trail.

DEX

(in uncertain denial)

I don't believe this!

He jerks the gun up, aiming it at her. She stares at him in hollow, numb indifference.

MAINWARING

(a broken woman)

Do you really think I care what you believe?

Dex slowly lowers his gun. He knows the woman has told the truth. Mainwaring turns from him, swiveling in her chair and staring stoically at the lighted fish tank behind her.

DEX

(desperately)

But who killed Nick? Who killed me?

Mainwaring doesn't answer, just stares at the fish.

DEX

(hoarse whisper)

He was your son. Don't you even care?

She says nothing. Dex, his face a mask of pained defeat, turns and heads for the door.

ON MAINWARING

...still watching the fish in the tank in silent calm. She reaches into the desk drawer.

...at the French doors. He hears the distinctive CLICK of a gun behind him and wheels wildly about. Before he can even aim, A SHOT resounds in the room. Dex blinks in startled shock.

QUICK CUT TO:

FISH AQUARIUM

BLOOD splats across the glass. The fish swim calmly through the soft, glowing, silent water. THERE IS A THUD. CAMERA PANS TO FLOOR...to the HEM OF A BLACK DRESS, THE BLACK-STOCKINGED LEGS IN BLACK HIGH HEELS sprawled awkwardly on the carpet. Also lying there, completing the black ensemble is a SMALL BLACK, SMOKING PISTOL.

INT. DEX'S OFFICE - CLOSE-UP - GAIL'S PHOTO - NIGHT

A DOOR CLICKS. CAMERA SWINGS AROUND TO THE OFFICE DOOR. A weary, dejected Dex staggers in, leaning his back against the door, slamming it shut. He glances glazedly about the room. The couch is empty. Syd has left. Dex weaves to the desk. The note he left her is gone too.

He glances up...at Gail's picture...and the sorrow and abject despair sweep across his face. He sinks in the chair, head in hands, softly weeping. He has failed utterly and hopelessly. He'll die and the truth and answers and the revenge will die with him. But the murderer will live.

Dex pounds his desk in futile, desperate anger. In lost fury, his arm sweeps across the desk, scattering the stacks of papers and books there. He pushes back on his desk, the castors on his chair sliding him over to a wall where, in his disconsolate rage, he overturns a bookshelf. He lurches from the chair and, grabbing one of its arms, sends it careening into a corner, upsetting the wastebasket.

He tosses cushions from the couch, rips more books from the shelves. He yanks the window blinds, tearing them down...unveiling the cracked, blood-stained window. Dex, sweating, breathing in tortured jerks, stares at the crimson stain in wild-eyed agitation...as though the bloody smear were taunting him. With a choked, wailing sob, he kneels down in the debris at his feet and, picking up one of the books, flings it with violent accuracy. It CRASHES through the stained, cracked glass, sending shattered shards spraying everywhere.

Dex suddenly clutches at his stomach, gasping in pain. The cold wind whistles through the broken glass like the wail of the dead. Dex weakly crawls to the desk, pulling himself up it, his shaky hand reaching for Hal's plain-wrap scotch there. He grabs it and, screwing off the lid, gulps some down. His laboured breathing slowly subsides to normal. He takes another swig...and slowly lowers the bottle.

There is a strange confused expression on his face. He licks his lips curiously. Suddenly reanimated, he scrambles among the strewn papers on the floor around his desk, searching for something. He finds it. HIS COFFEE CUP.

CLOSE ON DEX

...examining the mug curiously...a disturbing look of dark realization in his eyes...

BACK TO SCENE

Dex uncovers the phone from beneath the rubble. Wincing from a sharp spasm, he shakily dials. WE HEAR IT RING in rhythmmed accompaniment to Dex's staccato breathing as he waits. THEN A VOICE..."Hello?"

DEX
(weakly)
It's Dex...I need you...

INT. DEX'S OFFICE - ON DOOR - LATER

A MAN'S SHADOW looms in the opaque glass of the door window. A CLICK, the knob spins and the door opens, pushing aside scattered papers and books in its arc. Hal enters, looking about the dark disarrayed room in concerned, hesitant confusion.

HAL
Dex...?

He closes the door, the wind moans and sweeps through the open window. Hal shivers.

HAL
Dex?

He sees him...a dark figure huddled in the far corner on his desk chair.

ANOTHER ANGLE

...as Hal approaches his friend. Dex sits slumped in the folds of his overcoat, his head on his chest, eyes closed.

HAL
Dex...Dex?

He shakes him lightly. Dex's head jerks up abruptly. His eyes pop open, his hand snaps up, holding Bernard's gun...the barrel pointed wildly in Hal's startled face. Hal jumps back.

DEX
(speaks with some difficulty)
No, Hal...not dead yet.

Dex's face is drenched in sweat. In his other hand, he holds Hal's scotch bottle. He takes a swig from it. Hal sits on the cushionless sofa.

HAL
(points to the gun)
Where'd you get that thing...Where you been, Dex?

CONTINUED

DEX

Spending a long night in Hell, Hal...
Facing a lot of demons, some my own...
I'm not much of a detective, Hal, but
I figured out a few things...

HAL

Such as?

Dex, despite his obvious physical weariness, seems tense and keyed-up.

DEX

You're never more alive than when you're
on the edge of death...

(swig of scotch)

Your senses, your whole being, fires with
vividness, an almost visionary clarity.
You're aware of, remember the most minor
details about the most insignificant things.
Things from long ago. Things you'd forgotten.
Things you invariably don't think about at all.
Like this Scotch. Now it's cheap. But it
doesn't taste at all like the stuff you poured
me the other day...probably because that Scotch
was spiked.

(levels gun at Hal)

It was you, Hal. You poisoned me. It was you.

HAL

(nervously staring at the gun)

You don't know what you're saying, Dex.
You're not holding up real good.

DEX

(growling vehemently)

I'll outlive you!

He throws something over on the couch. His coffee mug. Hal picks
it up and examines it.

HAL'S POV

...inside the cup, on the bottom, is a small RESIDUE OF THE LUMINOUS TOXIN,
visibly glowing in the dark room.

BACK TO SCENE

Hal looks up at Dex. He's caught and he knows it.

DEX

Where'd you get the stuff anyway?

HAL

Stole it from the Med Center. The night
I was up there with Elaine. She went
off on a call. Left her keys behind.

CONTINUED

DEX

I'm getting real tired of asking this question...But why?

HAL

The book.

DEX

(dull uncomprehension)

What?

HAL

Lang's book.

DEX

(again)

What?

HAL

(rising, impatient agitation)

Lang's novel! I wanted Lang's novel!
I was going to pass it off as my own!

Dex just stares at Hal in numb disbelief. It unnerves Hal.

HAL

Christ, Dex! It's brilliant. A surefire bestseller. You would have known it, if you'd read it! Thirty seconds! Thirty goddamn seconds after I gave you the drink...

(smashes mug on the floor)

You tell me you didn't even read it!

(anguished guilt)

God, Dex, you think I wanted to kill you?

DEX

Then why did you?

Hal stares out the broken window, beyond the bloodstained jagged edges, numbly absorbing Dex's words. He shivers in the cold.

HAL

My book was going nowhere...Everything that was good about it, you'd helped me with...the plot, structure...But I couldn't make it come alive...I was in here one afternoon working on it...or trying to... Lang's manuscript was lying on your desk. I about laughed when I realized what it was... I knew the kid was an overachiever, but really...I thought I'd read a few pages, get a few yucks...

(pause)

I suppose I'd made up my mind what I was going to do before I ever got to the last page...

CONTINUED

DEX

That good?

HAL

It inspires that angry kind of envy that makes murder easy...

(bitter hostility)

I mean here I was sweating my balls off trying to finish some mediocre piece of tripe just to get some underpaid teaching position and some little hot-snot kid, carrying a full classload, casually knocks off a minor masterpiece in a semester...I wasn't sure I could do it, Dex, you know? As much as I wanted to. I was scared stiff. Remember that morning in the john? My case of the jitters. It wasn't over any goddamn promotion. But he was such a smug little shit...I didn't feel a thing. Just over the edge and bon voyage. No guilt. Nothing.

DEX

What about me?

HAL

(defensively)

I thought you'd read it, Dex.

DEX

(smoldering)

Gail didn't read the damn thing!

HAL

Yes, she had. She was...

(wildly accusatory)

That was your fault! I got all the other copies out of Lang's apartment that morning. I tried to throw yours in the trash to pick up later. But you went and stuck it in your damn briefcase!

DEX

(remembering)

And I left it at Gail's...

HAL

I saw it there when Elaine and I took her home last night...But I couldn't do anything with Elaine there, so I went back this afternoon. I didn't think she was home. I'd called. Got the machine. She was asleep...the damn manuscript there in her lap...

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

DEX

(coldly)

You burned it. She tried to stop you.
It was you in the house this afternoon.
Tonight in the theatre...

HAL

(slowly falling apart)

I thought you found out something! God-
dammit, Dex! You were dead. Dead! But
you just wouldn't lie down! Christ, I
didn't mean for...It...Everything...
Everything just got out of hand...

Dex starts to laugh. Silently at first, a weary disbelieving grin that
shakes his body, then a breathy, jerky chuckle that crescendoes into a
gut-wrenching, roaring, almost hysterical, bellow.

HAL

(unnerved, petulant)

What are you laughing at...What are you
laughing at...?

Dex's laughter suddenly segues into a violent coughing spasm. He holds
his hand to his mouth, blood trickles over his palm. Hal tries to move
in. But Dex jerks up and backs him off with the gun. Dex takes a swig
of Scotch.

HAL

(a broken child)

Whattaya laughing for?

DEX

(sardonic)

'Cause it's funny...I'm dead. Five other
people are dead...because of somebody's
homework...somebody's lousy homework...

He laughs again...and a spasm of pain rips through him. His head sags,
his tired eyes blink furiously. He's weakening. And Hal knows it.

HAL

You don't understand, Dex. If I didn't do
it, there wasn't going to be any book, no
more money, no promotion...nothing...

DEX

And that was worth somebody's life?

HAL

My life! Yes! That's what I was fighting
for. It was my chance.

(moving stealthily to Dex)

You know how this mausoleum of higher
education dries you up, stifles your talent.
For God's sake, it happened to you!

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

Dex weaves rockily in his chair. Hal, wild and desperate, feverishly eyes the gun in Dex's hand.

DEX

No...I just quit on my talent. You had to steal another man's...

HAL

(crazed, bristling arrogance)
Some rich bitch's charity-case! Why should some coddled piece of scum from no where get all the breaks and not me?! What do you care about him? He was fucking your wife, for Christsakes! You oughta be glad I killed them!

DEX

(harshly)
And me too? Should I be grateful that? Another favour you did your pal?

HAL

(wildly)
It was my chance! Dammit, Dex! My chance!

DEX'S POV

...Hal, VERY BLURRY, moving toward him.

HAL

You know what it's like...the pressure...

Hal POPS BACK INTO FOCUS, just as he's reaching for the gun.

BACK TO SCENE

...as Dex snaps both his head and the gun up, stopping Hal short.

DEX

(grim smile)
Yeah...Publish or Perish. You Perish.

He pulls the trigger. The pistol barks. Hal jerks backwards from the impact of the bullet, sliding across the strewn books and papers, falling to the floor and slamming up against the desk in stunned surprise.

CLOSE ON GAIL'S PICTURE

As Hal hits up against the desk, it falls over -- face forward.

ON HAL

...stunned, wiping at his wet stained shirt and gazing dazedly at the blood transferred to his hand. The gun spits again. And Hal is hit a second time. He stares up at Dex.

ON DEX

...slouched in his desk chair, the sweat streaming down his face...an in-mask of determined vengeance. The gun fires again. And again...as the CAMERA PULLS IN CLOSE ON THE SMOKING BARREL.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. POLICE INTERROGATION ROOM - CLOSE ON WINDOW -DAWN

...the smoke of the gun becomes the FOGGED STEAM of a window. Outside, dawn's bleak light stretches across the snow-covered city.

CAMERA PULLS BACK. Dex stares out the window blankly, slumped in a straight-backed chair. THERE IS A CLICK. Dex wearily turns.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Cobb has turned off the tape recorder. Both he and Ulmer stare at Dex in solemn, uncomfortable sympathy.

DEX

...just somebody's homework...that's all...

There is a KNOCK on the door. Ulmer crosses the room and answers it. An OFFICER stands there with an uneasy Sydney. Seeing Dex, she rushes to him, kneeling beside his chair and hugging him, tears filling her eyes. Dex smiles a wan smile at her.

SYD

I didn't know where else to go...

Cobb comes over.

COBB

Look...There...a...anything we can do for you...?

Dex looks up at him for a moment, thinking...

DEX

As a matter of fact...

EXT. FAIRGROUNDS - PANORAMIC AERIAL VIEW

The day has turned out to be not so bad after all. The sun peeks through the grey winter gloom, shining down on a FAIRGROUNDS. All closed up. All the booths boarded...the rides covered and shut down.

EXCEPT ONE. A RICKETY, BUT GAILY-COLOURED, FERRISWHEEL IS SLOWLY REVOLVING...

THE CAMERA MOVES DOWN AND IN CLOSE ON THE WHEEL, PICKING UP AND STAYING ON DEX AND SYD, in a car making its upward climb.

The old car rocks and creaks in the wind. Dex, pale and weak, huddled in his overcoat, stares downward in fascinated awe. He looks up and smiles a tired smile at Syd. She smiles back and Dex's gaze returns below. Their car reaches the apex of the Ferriswheel and starts its descent.

THE CAMERA REMAINS AT THE TOP as several empty cars rock by...then it PANS UPWARD...into the clouds, into the burgeoning SUNLIGHT...as it breaks through the dismal grey and fans out, its warm glow glistening brightly across the winter sky.

FADE OUT.

THE END