

OPEN ON:

THE SIDE OF A BED.

From this low angle, all we can tell is that this bed is empty, it has nice sheets, and it is neatly made.

For a long beat, this is how the bed remains.

Then PAUL and LEXY RANSOME fly in and start messing it up.

PAUL
God, I'm sorry.

LEXY
No no, I'm sorry.

Paul's older than Lexy, maybe by 10 years or so. They try to have a conversation while they rip off each other's clothes.

LEXY
I don't know why I get like that--

PAUL
C'mon, I'm the asshole here.

LEXY
Yeah, that's what I'm saying -- I don't know why I get like that when I already know you're the asshole here.

Paul smiles. Lexy kisses him -- but notices his eyes look heavy. She pauses.

LEXY
Wait a minute... this isn't the valium apologizing, is it?

Paul shakes his head. He tries to kiss her back but she pulls away.

LEXY
Because an apology doesn't mean anything if you can't remember it the next morning.

PAUL
I'll remember. I promise.

But she looks dubious. So Paul reaches over to his nightstand and grabs some post-it notes. He writes out "I'm sorry" and sticks it on his nightstand.

Then he writes another "I'm sorry" and sticks it on the headboard of the bed. Then he writes another one and sticks it on Lexy's shoulder. She laughs.

SUDDENLY, FOR NO APPARENT REASON AT ALL -- our view of Lexy and Paul is partially obstructed by the bed. We're much closer to the floor now, directly below Lexy's nightstand.

PAUL

You know, while I'm handing these out, I should just go ahead and apologize now for the next time, too.

LEXY

For the next time you're a jerk, you mean?

PAUL

Yeah. This way, when the time comes-- and we both know it will -- then we can just jump right to this part.

LEXY

(kissing him lower)
Okay. Apology accepted.

PAUL

And I should probably apologize for the next time I get distracted at work and come home late. You deserve better than that.

LEXY

You're right, I do.
(kissing lower)
C'mon, what else you got? Cause I'll keep going if you do.

PAUL

Okay. I apologize in advance for... not being more sensitive to your feelings.

(Lexy kisses lower)

For... forgetting our anniversary.

(Lexy kisses lower)

For... letting the kitchen garbage pile up.

(Lexy's head disappears;

Paul's eyes flutter)

For...how quickly this may be over.

Lexy laughs. Paul turns his head...and NOTICES US WATCHING for the first time. He makes a face.

PAUL

Great. What do you want?

THEN, FROM HIS POINT OF VIEW -- he sees --

LORELEI, a four-year-old Rhodesian Ridgeback, lying on the carpet, staring earnestly up at them. She wags her tail.

PAUL
Lexy, for crying out loud...

LEXY
Ah, leave her alone, she's just minding her own business.

PAUL
No, she's not. She's definitely minding our business.

Lorelei starts at Paul. Then she scratches her ear. Then she starts licking her privates.

PAUL
Okay, now she's mocking me.

Lorelei peeks up at him curiously. Paul leans off the bed, his face only a few inches from Lorelei's.

PAUL
I am going to do unbelievably dirty things to your owner for the next seven to eight minutes and there's nothing you can do about it.
(in a googie baby voice)
No there isn't! Nuh-unh! There's nothing you can do! So how about you just stop judging me?

Lorelei wags her tail and jumps up on the bed -- clearly, Paul's voice means it's playtime.

Lexy giggles, but Paul grabs Lorelei by the collar and pulls her off the bed. He loses his balance a bit as he stands up.

PAUL
Alright, you're out. Vamoose. Go watch TV downstairs for awhile.

Paul walks over to the door and Lorelei follows, her tail wagging. Maybe they're going for a walk!

But as soon as she gets INTO THE HALL --

Paul SLAMS the door behind her. Lorelei's tail immediately droops. She turns, sniffs under the door. Then she SCRATCHES at it with her paw.

PAUL'S VOICE
Dog! Scram! You're damaging my mojo.

Lorelei cocks her head at the door, then SCRATCHES it again.

PAUL'S VOICE

Hey, dummy -- go find the Kitty-cat! Where's the kitty-cat?

Lorelei's ears perk up and she darts off, BARKING--

--as she flies down the stairs -- jumps up on the couch -- and looks eagerly out the front window. She inspects every inch of the yard, her tail wagging a mile a minute.

But there's no kitty-cat out here at all. She's been duped.

She takes one last look around, then gets down and heads over to her dog bowl. She sniffs it once, and again for confirmation -- nope, still nothing in there.

Then she meanders over to the foot of the stairs and looks up at the bedroom door hopefully. It's still closed. So she sighs, lays down, and rests her head on her paws.

But she does not close her eyes. She just looks around the house.

FADE OUT.

OVER BLACK:

THE DOGS OF BABEL

STILL BLACK:

PAUL'S VOICE

For documentation purposes, here's what I can remember about that day.

FADE IN:

ON A CLASSROOM --

Paul is lecturing to 20 college students. On the board behind him are words like: PHONETICS. SEMANTICS. PSYCHOLINGUISTICS.

PAUL'S VOICE

I remember teaching.

Paul prattles on about something or other. The class, for the most part, looks pretty bored, and one STUDENT is asleep in the front row.

Not that any of that matters to Paul -- he's clearly one of those professors who gets so involved in a lecture that he forgets anyone else is even in the room.

A STUDENT raises her hand. Paul, four feet away but right in the middle of a thought, doesn't even notice.

IN PAUL'S OFFICE -- LATER --

Paul sits in front of a MUTED television monitor, apparently studying nonverbal communication. Every time the woman on screen blinks, or gestures, or smiles, Paul scribbles furiously on his legal pad.

PAUL'S VOICE

I remember working.

One of his STUDENTS knocks on the door, but Paul doesn't hear her and doesn't turn. The student clears her throat. But Paul's a hundred miles away. He never even looks up.

TWO HOURS LATER --

The room is dark except for a desk lamp and the eerie gray static from the TV's. But Paul is still poring over papers, lost in thought.

PAUL'S VOICE

*I remember calling Lexy to tell her
I'd be late for dinner.*

He looks up, maybe for the first time in hours, and sees that it's dark outside. Then he glances at the clock: it's 8:20.

He grimaces, then grabs the phone and dials. It rings until the machine picks up -- *You've reached Paul and Lexy, we can't come to the phone right now, leave a message* -- followed by a BEEP.

PAUL

Well it's a good thing I already
apologized for this last night,
Lex, because I completely lost
track of time here and--

The answering machine CLICKS off suddenly when somebody picks up the phone on the other end.

A MALE VOICE

Ransome residence.

PAUL

Ransome residence? Who is this?

A MALE VOICE

(beat)
Who's this?

PAUL

This is Paul. You're in my house.
Now who is this?

A MALE VOICE

Are you the husband?

PAUL

Am I the husband? Yeah, you're
goddamn right I'm-- wait a minute.
Oh god, what's wrong? Where's Lexy?

THE MALE VOICE

Sir... there's been an accident.

INSIDE PAUL'S CAR -- TEN MINUTES LATER --

As he frantically turns on his street and speeds to his house.

PAUL'S VOICE

*Then I only remember not
remembering anything.*

IN HIS DRIVEWAY -- there's an ambulance and four police cars.
Paul's breath catches in his throat.

He SCREECHES to a halt, flies out of his car, hurries to his
front door. Time seems to SLOW. Things become disoriented.

INSIDE THE HOUSE -- five police officers stop what they're
doing and stare at Paul as he enters. Paul looks around at
them wildly, then SAYS SOMETHING THAT CANNOT BE HEARD.

An OFFICER starts toward him wearily. His MOUTH MOVES but we
can't hear what he's saying either. He grabs Paul's arm, but
Paul pushes him away.

IN THE BACKYARD -- there seems to be an even larger assembly
of officers. Paul hurries toward them, maneuvering around the
cops inside, who try to block his path as best they can.

PAUL'S VOICE

*(with the same detached
calm as before)*

*But here is what we know to be
true, those of us who can speak to
tell the story.*

Paul finally makes it OUTSIDE -- where a group of officers
stop their conversation to stare at him --

-- while two EMT's and a PHOTOGRAPHER are gathered around the
large trunk of a tree, examining something at its base.

PAUL'S VOICE

We know that at some point in the late afternoon or early evening, my wife Lexy climbed up into an apple tree in our backyard.

-- then the photographer moves to get a better angle, opening up a line of sight for Paul to see --

-- Lexy's lifeless body, lying twisted on the ground.

Paul sinks to his knees.

PAUL'S VOICE

And we know that at some point afterwards, she fell out of the tree, snapped her neck, and died instantly.

A creased, middle-aged Detective named ANTHONY STACK notices Paul and SNAPS HIS FINGERS at the paramedics. They quickly fish out a white blanket and throw it over Lexy, covering her.

As Detective Stack walks toward him, Paul pries his eyes from the body and looks up, higher and higher, at the apple tree above her. It's large, 20 feet at least, with thick branches and a ripe crop of red apples. It makes Paul FLINCH.

FLASH UP IN THE TREE -- (EARLIER)

-- Lexy, suspended in the branches, picks an apple and looks down at her empty backyard. As her foot slips--

FLASH TO AN UNFAMILIAR DINING ROOM -- (EARLIER)

An older couple -- MR. AND MRS. PERASSO -- silently eat their chicken cacciatore.

PAUL'S VOICE

We know that the Perasso's, our next door neighbors, were the ones who discovered Lexy's body.

A big bay window looks into their backyard, and outside, a light on the house next door seems to be malfunctioning, systematically turning ON, then OFF, then ON again, creating a kind of decelerated strobe effect.

In addition, a truly chilling sound comes from the same house -- something between a coyote's HOWL and a dog's WAIL. Whatever it is, the noise is loud and it's unrelenting.

Finally, Mr. Perasso slams down his fork after a particularly loud HOWL. Then he silently stalks out to their BACKYARD --

PAUL'S VOICE

*And we know that Lorelei, her dog,
was the one who summoned them.*

--and climbs up on a small bench to look over the fence --

INTO THE RANSOME BACKYARD --

-- where Lorelei stands perfectly still, barely even moving her head while she HOWLS.

Then the motion sensor light switches OFF and Lorelei springs into action, scurrying across the yard and turning it right back ON. And just as quickly, she freezes again.

Mr. Perasso looks genuinely puzzled for a moment, until Lorelei starts YELPING again and his face clouds up...

BACK INSIDE THE PERASSO HOUSE --

Mrs. Perasso eats her chicken and wearily watches her husband yell obscenities over the fence. But then, mid-yell --

-- Mr. Perasso suddenly careens off the bench back into his own yard. Then he glances into the house, and the ashen look on his face makes Mrs. Perasso drop her fork.

FLASH OUTSIDE THE RANSOME HOUSE -- (EARLIER)

Two cop cars pull up, followed closely by an ambulance.

IN THE BACKYARD -- the EMT's see the body and hurry toward it.

PAUL'S VOICE

*We know that by the time the police
arrived, Lorelei had wedged herself
underneath Lexy and was unwilling
to leave her side.*

There is a sad WHINE coming from under the body.

IN THE RANSOME BACKYARD -- (BACK TO PRESENT)

Paul as before, crumpled to his knees, Det. Stack approaching. Paul looks over to the side of the yard, where a FEMALE OFFICER tries to corral Lorelei. But the dog keeps her distance, still half WHIMPERING, half WAILING, occasionally making a mad dash toward Lexy's body before she's headed off.

PAUL'S VOICE

*And we know that Lorelei, like me,
could not be consoled afterwards.*

Paul, watching her, looks like he's going to be sick.

IN A BATHROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Paul leans over the toilet and vomits so hard that it's a struggle for him to catch his breath.

IN FRONT OF THE RANSOME HOUSE --

The twinkling lights from the ambulance and police cars have attracted a small crowd, hovering at a respectful distance. A YOUNG OFFICER stands guard outside the front door.

When a middle-aged couple, MATTHEW and ELEANOR RICE, frantically arrive on the scene, the Officer watches out of the corner of his eye as they converse with some onlookers.

Then, as Eleanor starts to cry, Matthew walks up to him.

MATTHEW RICE

Is Paul in there?

(off his confusion)

The husband, is he inside?

YOUNG OFFICER

I think so. But I'm sorry, I can't let anyone through--

MATTHEW RICE

Can you at least tell him that Matthew and Eleanor are out here?

(off his hesitation)

Officer. Please. We're their best friends.

The Officer considers him. Then he waves another COP over.

IN THE BACKYARD -- SAME

A Female Cop is on her knees, trying to calm Lorelei down. But the dog still keeps her distance.

Paul watches them wearily from the porch. But when Lorelei starts to CRY again, Paul just turns away. He heads back into the house when the Young Officer appears in the doorway. They regard each other.

OUTSIDE PAUL'S HOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER

The Young Officer trudges back out on the front stoop, where Matthew and Eleanor wait for him.

YOUNG OFFICER

Okay, he asked me to tell you how much he appreciates you coming...

(he sighs)

...but that he'll call you tomorrow.

Matthew just stares at him, confused.

MATTHEW RICE

You told him we were out here?

YOUNG OFFICER

(wincing)

Yes. He was very clear.

(beat)

He'll call you tomorrow.

Matthew nods and looks away. Eleanor starts to cry again.

IN THE RANSOME BACKYARD -- LATER --

Paul stands on the porch and watches the EMT's take Lexy's body away. His eyes are glassy, though, as if he's unable to actually see anything.

PAUL'S VOICE

But what else do we know?

Paul doesn't seem to notice Detective Stack approach.

DETECTIVE STACK

I'm very sorry for your loss, Mr. Ransome. Accidents happen all the time, and there's never any rhyme or reason to them.

(off Paul's silence)

We... found a basket nearby. So our assumption is that she was picking apples and just lost her footing.

(off more silence)

Is that... is that something she did often? Picking apples, I mean?

Paul doesn't look at Stack, but he slowly nods.

PAUL

She makes this pie... this fresh apple pie. And I've warned her before -- she's a grown woman, she shouldn't be...

He trails off. Stack nods sympathetically.

DETECTIVE STACK

Alright. Listen, I'm gonna have a few more questions for you, but I'll just come back in a couple days after you've had some time to--

PAUL
 (calmly interrupting)
 If it's all the same to you, I'd
 rather get it over with now.

Stack stares at him. Clearly, he doesn't think that's a very good idea. But, with a sigh, he opens up his notebook.

DETECTIVE STACK
 Remember, these are just standard
 questions in cases like these, okay?
 (off Paul's nod)
 Alright. How would you describe
 your wife's mood as of late?
 (off his hesitation)
 What I'm asking is -- did she seem
 depressed? Or moody? You guys been
 fighting lately, anything like that?

PAUL
 No, not at all. Things have been
 normal. Everything's been fine--
 (he freezes)
 Wait. I mean, we did have an
 argument yesterday, yeah. But...we
 made up. It wasn't anything that...

DETECTIVE STACK
 Okay. I wouldn't worry about it.

But Paul stares at him, his mind reeling.

PAUL
 Jesus. You think she might've...

DETECTIVE STACK
 No, I don't -- I told you, these
 are just standard questions. We're
 actually very confident that--

PAUL
 You're "confident"? But you're not
 certain?

DETECTIVE STACK
 Well, the thing is, without a
 witness it's really hard to...
 (trails off, then:)
 Listen. We're certainly confident.

But Paul's obviously troubled now. Stack grimaces.

DETECTIVE STACK

I can get into specifics if you want, but based on where she fell from, based on how she landed, based on what you've told me... this is open and shut, Paul, trust me.

PAUL

Detective. It can't be open and shut unless you're certain.

Stack looks back at him sympathetically. He sighs.

DETECTIVE STACK

Okay. I'm certain.

Paul nods. Stack puts a hand on his shoulder and Paul allows himself to be led back into the house.

PAUL'S VOICE

This is how we know that Lexy's death was an accident.

THE FRONT OF THE HOUSE -- LATER --

A weary Detective Stack gets in his car, the only one left in the driveway now.

He sits quietly for a minute before turning on the engine.

IN PAUL'S BATHROOM -- LATER

Paul's taking a shower. The glass doors and mirrors are all fogged up. He's been here a long time.

PAUL'S VOICE

But there's something else that we know. That I know.

THE NEXT MORNING --

Paul lies awake in his bed. There's a SCRATCH at the door. Paul tries to ignore it, but Lorelei keeps SCRATCHING.

Paul reluctantly gets up and opens the door. Lorelei flies past Paul into the room, tail wagging, obviously looking for Lexy. Paul tries to ignore her and heads DOWNSTAIRS --

--where he looks around the empty house. Lorelei gallops past him, over to Lexy's 20 GALLON FISH TANK in the living room.

She SCRATCHES the base of it. Paul glares at her. She SCRATCHES it again, then glances back at Paul.

She SCRATCHES it once more. Is she really telling him...?

Paul sighs, then walks over to the tank, opens up the cabinet beneath it, and pulls out some fish food. He drops a pinch of food into the water.

IN THE TANK -- the fish swarm the surface. Paul stares at them, his face inches from the glass. He looks exhausted, like he didn't sleep a wink last night. He SIGHS.

PAUL
(sweetly, w/o animosity)
I always hated your goddamn fish,
Lexy.

He drops another pinch of food into the tank, then heads into the kitchen and pulls a box of cereal out of the cupboard.

Lorelei, still sitting in front of the fish tank, SCRATCHES at it again. Paul clenches his jaw.

PAUL
I just fed the fucking fish, dog.

He grabs the dog food from the pantry and scoops some out.

PAUL
Here, you eat, too. It'll take your
mind off things.

But Lorelei doesn't move. She SCRATCHES the fish tank again. Paul, annoyed now, starts to yell at her--

--but stops. Something catches his eye. On the stove in the kitchen there's a:

DIRTY FRYING PAN. Paul walks over to it.

He dips his finger into the juices at the bottom of the pan. Stares at it.

Walks over to the fridge and opens it up.

Looks behind a jar of applesauce on one shelf, then two bunches of grapes on another. Nothing much is behind either.

Paul is perplexed. The doorbell RINGS.

15 MINUTES LATER --

Matthew and Eleanor Rice are in the living room, holding hands, here to comfort Paul.

But Paul's in the kitchen brandishing the frying pan, a halfway manic look on his face.

MATTHEW RICE

What do you mean she cooked your steak?

PAUL

I mean I brought a giant porterhouse home for this weekend. For Sunday. I always grill on Sunday. You know that. She knows that. Everyone knows that.

(off their stares)

So why would she just cook my Sunday steak up on a Thursday afternoon?

MATTHEW RICE

Maybe... she got hungry?

PAUL

Oh yeah, she got hungry. She thought she'd have a little snack before dinner, so she fried up a 22 ounce Porterhouse.

Matt and Eleanor trade a look.

PAUL

But that's not even the weird part. Do you want to know the weird part? The dishwasher is empty.

(off their blank stares)

There's no plate. No silverware. No nothing.

MATTHEW RICE

Maybe she empt--

PAUL

No, I emptied it. The night before.

ELEANOR RICE

Maybe she washed them by hand?

PAUL

Lexy has never, ever washed anything by hand. She's put plastic forks in the dishwasher. I'm not even joking.

Matthew and Eleanor stare at him for a long beat.

PAUL

You're looking at me like I'm crazy. I'm not crazy.

(re: frying pan)

This is crazy. Don't you think this is crazy?

Off their reactions --

IN THE DRIVEWAY -- LATER

Matthew puts his arm around Eleanor as he leads her to the car. She starts to cry again.

PAUL'S VOICE

*We know that on the afternoon she
died, Lexy stood in our kitchen and
fried up a 22 ounce steak.*

BACK INSIDE --

Paul watches them go, then turns back to the kitchen.

PAUL'S VOICE

*And we know that afterwards, she
either ate the entire 22 ounce
steak with her fingers...*

Lorelei is by the fishtank again. She SCRATCHES it.

PAUL

Oh for christ's sake.
(off another SCRATCH)
Why are you doing that? What do
you want? You want to go outside?

He opens the back door. Lorelei just sits there and
SCRATCHES the fishtank again. Paul's getting frustrated.

PAUL

You want a treat? Is that it?

He gets a treat and gives it to Lorelei, who wags her tail.

PAUL

Great. Happy now?

But Lorelei SCRATCHES the fishtank again. Paul fumes.

PAUL

I don't know what that means.
Okay? I don't know what you're
trying to tell me. So knock it off.
(another SCRATCH)
Stop it. Do you hear me? Do not
do that--
(another SCRATCH)
Goddamit. Don't. Do. That.
(another SCRATCH)
Lorelei. No. No! No!

Lorelei stares up at him, sees how angry he is. He's clearly
about to blow a fuse. So Lorelei hesitates...

...and SCRATCHES the fishtank again.

Paul loses control and PUSHES THE WHOLE THING OVER.

Water pours out onto the carpet. Fish flop on the floor.

Lorelei calmly walks past Paul and grabs a BONE which had been wedged between the fish tank and the wall.

She brings it over to him and sets it down at his feet. He picks it up. It's not a dog bone.

It's the T-bone from a Porterhouse, all the meat gnawed off.

Lorelei happily wags her tail. Paul looks at her, stunned.

PAUL'S VOICE
...or she fried up the 22 ounce
steak and fed it to Lorelei.

One of the fish on the carpet stops flopping and dies.

PAUL'S BATHROOM -- DAY

Paul fiddles with his tie in the mirror. Lorelei watches from the bed. Paul doesn't pay her any attention.

PAUL'S VOICE
But so what, right? So what. This is
grief. This is what it does to you.

AT THE GRAVEYARD -- LATER

A PASTOR is reading from the Bible, but PAUL isn't listening. His face is clinical, detached.

PAUL'S VOICE
It makes you spend your days looking
for meaning in insignificant things.
In things that probably have no
meaning at all.

He stares at all the faces gathered around the casket. Watching who's crying. And who's not.

BACK AT PAUL'S HOUSE -- LATER

There are lots of people here for the post-funeral reception. Eleanor Rice is busy in the kitchen, laying out all the food.

Lorelei, meanwhile, is cowering under an end table in the den.

IN THE LIVING ROOM -- Paul still stares at the faces gathered around him. Matthew brings him a beer.

PAUL
Who are all these people?

MATTHEW RICE
I know, it's amazing. She had so many friends, didn't she?

A teary OLDER WOMAN materializes out of nowhere and throws her arms around Paul.

OLDER WOMAN
I'm so sorry, Paul. I just... I can't believe she's...
(breaking down)
Oh god, we're all gonna miss her so much! It's awful -- just awful! I brought a macaroni salad, I gave it to Eleanor!

Paul, clearly uncomfortable, pats her on the back before a nearby WOMAN leads her away, sobbing. Paul stares after them.

PAUL
I have no idea who that was.

MATTHEW RICE
Oh c'mon, even I recognize her and I only met her that once.
(off Paul's blank stare)
She's Lexy's aunt, man. Remember? Last Thanksgiving?

PAUL
Oh. Right.

Matthew takes a good look at Paul. He seems a little pale.

MATTHEW RICE
Listen... are you feeling okay?

Before he can answer, another group of friends and family line up to pay their respects. Paul greets them all politely but silently.

By the time they leave, Paul is sweating through his shirt. Matthew sees it and takes him by the arm.

MATTHEW RICE
C'mon. Let's take a breather.

IN THE KITCHEN -- LATER

Eleanor is busy organizing all the food and Matthew lends her a hand. But Paul just sits on a stool, staring out at the crowd in the living room.

PAUL

Who is that?

He points to a THIN GUY standing by the cheese plate.

ELEANOR RICE

You know, I'm not sure what his name is. That's his wife Alva next to him, though. Or wait... is it Alma?

(off his blank look)

They were clients of hers. I'm sure she told you about them -- they're the ones who lost their daughter last year, remember?

PAUL

No, I don't remember. How do you remember?

ELEANOR RICE

Lexy invited me to lunch with Alma... Alva?... a few months ago. Hand me those crackers, will you?

PAUL

How do you guys know all these people and I don't?

He stares out into the living room. Eleanor doesn't answer.

PAUL

When did I stop paying attention?

(beat)

What else did I miss?

Eleanor and Matt exchange a quiet glance. Paul doesn't notice, though -- he just points to a TALL RED-HAIRED WOMAN who's just walked in the front door.

Lorelei greets her, tail wagging, and the Woman kneels down to pet her. Paul openly stares.

PAUL

Who's that?

ELEANOR RICE

I don't know... listen, maybe you and Matthew should--

PAUL

Will you find out for me?

ELEANOR RICE

Yes, Paul, I'll find out for you.
Now why don't you two go upstairs
for a little while -- I've got
things under control in here.

Paul doesn't resist when Matt pulls him off of the stool and leads him up the staircase.

They walk into his bedroom. Matt motions toward the bed.

MATTHEW RICE

Go on, go ahead -- take a load off.

Paul does without argument. Lorelei wanders in and lays down in her normal spot near the closet.

MATTHEW RICE

So I'm gonna turn off the light
now. Try to get some rest, alright?

Paul nods, and Matthew flips off the light, shuts the door. Then he walks back downstairs, where Eleanor is waiting for him. Matt sighs.

MATTHEW RICE

He's losing it.

PAUL'S BEDROOM -- LATER

Paul stands in the dark room, watching through the window as all the cars pull away.

Paul turns to see Lorelei in her spot by the closet, as usual. But now she's laying on something yellow.

It's one of Lexy's sweaters. Paul takes it from Lorelei, brings it to his nose and smells it.

Then he hangs it carefully back up in the closet. He walks into the bathroom, splashes water on his face, stares at his reflection in the mirror.

FLASH UP IN THE TREE --

-- where Lexy, suspended in the branches, picks an apple and looks back at Paul, her expression unreadable--

--and then her face suddenly *DISTORTS UNRECOGNIZABLY*, as if the video of Paul's memory has just gone on the fritz, and as her foot slips and she starts to fall and --

FLASH BACK TO THE BATHROOM --

-- where Paul snaps out of it, freaked.

He dries his face off, then heads back into the bedroom --
 -- where Lorelei is curling up with the same yellow sweater
 as before. The hanger swings back and forth in the closet.
 This time Paul lets her keep it. He slowly walks over and
 lays down beside her.

PAUL
 You were there. What happened that
 afternoon, girl? What did I miss?

Their noses are only an inch apart, but they don't touch.

PAUL
 What'd you see? Hmmm? What did
 you see that day?

And at that moment, Lorelei SIGHS. It sounds heavy, and sad,
 and perfectly human. And then Paul notices that her eyes are
 wet -- if he didn't know better, it would appear that she'd
 been crying.

The combination is enough to completely freak Paul out.

HALLWAY -- LATER --

Lorelei wanders aimlessly down the hallway.

She glances in Paul's STUDY -- where she finds him sorting
 through books with titles like The Evolution of Communication
 and The Instinct of Language.

Paul doesn't notice her-- he's in his own world now. Lorelei
 watches for a bit, then gets bored and heads on down the hall.

PAUL'S KITCHEN -- LATE AT NIGHT

Paul, nose in another book, walks in and opens the fridge.

ON THE TV -- Letterman's doing a 'Stupid Pet Tricks' segment.
 A pot-bellied pig rides a skateboard across the stage.

IN THE KITCHEN -- Paul ignores the TV and manages to make
 himself a sandwich while he reads. But meanwhile--

ON THE TV -- a Boston Terrier is on now, cradled in her
 owner's arms. When the dog YELPS three times, it sounds
 remarkably like "I love you". The crowd eats it up.

PAUL -- sees the TV and almost drops his sandwich.

TO THE STUDY --

--where Paul roots around in the back of a desk drawer.

Finally he finds what he's looking for. He pulls out a tape recorder, then stands and starts pacing back and forth across the room.

Back and forth. Back and forth. Then he stops, clicks on the tape recorder.

PAUL

For documentation purposes, here's
what I can remember about that day.

CUTS OF PAUL -- animatedly talking into the recorder. We can see his mouth move but we don't hear him. Over this:

PAUL'S VOICE

So what else do we know?

Then, suddenly speaking into the recorder live --

PAUL

We know this: On the day Lexy died...
Lorelei was there. We know that she
saw things -- she knows things --
that we don't. That I don't.

He walks into the bedroom, where Lorelei is asleep on the bed.

PAUL'S VOICE

*It's too bad, then, that dogs
cannot talk. It's too bad that they
can't tell us what they know.*

She's dreaming, the way that dogs do -- her legs twitch as if she's running, and her barks come out as MUFFLED WHIMPERS. It seems less like a dream, more like a nightmare. Paul reaches out to touch her, and she stirs awake.

PAUL'S VOICE

*But yet -- somehow, we're able to
talk to them.*

They stare at each other. Then...

PAUL

Kitty-cat! Where's the kitty-cat?

Lorelei BARKS, jumps off the bed and hauls downstairs. Paul watches her go, then clicks on the recorder again.

PAUL

Somehow -- to a certain degree, at
least -- they're able to understand
us. But it's a one way street. We
haven't returned the favor.

He heads down into the living room, where Lorelei's at the window, furiously searching the backyard for a kitty-cat.

PAUL'S VOICE

So the question is -- whose fault is that? Theirs?

Paul looks out the window next to Lorelei. The apple tree looms large against the night sky.

PAUL'S VOICE

Or ours?

He closes the curtain and coaxes Lorelei down from the couch. Then he clicks off the recorder.

FADE TO:

BLACK.

PAUL'S VOICE

The following is true. It has been documented, researched, and recorded. It is not anecdotal and nothing has been embellished.

ON A FARM -- deep in the countryside.

PAUL'S VOICE

Graz, Austria. Here there lived a man who owned a small farm, and on this small farm the man kept a watchdog named Sultan.

THE MAN sits on his porch, smoking a pipe, SULTAN by his side.

PAUL'S VOICE

Sultan was faithful, and loyal, and never left the farm his duty was to guard.

The man finishes his smoke, stands up...

...and falls back into his chair, clutching his side. Sultan looks up at him.

OUT ON THE ROAD -- an ambulance flies down the dusty road. No need for sirens out here.

PAUL'S VOICE

One day, the man became ill and was taken to the hospital by ambulance.

Sultan runs after the ambulance, right up to the edge of their property... and then he stops. He'll go no further.

IN A HOSPITAL -- the man lies in bed, unconscious, his FAMILY gathered around him.

As the familiar flatline BEEP sounds --

BACK ON HIS PORCH -- Sultan jolts awake.

PAUL'S VOICE

Shortly thereafter, he passed away.

IN A SMALL GRAVEYARD -- a ceremony is held as the man's casket is lowered into the ground.

PAUL'S VOICE

He was buried in a local graveyard five kilometers from his farm.

BACK ON HIS FRONT PORCH-- as the sun sets, the place is empty. The man's SON-IN-LAW pushes open the screen door and walks outside. He looks around. Sultan is nowhere to be found.

PAUL'S VOICE

The following week, Sultan disappeared. The family searched high and low for him. They put signs up around town.

A SIGN IS NAILED TO A POST -- with a picture of Sultan underneath the word MISSING in big black letters.

PAUL'S VOICE

But days passed, and Sultan did not return.

BACK AT THE GRAVEYARD -- the son-in-law gets out of his car, bringing a bouquet of flowers with him.

PAUL'S VOICE

A few weeks later, the man's son-in-law visited his father-in-law's grave.

He walks toward the graveyard... then stops short. He drops the flowers, because there at the foot of the man's grave--

SULTAN sits peacefully.

PAUL'S VOICE

Sultan had never been to this graveyard before. There were no footprints of his former master he could've followed. There was no feasible way for him to find the exact grave the man was now buried, six feet beneath the earth.

Awestruck, he approaches the dog, whose tail wags leisurely.

PAUL'S VOICE

*But yet, somehow here Sultan was,
guarding his master's new home.*

Then, off Sultan's even face --

FADE TO BLACK

EXT. STREET - DAY

Lexy Ransome jogs down the street with Lorelei, who's hasn't quite made it out of that loping puppy phase yet. They pass by a house with a sign out front that says: ESTATE SALE. EVERYTHING MUST GO.

Lexy eyes it as she jogs by. It's a big sale, with lots of people roaming about. Lexy slows and finally stops, which makes Lorelei glance up at her curiously.

LEXY

Oh, c'mon. It'll be quick.

She leads Lorelei over into the yard and starts browsing.

VOICE FROM BEHIND

Looking for anything in particular?

Lexy turns to find Paul watching her from a lawn chair nearby. His hair is shorter and his face is less creased than Present Day Paul. Lexy smiles at him.

LEXY

I'll know it when I see it.

Paul smiles back at her. He stands up, causing Lorelei to startle and cower behind Lexy's legs.

LEXY

*It's okay, girl.
(to Paul)
Sorry...*

PAUL

Oh, no big deal. I'm not really a dog person, anyway.

LEXY

Well that's perfect then. She's not really a people person.

Lexy rubs Lorelei's neck, trying to calm her down.

LEXY

Once she knows you, she's the friendliest dog in the world, but...

Paul looks at them both. Then he nods politely.

PAUL

Let me know if there's anything I can help you with. The bigger stuff is all inside.

He returns to the lawn chair and his book. Lexy wanders through the junk but keeps sneaking looks over at Paul.

When he glances up and catches her, she tries to play it off.

LEXY

So, uh... where are you moving to?

PAUL

*Oh, I live down in South Hill.
This is --
(he catches himself)
-- was -- my Mom's house.*

The smile wipes off Lexy's face.

LEXY

Oh no... I'm sorry.

Paul looks back at her. He pauses, then shrugs pleasantly.

PAUL

You know, I'm trying to start a new rule. If you make it to your 75th birthday, then no one's allowed to say "I'm sorry" to your relatives after you die. Instead, they have to say "congratulations." Because if somebody manages to make it to 75, then you know they've lived a full life, and so there's nothing to be sorry about.

LEXY

*(quietly:)
I think that's a good rule.*

PAUL

Well, pass it around. Maybe it'll catch on.

They look at each other for a minute. Then Lexy shyly turns back to the junk. She sorts through some board games, then some kitchen knick-knacks. Lorelei never leaves her side.

Lexy sees a small box near a toaster that reads SQUARE EGG PRESS. She picks it up, intrigued.

LEXY

(reading from the side)

"Square Egg Press. Turn ordinary hard-boiled eggs into a unique square treat." Wow, does this really work?

PAUL

I don't know. But for two dollars American you can take it home and find out.

(off her look)

Well. The price is negotiable.

Lexy pulls it out of the box.

LEXY

It's not even opened. It's a mint condition square egg press!

PAUL

Really? Here, can I see it?

She grins at him as she hands it over.

LEXY

Damn. I shouldn't have told you that. That really strengthens your negotiating position, doesn't it?

Paul turns the egg press carefully over in his hands.

LEXY

You know what? Never mind. What do I need a square egg press for anyway?

(beat)

Okay, I'm lying, I do need it. I need to own it. So... well played, sir. I will pay full price.

Lexy pulls two dollars out of her pocket and holds it out, but Paul just stares at the egg press. Lexy stops smiling. Finally, Paul glances up at her apologetically.

PAUL

I'm sorry. It's just a shame that she bought the thing and never got a chance to use it, that's all.

He shakes himself out of it.

PAUL

But hey, there's plenty of crap here that she never got around to. I mean, look at all this stuff -- she had an addiction, she really did. She was a junkie for junk.

He holds the box out to Lexy. But she's put her money away.

LEXY

You know what? You should keep it.

PAUL

Nah, I'd just stick it in a drawer somewhere. Besides, I don't even like square things. I'm an oval guy. (off her hesitation) Really. I want you to have it. Gratis, in fact. Seriously -- this is non-negotiable.

Finally, she takes the egg press from him. They look at each other for quite a long time until Lexy becomes self-conscious.

LEXY

Well... I should get going. But thanks for this.

PAUL

You're welcome. I hope you get more use out of it than my mom did.

She starts to jog away, then stops.

LEXY

What was her name? Your mother's?

PAUL

Eve. Eve Ransome.

LEXY

Ransome with an 'e'?

PAUL

Yeah. Why?

She smiles at him one last time.

LEXY

Just wondering.

Then she and Lorelei head down the street. Paul watches them grow smaller and smaller until they disappear.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - (STILL IN FLASHBACK)

Younger Paul walks through the rows of graves (this is the same graveyard that Lexy will eventually be buried in). He carries a small bouquet of flowers.

He reaches his mother's grave. At the foot of her stone is a small wrapped present. Paul stares at it.

He hesitantly picks the box up and turns it over. Then he lightly shakes it. Then he looks around -- no one is nearby.

So he sighs and carefully starts to pull the wrapping off. When he finishes, he's left with an unmarked cardboard box, and inside --

Is a square hard-boiled egg. Below it is a folded up piece of paper. Paul opens it up.

All that's written inside is one word -- "CONGRATULATIONS."

Paul stares at it, moved.

FADE TO:

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - LATER

Lorelei, alone in the empty house, glances outside, then looks around the kitchen. She sees the t-bone from the Porterhouse, still lying on the living room floor, and heads over to pick it up.

She takes it to the corner of the room and drops it, but then, apparently not happy with that hiding spot, she picks it up again and carefully places it behind the leg of the couch.

Much more pleased with that spot, she turns --

-- and is startled by Paul, who's standing in the doorway, watching her. He clicks on his tape recorder.

PAUL

(into recorder)

Okay then. I'd like to start by testing out a list of words and phrases that I believe the subject is already familiar with.

Paul flips to a long-ish list he's jotted down in his notebook. The first word at the top is "SIT".

PAUL

Lorelei. Sit.

Lorelei does. Paul puts a check mark by "SIT".

PAUL
Good. Now lie down.

Lorelei does. Paul puts another check mark in his notebook.

PAUL
Good. Go get your ball.

Lorelei just tilts her head at him.

PAUL
Lorelei, go get your ball.

Lorelei heads over to her toy basket and pulls out a SQUEAKY BALL. She looks back at Paul, almost as if to say -- "is this what you wanted?"

PAUL
Yep, good. Now bring it over here.
(off her hesitation)
Come on, come here! C'mere!

Lorelei hurries over, but Paul furrows his brow -- on the last 'c'mere', he'd subconsciously raised his voice to that familiar high pitch we all use to talk to dogs and babies.

Paul, obviously troubled by that, jots something down in his notebook, then looks back at Lorelei.

PAUL
Let's try that second part again.
You stay here -- stay.

Paul walks over to the other side of the room. Lorelei, still clutching the ball in her mouth, just stares at him.

PAUL
Okay, now -- Lorelei...
(with the baby talk pitch)
...applesauce!

But Lorelei doesn't move.

PAUL
Lorelei, cobblestone! Combover!
Commandant Lassard!

Then with a flat, normal voice:

PAUL
Come here.

Lorelei hurries over with her ball. Paul blinks, impressed.

PAUL

Wow. Very good. I was thinking maybe you were just reacting to the inflection of my voice and not the specific words, but obviously that's not the case. Which is good.

(beat)

Why am I telling you this?

He looks down at his notebook. The next phrase is 'wanna go for a walk?' He glances up at Lorelei.

OUT ON THE STREET -- LATER

Paul and Lorelei have almost made it to a nearby coffee shop.

PAUL

Heel. Good.

(as he jots in his notebook)

Now stay.

Lorelei obediently sits down to wait while Paul walks in.

She watches Paul order a coffee without ever looking up at the TEENAGE CLERK, writing in his notebook the whole time.

He returns outside and motions for her to jump onto a table.

PAUL

Up.

(off her hesitation)

Come on. Up.

She finally abides. Inside, the Teenage Clerk doesn't seem to approve, but Paul just ignores him and puts a check next to 'UP' on the list. The next word down is 'SPEAK'.

PAUL

Okay, Lorelei. Speak.

Lorelei sticks her paw out.

PAUL

No, not shake. Speak. Speak.

(off her silence)

C'mon, I know you know this one.

Lorelei, speak. Speak, girl.

But Lorelei just stares at him. Paul glances around -- they're pretty much alone outside.

PAUL

Speak. You know -- woof.

(sounding it out now)

Ruff. Lorelei, ruff! Woof!

He barks for a little while, trying various styles and tones.

Finally, Lorelei let's out a throaty sort of sound -- not quite a bark, not quite a whine.

PAUL

Good! Very good. That was a strong 'r' -- now give that to me again. Speak. Lorelei, speak.

But Lorelei silently sticks her paw out again. Paul bites his lip, then opens up his notebook.

In the margin next to SPEAK, he writes: RESULTS INCONCLUSIVE.

From inside the coffee shop, the clerk openly stares.

MONTAGE OF SHOTS --

-- of Lorelei responding to various words as they return home. "Get in the car." "Roll over." "Off the couch."

The list grows longer and longer.

LATER --

Paul, in gym shorts and a t-shirt, tries to tie his running shoes while talking into the recorder.

PAUL

Subject knows over 80 distinct words and phrases. Language comprehension is equivalent to a year old human infant. Increased linguistic capacity certainly appears possible with the right amount of training.

Lorelei sits calmly nearby, watching him. Paul clicks off the recorder and glances at her.

PAUL

Good first day. Thank you.

Paul finishes tying his shoes. Lorelei stands up and stares at him, wagging her tail, expecting to go with him.

PAUL

Sorry, dog. But I jog alone.

Paul heads to the door, then glances back at Lorelei --

--who's still staring at him, still wagging her tail. Paul hesitates in the doorway.

FADE TO:

EXT. HILLY STREET - DUSK

All is quiet until two figures appear on the horizon, jogging down the road. A person and a dog. They get closer...

...and closer... until they're near enough to recognize. The dog is Lorelei, but the person isn't Paul -- it's Lexy.

Lorelei and Lexy jog on, until another figure appears from an intersecting road and falls into step with them.

This is younger Paul, drenched in sweat and barely able to catch his breath. But he tries to play it cool anyway.

PAUL

Hey.

LEXY

Hey.

Lexy smiles to herself, amused by his attempt at casualness. They run on. When Paul speaks again, though, he has to do it in between gasps of breath.

PAUL

Are...you... married?

LEXY

No. Are you?

PAUL

No... not... anymore.

Lexy glances over at him. Not only is he wheezing, he's started to turn pale.

LEXY

Jesus. You don't look very good.

For his sake, she stops running. Paul immediately puts his hands on his knees, gasping for air.

PAUL

(waving her off)

I'm fine. And as soon...as I...
catch my breath... I'm going to ask
you out... on a date.

Lexy smiles. She pulls a water bottle out and offers it to Paul. He takes it and starts gulping it down.

LEXY

You really don't look very good.

PAUL

Yeah, well do you have any idea how many laps around this neighborhood it took to accidentally run into you?

LEXY

(smiles wider)

Sorry. I got a late start today.

He hands the water bottle back, empty. He notices Lorelei gazing up at him warily.

Paul hesitates, then slowly sticks his hand out to her.

Again, Lorelei hurries away from him, between Lexy's legs.

LEXY

(shrugs)

Strangers.

PAUL

It's cool.

(then, to Lexy:)

I'll keep trying.

Lexy can't seem to stop smiling at him.

LEXY

Tell you what. There's this party on Saturday that I have to drop by--

PAUL

I'd love to.

LEXY

Okay. Great. It's going to be boring, so it's probably a terrible first date but--

Paul waves her off as he collapses in a front yard.

PAUL

Beats the shit out of jogging.

FADE TO:

EXT. HILLY STREET - DAY

Present day Paul jogs down the very same hilly street, alone. He's sweating, but he's not out of breath. This isn't some light jog-- he runs with focus and intensity.

Obviously, he's gotten the hang of it by now.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

A sweaty Paul gulps down a glass of water, post-jog.

Lorelei's laying down in the living room, watching him. She yawns (sort of a 'waa' sound) and Paul glances over at her.

PAUL
Whoa. What was that?
(mimicking)
Waa. Waa. C'mon, Lorelei, do that
again. Waa.

Paul holds out his empty glass of water. But Lorelei rests her head back down on the floor.

PAUL
Lorelei. Waa. Waa, like...

Paul hurries over to Lorelei's water bowl and brings it back to her. Lorelei sniffs it, then leans over to lap some up --

PAUL
No, you want some? Say 'waa'.

Lorelei stares at him. Paul sighs, then sticks his tongue out and laps some up himself.

PAUL
See? Waa-ter. Waa--- oh, yuck.

He makes a face, then stands up to get rid of the water and pours her a new bowl.

Lorelei follows him to the sink, but Paul keeps the bowl just out of reach, tempting her.

PAUL
Here you go. Fresh water. Waa-
ter. Just make the sound.

But Lorelei just stares at him. So Paul goes to the pantry and grabs a bag of potato chips.

He feeds her one, and then another, and then another.

PAUL
You like that? Salt tastes good, huh?

Lorelei licks her lips and goes for the water bowl again, but Paul pulls it away and puts it on the counter.

PAUL
You want it? Just say 'waa' and
it's yours.

Lorelei just wags her tail. Paul turns and walks away.

FADE TO:

BLACK.

PAUL'S VOICE

The following is true. It has been documented, researched, and recorded. It is not anecdotal and nothing has been embellished.

AT A HOUSE BY THE SHORE -- a WOMAN looks out the window at her three dogs, napping in her back yard.

PAUL'S VOICE

Halifax, Canada. Here there lived the daughter of a Nobel Prize winner, a woman who would one day become a well known writer and environmentalist in her own right. But before any of that, she was simply a woman with a curious mind, whose best and longest companions were her three English Setters.

IN THE BACK YARD -- the woman whistles off-screen. Two of the dogs lazily lift their heads up but don't move, while the third dog, ARLI, jumps up and takes off towards her.

PAUL'S VOICE

In October of 1962, the woman decided she would try to teach her smartest setter, Arli, how to read and write.

IN THE KITCHEN -- the woman puts three lettered cups upside down on the floor -- A,B,C. Arli stares at her.

Then the Woman hides a treat under cup B.

ELISABETH MANN

B, Arli. Go ahead. B.

Arli takes his cue, nudges over the cup and eats the treat.

The woman smiles. She puts all three cups upright and holds a treat in her hand.

ELISABETH MANN

Do it again then. B. B, Arli.

Arli hesitates, then nudges over cup B. The woman grins again.

WEEKS LATER -- the Woman sits at her kitchen table, hunched over a typewriter. But she's not typing on it -- she's using pliers to pull keys out.

PAUL'S VOICE

The woman devised a special keyboard for Arli, and over the course of 3 years, she slowly, painstakingly taught him how to use it.

THE TYPEWRITER -- modified now, sits on the ground with three large cardboard extensions -- A, B, and C -- attached to their respective keys.

The Woman places a treat on the 'B' key.

ELISABETH MANN

B, Arli.

Arli walks up to the keyboard and nudges the correct key. The letter 'B' is typed out onto a blank page.

The woman grins again. Arli takes the treat and runs off.

TWO YEARS LATER -- the keyboard is now covered with modified letters and Arli navigates them expertly.

PAUL'S VOICE

Arli eventually learned how to type 19 different letters, plus the space bar. The woman could dictate thousands of words to him, and he eventually became so proficient that she let him type out her yearly Christmas letters.

The woman spells out the words "Dear Friends," and Arli types each letter without error.

CLOSE ON THE PAGE -- as the woman whips it out of the typewriter. Arli's written an entire four paragraph letter. Arli wags his tail as the woman grabs an envelope.

THE WOMAN -- watches Arli. But this time she does not smile.

PAUL'S VOICE

The woman was not satisfied, though. Despite their achievements, she held out hope that one day, Arli would stop typing her words and start typing his own.

ANOTHER DAY -- the Woman puts the keyboard down in front of Arli, who waits patiently for her to start calling letters.

ELISABETH MANN

Nope, no dictation today. Just write. Whatever you'd like to say.

Arli stares up at her, confused.

ELISABETH MANN

Go on. Don't type -- write.
(off her hesitation)
Write, Arli. Write.

And then, after another beat, Arli begins to write. The Woman watches him with great anticipation.

When Arli finishes, she yanks the paper out of the typewriter. She reads it and her face falls.

PAUL'S VOICE

But that day never came.

The paper reads: *Bed a cat cad a baf art ad arli.*

Arli wags her tail, awaiting the Woman's approval. But the Woman crumples up the paper and stares at him sternly.

ELISABETH MANN

Again.

CLOSE ON SHEETS OF PAPER -- as they're ripped out of the typewriter, one by one, all filled with nonsense words.

The Woman glares at Arli.

ELISABETH MANN

Again.

Arli looks sheepishly up at her.

OUT IN THE BACKYARD -- The sun rises over the horizon. All three dogs are asleep.

The Woman whistles for Arli. The other two dogs lazily lift their heads, but don't get up... and neither does Arli.

PAUL'S VOICE

Then, one morning, in the third year of their experiment, Arli woke up and decided that he did not want to write anymore.

The Woman walks outside, concerned.

IN THE KITCHEN -- the Woman tries to drag Arli toward the typewriter, tugging at him as hard as she can.

But Arli doesn't budge.

PAUL'S VOICE

*And so, for the rest of his life,
no matter how hard the woman tried
to convince him otherwise, Arli the
typing dog would type no more.*

Off Arli's unyielding face --

FADE TO:

INT. PAUL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

On a computer monitor, a matching photo of Arli with the Woman, Elisabeth Mann, accompanies a research paper about them. Paul stares at the picture, losing himself in it.

PAUL

Wow.

Paul clicks back to the lexis nexus home page. The phrase "COMMUNICATING WITH DOGS" has been typed into the search engine. Words flash by onscreen.

Beneath the paper by Elisabeth Mann, there's a paper by Stanley Coren. A paper by Rupert Sheldrake.

And a whole bunch by Wendell Hollis, with titles like:

ALL BARK, NO BITE

The physiology of a canine's pharynx, trachea, and epiglottis

THE DOGS OF BABEL

Finding the native tongue of canines

Paul clicks on the latter paper and finds sentences like:

...still, humans and canines share 90% of vocal physiology...

...continued scientific experimentation could allow for...

...potential for language acquisition is certainly within grasp...

Paul's eyes get big. He pulls up Yahoo's PeopleSearch. Lorelei walks over and puts her head in his lap, begging for attention.

But Paul doesn't even look down at her. So Lorelei eventually gives up and heads out of the room.

Paul grabs the phone and dials a number off the webpage. It rings once, then goes right to voicemail -- the message is simply "You've reached Wendell Hollis." Then it BEEPS.

PAUL

Hi, Dr. Hollis, my name is Paul Ransome, I'm a professor of linguistics up here at Ithaca. Sorry to call you at home, but I'm on Lexis Nexis and I'm reading your papers here on canine language acquisition, and, well... I had a few questions. If you could call me back as soon as possible, I'd appreciate it.

He hangs up the phone. Thinks. Then --

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Lorelei starts to drift off to sleep on the couch when HAMMERING from the kitchen suddenly wakes her up.

She perks up, then decides to go check it out. She walks in the kitchen to find--

Paul hard at work modifying an old laptop keyboard, just as Elisabeth Mann had done to a typewriter 45 years before.

He glances over at Lorelei.

PAUL

Not ready for you yet.

Lorelei stares at him, then looks over at her water bowl, marooned up on the counter. She SCRATCHES the cabinet beneath it, but Paul doesn't look at her.

So Lorelei sighs and walks out of the room.

She jumps up on the couch in the living room, rests her head on the armrest, and stares outside.

FADE TO:

BLACK. Then...

EXT. A FAIRGROUND - DAY

Paul and Lexy get out of his car and head toward a large tent in the middle of the fairground. Lexy's got a gown on, but Paul's in a sportscoat with an open collar.

They walk up to the tent behind a man in an expensively tailored suit. Paul stares at him, then looks at Lexy.

PAUL

Am I underdressed?

LEXY

No, you look great.

But another guy walks into the tent in a tux. Paul groans.

LEXY

Don't worry. It's my fault, I forgot to tell you. But you really do look great.

PAUL

What kind of party is this, anyway?

LEXY

It's just a fundraising gala for some clients of mine.

PAUL

Ah.

(beat)

I'm sorry. I have no idea what you do.

Lexy smiles at him, and they walk into the tent --

--where every single guest wears ornate masks that cover their face. Paul stares openly.

LEXY

I guess I also forgot to tell you that it's a masquerade ball. Here-- pick one.

On either side of the aisle is a basket filled with hand-made masks, all different faces, shapes and styles.

Paul sorts through them -- there's a unicorn and a princess, a snaky-haired Medusa and a Bacchus crowned with grapes. These are not flimsy plastic Halloween masks; each one has been painstakingly designed and crafted.

PAUL

Wow. These are amazing.

Lexy doesn't answer, just waits for Paul to choose his mask. Finally, he picks out a white knight, and after only a moment's hesitation, he pulls it over his face. Lexy nods.

LEXY

Good choice. You're a knight named Tam Lim -- I found him in this book of fairy tales I read every now and then for inspiration.

Paul looks around and it dawns on him.

PAUL
You made all these.

LEXY
(with a shrug)
It started out as a hobby and
turned into a full-time business.

PAUL
Wow. There's that much demand?

She nods, and then smiles at Paul as she sorts through the basket for one for herself. She finds what she's looking for and then pulls it on...

LEXY
Oh, you'd be surprised how many
people like to wear masks.

.. and hers is a dog's mask. In fact, it's a nearly perfect recreation of LORELEI'S FACE.

Then, with a curtsy, Lorelei heads off to find a seat, and eventually, Tam Lin follows behind.

FADE TO:

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - PRESENT DAY -- NIGHT

The real Lorelei heads up the stairs, looking for Paul.

She finds him in his bedroom. His face is covered with shaving cream and he's holding a razor, but he's in a daze, staring straight into the mirror.

Lorelei rubs up against his leg and Paul JUMPS, causing Lorelei to jump, too.

Paul stares down at her, like he's looking at a stranger.

Then he looks past her, to Lexy's night stand, which is exactly the way she left it on the morning of her death.

One of the "I'm sorry" post-it's that Paul wrote that night is still there. So are her glasses, a half empty cup of water, and a well-worn book of fairytales.

Paul picks up the book and a green highlighter falls out from between the pages. The spine is bent just enough to open up to --

-- the Tam Lin story. Paul brushes it with his finger.

Then he puts the highlighter back and carefully places the book on the nightstand, in the exact position he found it in.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Lorelei and Paul walk to the same coffee shop as before. Lorelei obediently waits outside for him. Paul enters to find the same Teenage Clerk behind the counter.

But Paul forgot to wipe the shaving cream off his face. The Clerk stares at him as he orders.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - KITCHEN

Coffee in hand, Paul walks back up the driveway with Lorelei in tow. Matthew Rice is waiting for him on the front stoop.

MATTHEW RICE

Hey, buddy.
(re: shaving cream)
I like the new look.

Paul touches his face and is truly surprised to find shaving cream there.

MATTHEW RICE

Missed you at school today.

He greets a friendly Lorelei. They both follow Paul inside.

PAUL

Today's Thursday. I don't have any class on Th--

MATTHEW RICE

Today's Wednesday.
(off Paul's surprise)
It's okay. I filled in for you. I was kind of happy when you didn't show, actually -- you're such a workaholic, Eleanor and I were afraid you'd...

He trails off. Panting now, Lorelei heads over to her water bowl on the counter. She SCRATCHES for it. But no one pays her any attention. She glances at the door to the backyard.

(The entire conversation that follows is seen from Lorelei's perspective. She's paying attention but isn't always looking at who's talking. Sometimes she is. But sometimes she's scratching herself instead.)

MATTHEW RICE

I know you're gonna resist this, but I thought it might be a good idea for you to take a few weeks off.

(MORE)

MATTHEW RICE (cont'd)

No need to rush right back into things -- relax, go on a trip somewhere, take some time for yourself. Parks and I will cover your class load.

Matthew hesitates when he notices the altered laptop on the kitchen table.

MATTHEW RICE

Just... give it some thought before you say no, alright, because it's--

PAUL

Okay.

MATTHEW RICE

Okay?

Paul just nods. Matthew stares at him for a long beat, waiting for an explanation that doesn't come.

MATTHEW RICE

Paul?

(re: the keyboard)

What is that?

Paul looks away.

As he finally starts to launch into his explanation, though, Lorelei wanders off, through the doggy door into--

THE BACK YARD --

--where she looks around, taking in the scene. Cars drive by the side of the house. A neighbor mows the grass nearby.

But Lorelei just stares at the big apple tree in the middle of the yard.

She lopes over to it, puts her two front paws on the tree and stands on her hind legs, staring up at the branches above her. Almost like she's looking for something. Or someone.

But no one's up there. Lorelei gives up, sniffs around the yard for a second, then wanders back--

INSIDE --

--where Paul is still explaining his experiment to Matthew.

Lorelei, meanwhile, checks her food bowl... but the water bowl's still up on the kitchen counter. She heads over to it.

Matthew notices and grabs the bowl to set it down for her.

PAUL

...I've done the research, Matt.
You would be amazed at some of the
things dogs are capable of. This
is serious work--

(re: the water bowl)

Hold on. Don't give her that.

MATTHEW RICE

Oh. Okay.

(beat)

Why?

PAUL

Because I'm withholding it.

(off his look)

As part of a test.

Matthew looks down at Lorelei. He shrugs apologetically and
puts the bowl back up on the counter.

PAUL

Listen, they say dogs have the
mental capacity of a two year old
child. Well, two year old kids
learn to talk -- why can't dogs?

MATTHEW RICE

Because... they're dogs?

PAUL

We've taught chimps to speak in
sign language. We've learned that
dolphins communicate complex
thoughts to each other in squeaks.
40 years ago, no one believed
either of those things were
remotely possible. Listen, I'm not
saying I'm gonna get Lorelei to
tell me what she dreamt about last
night. I'm just saying -- let's
put aside socially accepted beliefs
about what dogs can or can't do,
and let's see what may be possible.

Matthew just looks at Paul.

MATTHEW RICE

You're serious.

Paul nods. After a long beat, Matthew chuckles.

MATTHEW RICE

A guy walks into a bar with a dog,
right?

(MORE)

MATTHEW RICE (cont'd)

He says to the bartender, "I'll sell you this dog for 5 bucks, and guess what -- he can talk." But the bartender doesn't believe him, of course, so the man nudges the dog and says "okay, show him." The dog looks up at the bartender and goes "Dude. You gotta buy me, this guy's an asshole -- he keeps me locked in a cage, he never takes me for walks, and the shit he feeds me makes dog food taste good." Well, the bartender's in shock -- he says to the owner, "this dog is amazing! But why are you selling him for five bucks -- he could make you rich!" And the man replies, "Yeah, I'm just sick of all his damn lies."

He grins, but Paul just stares at him. Matthew sighs.

MATTHEW RICE

Does this have something to do with Lexy, Paul?

(off his silence)

It does, doesn't it? But what? What is it that you're trying to do here? What are you trying to find out?

PAUL

(beat)

You wouldn't understand.

MATTHEW RICE

Help me try.

But Paul doesn't answer. Matt looks away, over at Lorelei, who's snuck back into the kitchen and is staring up at her water bowl again.

MATTHEW RICE

You know not giving them water is, like, breaking the cardinal rule of dog ownership, right?

PAUL

She can have water. All she has to do is ask for it.

Paul turns back to the keyboard. Matthew looks around. Realizes the conversation is over. He sighs again as he starts to head for the door.

MATTHEW RICE

Well... let me know if there's anything I can do to help, okay?

PAUL
Thanks for stopping by.

MATTHEW RICE
No problem. Hey, Paul?
(re: shaving cream)
Finish the job, will you?

Matthew leaves. Paul grabs a dish towel and wipes the shaving cream off, revealing his untouched three day stubble.

Then he makes a few final adjustments and sets the modified laptop down on the floor. It's a kinda primitive job, with three giant cardboard keys (A, B, and C) attached to their respective letters.

Paul gets a dog treat and puts it on the giant 'B' key.

PAUL
Lorelei. B.

Lorelei glances at him, then waltzes over and snatches the treat off the key.

But she doesn't press it hard enough, and the laptop screen stays blank. Paul grimaces.

So he goes to the fridge, grabs some peanut butter, and spread it over the 'B' key.

PAUL
Okay, B. Again, girl. B.

Lorelei starts to lick the 'B' key, causing a string of 'bbbbbbbbbbbb's to appear on the laptop monitor.

Paul smiles, pleased. But Lorelei licks the cardboard key so hard it comes off. Then she picks it up in her mouth and takes it across the room, where she lays down and starts licking the hell out of it.

PAUL
Hey. No. Lorelei, no--

Paul grabs it from her.

Lorelei looks up at him, licking peanut butter off her lips. She heads over to the counter, trying to get at her water bowl. But Paul ignores her.

She lets out a FRUSTRATED WHIMPER, then walks past Paul, who's focused on fitting the 'B' key back in place. But he ends up knocking the modified 'A' key off instead. Paul throws them both down in frustration, when--

-- a strange LAPPING noise can be heard from somewhere. Paul stands up and follows the sound to the nearby --

BATHROOM --

-where Lorelei is drinking water from the toilet bowl. She looks up at him and happily wags her tail. Paul grimaces.

He flips off the light to the bathroom and walks away. All is dark and QUIET for a long beat.

Then the sound of Lorelei DRINKING starts up again.

FADE TO:

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY -

Lorelei DRINKS water from her bowl as Paul carefully arranges a fancy plate of breakfast on a tray. Lorelei finishes the water and heads over to him, waiting patiently to pounce on any scrap that may fall.

Paul puts the finishing touches on the meal, then carries the tray upstairs. Lorelei keeps stride with him, tail wagging.

PAUL

Where's Lexy, girl? Go wake up Lexy.

Lorelei hurries into the bedroom and jumps up on the bed, stirring Lexy awake. Paul follows her in.

PAUL

Not that I'm jealous -- I know it's only been four months and all-- but if you asked her 'where's Paul?' she'd just sit there and lick herself.

Paul sets the tray of breakfast in front of her.

LEXY

Oh my god, Paul. Thank you!

PAUL

You're welcome. Did you sleep okay?

LEXY

I slept great. Wow-- eggs benedict.

PAUL

Your lips were moving.

(off her confused look)

Last night, while you slept. Your lips were moving.

LEXY

You were watching me?

PAUL

I'm always watching you. What were you dreaming about?

(off her shrug)

You can't remember?

LEXY

No, I remember.

PAUL

Was it a nightmare or something?

LEXY

Oh no, not at all. It was a good dream. It was a very good dream.

PAUL

Well come on, then, spit it out.

LEXY

I can't. I'll ruin it.

PAUL

You'll ruin it? How?

LEXY

Because, dummy, the best dreams are always the ones that sound the most ridiculous out loud, and if you try to explain them to somebody the next morning, you end up ruining them. God, don't you know anything?

Paul stares at her, then grabs a slice of bacon off her plate.

PAUL

I'll just keep asking, you know.

Lexy looks back at him, then rolls her eyes.

LEXY

Okay, fine. I dreamt that I was living in this mansion -- a lot like this house, but way, way bigger -- and I was a really famous writer. Which is a little strange, because I almost flunked English every year back in high school.

She takes a bite of her eggs and a sip of her coffee.

LEXY

In this dream, though, I was the most famous writer in the world. But the thing of it was, I'd only ever written one sentence in my life.

PAUL

One sentence made you the most famous writer in the world?

LEXY

Everybody just thought it was the saddest sentence ever written. It was so powerful that it made people weep just to hear it read out loud.

PAUL

Wow. What was it?

Lexy pauses, a little apprehensive.

LEXY

"I remember my wife in white."

PAUL

(beat, then sounds it out)
I remember my wife in white.

Lexy cringes when she hears him say it.

LEXY

Damn it!

PAUL

No, it's a good sentence. I mean--

But Lexy smiles and playfully buries her head in a pillow.

LEXY

Argh! See, I told you!

Lexy rolls over and stares up at him.

LEXY

You ruined my beautiful dream, Paul. You owe me big.

Paul stares back, admiring her. Suddenly, the words impulsively pop out of his mouth.

PAUL

Marry me.

LEXY

You don't owe me that big.

PAUL
Lexy. Marry me.

Lexy pauses. She's being playful, but she realizes he's not.

LEXY
Are you serious?

PAUL
I am completely serious.

LEXY
Paul... you don't know nearly
enough about me yet.

PAUL
I know everything I need to know
about you.

LEXY
But what if you don't? What if you
find out more and then you change
your mind?

PAUL
I won't.

*Lexy just stares at him, a million different emotions
flashing past her face. Finally, she nods.*

LEXY
Okay. I'll marry you if you can
answer one question.

PAUL
Ask it.

Lexy pulls the blanket up to her neck, covering her body.

LEXY
Do I have any tattoos?

PAUL
No.
(then, after he thinks)
No. You don't have to cover up, I
know every inch of your skin by
heart. You have a birthmark on your
left ankle and a scar on your right
hip, but you don't have a single
tattoo.

*Lexy smiles at him, then sits up and moves close, like she's
about to kiss him.*

But at the last moment, she lowers her head and parts her hair. An intricate ink design can be seen on her scalp.

LEXY

It's snake hair. Like Medusa. I got it when I was 17.

Paul, shocked, touches it with his fingers, tracing from a few inches above her hairline all the way to the back of her head -- it covers the entire scalp.

PAUL

When you were 17... you shaved your head... to get a Medusa tattoo?

LEXY

No. I shaved my head because I hated my hair. I got a Medusa tattoo because I was 17.

She looks him in the eyes.

LEXY

I love you, Paul. But you don't know enough about me yet.

She winks, then turns back to the breakfast tray.

PAUL

I'll just keep asking, you know.

Lexy shrugs, her back to him. But as she eats her eggs -- although he can't see this -- Lexy can't stop smiling.

FADE TO:

PAUL'S BEDROOM - MORNING (PRESENT DAY)

-- where Paul groggily opens his eyes to find Lorelei licking his face. He pushes her away, then turns his pillow over and tries to get back to sleep.

PAUL

Take Lorelei out, wouldja--

But he pauses when he realizes that Lexy's not beside him. Her side of the bed is empty.

Lorelei's tail starts THUMPING against the mattress. Paul stares hard at her.

PAUL

Lorelei... where's Lexy?

Lorelei's ears perk up and her tail THUMPS the bed even harder, but she doesn't move.

PAUL
C'mon, where's Lexy? Go find Lexy!

And all of a sudden, she's off, running wildly from room to room. Paul watches, heart-struck, as she charges through the house, sniffing in corners and barking.

He grabs his notebook and flips it to the page where he's making a list of the words that Lorelei knows.

With a sigh, he adds 'WHERE'S LEXY?' to the end of the list.

Then he walks downstairs to find Lorelei pawing at the basement door. Paul pauses.

INSIDE THE BASEMENT - SAME

All is dark.

Then Paul pushes the door open and flips on a light. Although he stands at the threshold, hesitant to go in, Lorelei flies past him down the stairs.

Finally, he follows her down, walking into--

LEXY'S WORKSHOP. Masks line the walls. Tools and materials cover the work desk. Nothing here has been touched since her death. Lorelei checks every corner, looking for Lexy. Paul follows her, taking in the scene.

He stares at the masks, all beautiful, all intricately designed. Runs his hand over her tools. Looks in a closet which has become a makeshift wine cellar. Takes a seat in her work stool.

He glances around, noticing an empty bottle of wine nearby. Next to it are two wine glasses.

Paul starts to pale. He picks up the bottle and reads the label -- it's a '97 Caymus Cabernet. Paul stares at the two wine glasses.

He impulsively grabs a nearby phone and dials a number.

INT. RICE'S HOUSE - DAY

Matthew and Eleanor Rice busy themselves in the kitchen, getting ready for the day.

Matthew scarfs down a muffin as he picks up the phone.

MATTHEW RICE
Hello?

PAUL'S VOICE

'97 Caymus Cabernet. Is that a good wine?

MATTHEW RICE

A '97 Caymus Cab? Heck yeah it is. Why? You find a bottle?

PAUL'S VOICE

I-I think Lexy had been saving one.

MATTHEW RICE

Well I bet she had. That's one hell of a wine.

Eleanor, overhearing the conversation, shoots Matt a worried look. Matt pauses.

MATTHEW RICE

Hey, Paul...it's 8 in the morning. I mean, I'm not your mother, but--

PAUL'S VOICE

I'm not gonna drink it, Matt.

MATTHEW RICE

Oh. Okay. Good.

(beat)

Can I have it then?

Eleanor shoots Matt a dirty look.

MATTHEW RICE

What? C'mon, he's a barley guy. A hops guy. He's not exactly gonna appreciate something like--

She glares at her husband, who shrugs.

MATTHEW RICE

(into phone)

All I'm saying is if you just want to get drunk, Paul, a six pack of Miller Light will do the job fine.

BACK IN PAUL'S BASEMENT -- SAME

Paul's barely listening to him.

PAUL

Were either of you over here that afternoon? For lunch or something? The day Lexy...

He trails off and waits for Matt's answer.

MATTHEW RICE'S VOICE

No, Paul. We were both at school.

PAUL

Did anybody say anything at the funeral? About being here that day? Because no one said a word to me.

MATTHEW RICE'S VOICE

No, not that I remember. Why?

PAUL

I think maybe somebody was here that afternoon. I'm just not sure wh--

He trails off. The sun from a nearby window hits the glasses at just the right angle, and Paul gasps.

There are fingerprints all over them.

Distracted, he hangs up the phone.

BACK IN THE RICE'S KITCHEN --

The DIAL TONE sounds.

MATTHEW RICE

Paul? Hello? Hello?

He hangs up, too, and looks over at Eleanor.

MATTHEW RICE

He's really losing it.

POLICE STATION -- DAY

Paul waits in the lobby, a briefcase in his lap, completely out of place among the rest of the clientele here.

Detective Stack enters and beelines straight toward him.

DETECTIVE STACK

Paul, sorry to keep you waiting.

He smiles warmly at Paul, who looks away.

DETECTIVE STACK

What can I do for you?

Paul hesitates, wavering, then gives up and unlatches the briefcase on his lap.

PAUL

This is going to seem strange, I know, but...

He pulls out the two wine glasses, each tucked safely in their own plastic bag.

PAUL
I found these.

Stack stares at the glasses, totally confused, then glances at Paul, who bites his lip, obviously a little embarrassed.

DETECTIVE STACK
Tell you what -- why don't you come
on back to my desk?

DETECTIVE STACK'S DESK -- A FEW MINUTES LATER --

Stack holds the glasses up to the light. The fingerprints are clearly visible. Paul sits across the desk.

DETECTIVE STACK
Forgive me for being dense -- but
I'm still not sure I understand
what these have to do with your
wife's accident.

Paul doesn't answer. Stack sighs.

DETECTIVE STACK
Okay, for argument's sake, let's
just say there was someone else
there that day--

PAUL
Listen, I'm not crazy, if that's
what you're thinking. I'm not
saying -- I know nobody's ever been
murdered by getting thrown out of an
apple tree, okay. That's not what...

Paul rubs his hand through his hair.

PAUL
I'm just trying to find some answers
here. Answers to what, I don't know
-- but if there was somebody in the
house... maybe they do.

Stack looks at him carefully. Paul returns the gaze. Stack sighs, then picks up the glasses again.

DETECTIVE STACK
It'll take 24 hours. Go see Cindy
outside, ask her to take your prints
for reference. I'll be in touch.

Paul smiles at him, grateful.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Lorelei wags her tail and greets Paul as he walks in.

He ignores her, though, and throws his keys down on the kitchen table. Lorelei heads over to her food bowl and noses it over, trying to get him to notice.

But Paul just walks up the stairs. Lorelei watches him go.

LATE THAT NIGHT --

Paul's struggling with the modified laptop, but the cardboard keys are still falling off and Paul's having trouble focusing.

He takes a sip of cold coffee, then rests his head on the table, in the crook of his arm, next to a half-eaten plate of take out spaghetti.

After a few seconds, Paul rubs the sleep out of his eyes and gets back to work. Lorelei wanders into the room and checks her dog bowl again. Paul notices.

PAUL

Whoops. Kinda forgot about you.
You hungry?

Lorelei turns and looks right at Paul.

LORELEI

What tipped you off, genius?

Paul does a double take -- did she just...? But Lorelei wanders over to the table and nods at the spaghetti.

LORELEI

Alright, listen up. You give me a meatball, I'll tell you everything you want to know.

Paul stares at her, eyes wide, then slowly picks a meatball out of the spaghetti and holds it out to her.

Lorelei snatches it away, hurries over to her favorite spot on the carpet, and lays down to eat. She glances back at Paul.

LORELEI

(with her mouth full)
Okay. Hit me.

Paul pauses only briefly.

PAUL

What... what happened to Lexy?

Lorelei nods at a nearby door as she wolfs down the last of the meatball.

LORELEI

Nothing happened to her. She's right in there.

Paul looks at Lorelei... then at the door... and then he stands up. Lorelei watches on from her spot on the floor.

Paul reaches the door and pauses. He takes a deep breath, then pushes it open, revealing --

...AN EMPTY BATHROOM. Paul walks in and yanks the shower curtain back -- it's empty in there, too. He sighs, then wheels around and glares at Lorelei.

PAUL

I'm so sick of all your goddamn lies.

SMASH CUT:

BACK AT THE KITCHEN TABLE -- MORNING

-- where Paul's eyes snap open, his head resting in the crook of his arm. He looks over at Lorelei, who's asleep next to her food bowl.

He heads to the pantry to get her some food. But the dog food bag is empty. So is the rest of the cupboard.

Then he opens the fridge. Nothing but baking soda and ketchup. Paul's out of food, too. He grimaces.

AT THE COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Paul's at a table outside, drinking coffee and eating a greasy fast food burger. Lorelei sits by his legs, watching him eat.

Paul pulls french fries out of the bag and sets them on the ground for Lorelei, who hungrily scarfs them up.

A LITTLE KID nearby tries to pet Lorelei, but she quickly ducks away from him and cowers between Paul's legs. Paul shrugs at the kid.

PAUL

She's shy around strangers.

For some reason, the kid bursts out CRYING and runs over to his MOTHER. Paul looks bewildered. The Mother and the Teenage Clerk stares at him disapprovingly.

Detective Stack walks up, a box under his arm. Paul grins.

PAUL

Thanks for coming, Detective.

But Stack waves him away, right to business. He pulls one of the wine glasses out of a box, wrapped in a plastic bag.

DETECTIVE STACK

So this one has Lexy's fingerprints all over it.

(then, the other)

And this one has someone else's.

PAUL

Whose?

DETECTIVE STACK

I don't know, the prints aren't in the database. All I can tell you for sure is that he's not you, he's not Lexy, and he's never been arrested.

He hands both glasses to Paul, who inspects them carefully.

PAUL

So what now?

DETECTIVE STACK

What now? Now I give you advice. And hopefully now you listen.

(before Paul can protest)

Your wife had an accident, Paul. It's tragic but it's true, and the sooner you just accept that, the sooner you move on with your life, the better off you'll be. Whether or not someone else was in the house that day, whether or not Lexy was having an affair, ultimately none of that matters--

PAUL

Whoa, whoa -- who said anything about an affair?

DETECTIVE STACK

C'mon, Paul. Don't pretend you didn't notice the lipstick's only on one of the glasses.

Paul looks away -- obviously he did notice.

PAUL

Lexy wasn't having an affair, Detective. That's not who she was, and that's not what this is about.

Paul looks him right in the eye. Stack returns his gaze, starting to get the picture now.

DETECTIVE STACK

You're hoping to find a witness, is that it?

(off Paul's silence)

Whoever was in the house that day... he was gone long before Lexy ever went up in that tree, Paul.

PAUL

You don't know that for sure.

DETECTIVE STACK

Yes, I do. People don't run away from a crime scene if there's no crime, okay? They dial 911. They try CPR. They feel for a pulse, at least. But none of that happened here. Nobody called for help, and nobody touched Lexy's body until we did. Well, nobody human, anyway.

Stack looks down at Lorelei, who's eyeing him warily from under the table. Paul follows his gaze.

Then Stack stands, signaling that this discussion is over.

DETECTIVE STACK

I'm sorry about your wife's accident. I wish there was more I could do.

BACK AT PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Wendell Hollis' research papers litter the table around Paul. He dials a number on the phone -- but like before, it goes straight to voicemail.

PAUL

Hi, Dr. Hollis. It's Paul Ransome from Ithaca again. I'm here working with a do-- a subject, a canine subject, on language acquisition. We're using the Mann keyboard method -- I'm not sure if you're familiar with that or not -- and, well... it's not without it's frustrations. But you seem to be somewhat of an expert in this field, and I really would love to talk, just to... you know. Compare notes. Please call me back if you can. Thanks.

Paul looks over at his modified laptop. The giant cardboard keys are askew. At best, it looks like a grade school science project. Paul sets his jaw.

INT. ITHACA COLLEGE - HALLWAY - DAY

A door is ajar. The sign reads: ROOM 312. ENGINEERING LAB.

INSIDE --

Paul shows a drawing to a GUY with a welding iron.

PAUL
Is something like this possible?

GUY
Sure, I could make that for you.
How big do you want each key?

PAUL
Well... big enough for...

Paul trails off. The guy stares at him.

PAUL
I guess I'm thinking... you know.
Paw-sized.

The guy keeps staring at him.

FADE TO:

BLACK.

PAUL'S VOICE
The following is true. It has been
documented, researched, and
recorded. It is not anecdotal and
nothing has been embellished.

AT A HOUSE IN THE SUBURBS -- with the picket fence and the swing set out back.

PAUL'S VOICE
Suffolk, Virginia. Here there
lived a man, and his wife, and
their two kids, and their dog. The
man worked for the Coast Guard and
was stationed out of Portsmouth,
twenty miles away.

TWENTY MILES AWAY -- a MAN steps off a white coast guard boat, rubbing his eyes. It's late and he's tired.

PAUL'S VOICE

The man would return home at odd hours, depending when his ship returned to port. He would not call, and Portsmouth was too far away-- and far too busy-- for anyone in Suffolk to hear the whistle of his boat when it docked.

AT THE HOUSE IN SUFFOLK -- the man's WIFE, who'd been asleep in bed, opens her eyes. From somewhere, there is a SQUEAK.

PAUL'S VOICE

But yet, to the man's amazement, whenever he returned home, his wife Teresa was always freshly made-up, the house was always clean and neat, and she always had a perfectly timed pot of tea waiting for him.

AT THE DOGGY DOOR -- the FAMILY DOG pushes his way into the front yard. The doggy door SQUEAKS open and shut behind him.

PAUL'S VOICE

Her secret was simple -- somehow, someway, the family dog, Jackson, could sense when the man was about to return. As soon as Jackson would scamper out of the house and station himself at the end of the sidewalk, Teresa knew it was time to get ready.

QUICK SHOTS -- of Teresa pouring water into a kettle.

-- turning on the stove.

-- applying lipstick.

-- cleaning off the counter.

PAUL'S VOICE

So while she put the tea kettle on, reapplied her makeup, and tidied up the house, Jackson would patiently wait outside for his master to arrive. And arrive he always did.

CLOSE ON THE TEA KETTLE -- as the steam rises, and the kettle begins it's WHISTLE --

OUTSIDE -- a car pulls into the driveway. The engine shuts off. The car door opens.

PAUL'S VOICE

And so no matter his schedule, no matter the hour, the man returned to find his dog -- and his wife, and a fresh pot of tea -- waiting for him every day, and every night, for 14 years, without fail.

TERESA OPENS THE FRONT DOOR -- to see her silhouetted husband greet Jackson as he walks through the gate.

Off Jackson's joyful face as he reunites with his master --

FADE TO BLACK

INT. ITHACA COLLEGE - PAUL'S OFFICE

Paul walks into his office. His inbox is loaded with mail. He takes a seat in his chair but doesn't touch anything.

A photo on his desk (which we can't see) catches his eye.

He pauses, then opens his attache case and places it inside.

FADE TO:

INT. A CHURCH - DAY

It's a wedding. The groom's side of the church is packed. But the bride's side is practically empty.

A man wearing the Tam Lin mask and a tux stands at the front of a church. A PASTOR stands behind him.

The first notes of 'Here Comes The Bride' play and the crowd turns to watch the bride walk down the aisle. Her dress is stunning, but her face is covered with the princess mask.

The man waiting for her takes off the Tam Lin mask. It's Paul, of course, happy as can be.

The Princess arrives at Paul's side. He pulls the mask up like a veil. Underneath, tears stream down Lexy's face. She looks back at the lopsided crowd behind her, then over at Paul.

LEXY

You think you're so popular, don't you?

PAUL

I just wish your parents were here to see how beautiful you are.

Lexy doesn't answer, just looks back at her empty front row.

She waves at a COUPLE sitting in the second row on her side, then whispers to Paul out of the side of her mouth--

LEXY

Paul. The Gibson's are your friends.

PAUL

They're both our friends.

LEXY

You've known him since college.

PAUL

But she really likes you.

They look at each other... and Lexy smiles.

Paul does, too. They stare at each other as the Pastor begins to speak. Lexy leans into him.

LEXY

(whispering)

Can I ask you a question?

PAUL

Anything.

LEXY

Would you have ever stopped asking?

Paul brushes Lexy's face as he shakes his head 'no'.

Without any prodding from the Pastor, Paul leans in to kiss her, but just before he reaches her lips, Lexy's face jarringly DISTORTS, just like before, and --

PAUL'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Paul wakes with a start, scaring Lorelei, asleep next to him.

She jumps off the bed. Paul's open attache case is nearby.

Inside is the framed photo from his office -- a beautiful shot of Paul and Lexy at their wedding. Lorelei sniffs it, then turns back to Paul, who's staring at Lexy's untouched night stand. The book of fairytales is still there.

Paul picks the book up, takes it over to the nearby bookshelf, pulls the green highlighter out from between the pages, and as he puts the book back in the empty spot where it belongs --

--he suddenly sees something that makes him pause.

Written on the back flip cover of the book, in green highlighter, are the letters DRM, followed by a phone number.

Paul stares at the highlighter in his hand -- and back at the book -- and the green numbers scrawled in the margins --

--and then, impulsively, he picks up the phone and dials.

Before he has a chance to think twice, the phone is ringing, and then, a groggy male VOICE mumbles out a 'hello'.

PAUL

Hi, I'm sorry to bother you so early, but... who is this?

VOICE

(still groggy)
David. This is David.

PAUL

David who?

VOICE

David Mackay. Why? Who's this?

Paul glances back at the book and the letters DRM. He sucks in a sharp breath.

PAUL

How do you know my wife?

VOICE

I'm sorry?

PAUL

How do you know Lexy Ransome?

VOICE

Lexy Ransome? I have no idea. Who is this?

PAUL

Your initials and your phone number are written in her book, man, so there's no point in lying to me.

VOICE

(beat)
Is this a joke?

PAUL

No, it's not. Now I'm going to ask you again: how do you know my wife?

VOICE

You have any idea what time it is?

PAUL

Listen to me. I'm not sure who you are and I'm not sure how you know her, but you better start giving me some answers here or--

Paul's interrupted by a CLICK and then a DIAL TONE. He stares at the phone, then dials again. The same VOICE answers.

PAUL

How do you know my wi--

VOICE

For chrissakes. Stop calling here.

The voice hangs up and again, there's a DIAL TONE. Paul stands and Lorelei wags her tail, mistakenly assuming that he's gonna take her out. But instead, Paul just paces around the room.

Finally, he lurches for the phone one more time. But this time, a RECORDED OPERATOR answers.

AUTOMATED VOICE

The number you are calling has been blocked. Please hang up and--

Paul slams down the phone. Then he glances at the laptop.

EXT. HOUSE -- TWENTY MINUTES LATER

A MIDDLE-AGED MAN in a bathrobe walks out his door to grab the paper. He flips to the sports page, checking last night's score, and doesn't see Paul until he's a few feet away.

PAUL

David Mackay?

(off his hesitant nod)

We just spoke on the phone--

DAVID MACKAY

Oh my god.

PAUL

Tell me how you know my wife.

DAVID MACKAY

Listen, buddy, I don't know how you got here, I don't who you are or what you're after--

PAUL

I PeopleSearched you, buddy, and she wrote your name and number into her book, okay, so please don't--

DAVID MACKAY
 -- but I'm gonna give you
 about five seconds to--

PAUL
 --so please don't insult me
 by saying you have no idea
 who she was--

DAVID MACKAY
 --to get off my property--

PAUL
 Your middle name begins with an R,
 doesn't it. Doesn't it?

DAVID MACKAY
 What? No. My middle name is Alan.

PAUL
 You're lying.
 (beat)
 Where you there that day?

DAVID MACKAY
 What day?

PAUL
 The day she died.

DAVID MACKAY
 Jesus. Listen, man--

PAUL
 (interrupting)
 Were you having an affair with her?

DAVID MACKAY
 That's it. I'm calling the cops.

When he turns back to the door, Paul grabs him by the wrist. Mackay tries to shake him off, but Paul won't budge.

They struggle (a little pathetically) until Paul eventually loses his footing and Mackay pushes him to the ground. Then he hurries back inside and SHUTS and LOCKS the door.

Paul gets to his feet and, through the window into the kitchen, he sees Mackay pick up the phone.

Paul turns to hurry away, but then his eyes dart to the newspaper strewn at his feet. He pauses.

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Detective Stack sits at his desk, typing up a report, when Paul walks in. He carries Mackay's newspaper with the sleeves of his shirt pulled over his hands.

PAUL

We need to dust this newspaper for prints and compare it with what you took off that wine glass.

Stack takes off his glasses and rubs his eyes.

DETECTIVE STACK

Paul...

PAUL

I think this guy was in my house that day. I think we found him.

DETECTIVE STACK

Paul. Lexy's case is closed. I've already turned in the paperwork.

PAUL

Okay, but all I'm asking--

DETECTIVE STACK

No, you're not listening to me. I can't run prints on this even if I wanted to -- I don't have an active case number for billing.

PAUL

Oh come on, don't give me the red tape excuse here.

DETECTIVE STACK

I'm sorry, Paul, but it's against protocol--

PAUL

Detective. My wife is dead. No offense, but I don't give a damn about your protocol.

Stack regards him coolly. Paul sighs.

PAUL

Please. Do this one last thing for me, Tony, and I promise, I'll leave you alone for good.

Detective Stack looks at him...

... then snaps on a plastic glove, grabs the newspaper, and tucks it into an envelope marked 'evidence'.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Empty except for Lorelei, sniffing around the hallway.

The door to the basement is open a crack. Lorelei pushes it open with her paw. As she heads down the stairs --

IN THE BASEMENT (FLASHBACK) --

-- Lexy turns and jumps when she sees Lorelei walking down. Right behind her is Younger Paul.

LEXY

Oh my god. You guys scared me.

Paul smiles at her. Lexy's hands are coated in paper mache.

LEXY

Is it dinnertime already? Sorry, I lost track of time -- I'll go heat up something for us real quick.

PAUL

It's okay, I brought home a couple subs. What are you working on?

The basement is clearly Lexy's work space -- there's a small kiln, a big desk, and tons of supplies. Masks, in various stages of completion, line the walls.

Lexy shrugs and turns back to her work.

LEXY

Same thing.

PAUL

Same thing? Which thing? The thing you started three weeks ago?
(off her nod)
Jesus, how many masks do they want?

Lexy hesitates as if she's reluctant to talk about it.

LEXY

Just one.

PAUL

You've been spending all this time on one mask? Who's it for?

LEXY

A new client.

She pulls some old newspapers over whatever she's working on.

LEXY

It's a referral from the McCoys -- they threw the Halloween party last year?

(MORE)

LEXY (cont'd)
One of their friends called -- this couple. They had a... special request.

Paul glances at the bulge under the newspapers.

PAUL
Well what is it?

LEXY
It's nothing. They just wanted me to make a mask of their daughter.

PAUL
Of their daughter or for their daughter?

LEXY
Of.
(beat)
She died two months ago.

PAUL
Oh god, that's terrible. How?

LEXY
(reluctantly)
Suicide.

Lexy holds out a picture, but she doesn't make eye contact.

LEXY
They gave me this as a reference.
She's pretty, isn't she?

THE PICTURE -- is of a normal, attractive 16-year-old GIRL. Maybe she's not quite comfortable in her own skin yet, but she's smiling widely, and, for all intents and purposes, she looks happy. Paul stares at her, trying to process it.

PAUL
So wait, let me get this straight -- the parents want you to make a mask of their dead daughter's face?
(off her nod)
What are they gonna do, display it on the coffee table?

LEXY
Death masks have been around for thousands of years, you know.

PAUL
It just seems really...goth.

LEXY

Well, we all grieve in different ways, Paul.

And even though this is a flashback, the meaning of those words seem to resonate with him.

LEXY

They gave me this, too.

She shows Paul a sealed book. The cover reads:

PAM'S DIARY -- TO BE READ BY NO ONE! (NOT EVEN YOU, MOTHER!)

She opens it to a dog-eared page and starts to read.

LEXY

I've never told anyone this, but sometimes I think about how much better it would be if I wasn't here. And what's worse, I believe it -- in that moment, it doesn't matter if people love me or if the sun is shining or if there's a movie coming out the next day that I'm dying to see. I believe it. But that's all it is -- a moment -- and when the moment's gone, I don't believe it anymore, and I'm happy. Trouble is, even when I'm at my happiest, in the back of my mind I always know... all it takes is a moment.

She gingerly closes the book and locks it again...

LEXY

I just think that, right now, both of her parents are wondering -- did we ever know her at all?

...then she carefully places it beside the girl's picture.

LEXY

And I dunno. Maybe...maybe they're hoping this mask will give them something they recognize again.

PAUL

Well, can I see it?

Lexy looks away, then changes the subject.

LEXY

I know I've been distracted lately, Paul. And I'm sorry.

But the look on Paul's face makes you wonder if he noticed.

LEXY

*This is important to me, though.
This...this feels like the most
meaningful thing I've ever done.*

PAUL

Lex... I'd really like to see it.

*Lexy hesitates a little longer, and then reluctantly pulls
the mask out from under the newspapers.*

*At first glance, it appears that she's simply painted the
girl's face from the photo. But Lexy captured her smile and
the rest of her features perfectly-- although the artistry is
slightly abstract, it's still somehow really lifelike.*

*When Paul looks closer, though, he can see that the smiling
face is itself a mask. Beneath it is the faint outline (like
those comedy/tragedy masks from the theatre) of another set of
features -- features which stand in somber contrast to the
bright smile and happy eyes on the surface. It's amazing work.*

PAUL

Wow. Lexy... wow.

LEXY

*Do you think they'll like it? Is
it too abstract?
(off his face)
What? What's wrong?*

PAUL

*No, I mean, it's beautiful. But
it's just so... haunting.
(beat)
Are you sure her parents are
looking for 'haunting'?*

Lexy looks back at him, worried.

LEXY

*They want something to remember
their daughter by. Well... this is
their daughter.*

Paul sees how important this is to her.

PAUL

Then I think they'll love it.

Just as relief flashes on Lexy's face...

FADE BACK:

TO THE PRESENT --

--where Paul has appeared at the top of the stairs.

PAUL
Lorelei? You down there?

Lorelei bounds up the stairs, tail wagging, to greet Paul. He shoots her a dirty look, then flips off the basement light.

OUTSIDE THE HOUSE --

Matthew Rice RINGS the doorbell.

Paul answers and lets him in. The house has become a mess, but Paul either doesn't notice or doesn't care.

PAUL
Come on in. You want something to drink?

MATTHEW RICE
Sure. Whatever you're having.

Paul checks the refrigerator. It's empty except for two cans of Pabst Blue Ribbon. He pops them both open and hands one to Matthew, who eyes it critically.

MATTHEW RICE
So you told Alan in engineering about your little... experiment.

PAUL
I needed a keyboard.
(off Matthew's silence)
It's a legitimate academic study, Matt. There's this professor down in Wooster, this guy Hollis, who's written like ten papers on the subject.

MATTHEW RICE
Wooster, huh?

Matthew looks around the kitchen, sees all the dishes in the sink and the overflowing garbage in the pantry.

MATTHEW RICE
I know that it's been hard, okay? I know that it's been a struggle. But when you brought it to campus... when you asked him to build you what you asked him to build you...
(cutting right to it)
It's become a joke at school, Paul.

PAUL
It's not a joke to me.

MATTHEW RICE
I know. Listen, I'm only here
because I want to help, okay?

PAUL
I don't need your help.

MATTHEW RICE
Fine. But you need somebody's.
(off his look)
Have you thought about... have you
thought about seeing someone?

PAUL
Thanks for stopping by, Matt.

MATTHEW RICE
Come on, Paul. Let's talk this
through.

Paul ignores him and sits down next to Lorelei. She rubs up
against him and tries to lick his face. As Paul gently
pushes her head away, he speaks quietly in her ear.

PAUL
Sic. Do you know that one?

Lorelei wags her tail at him.

PAUL
Go on then. Sic him. Attack.

Matthew stares at him as if he's lost his mind.

MATTHEW RICE
Alright, man, Jesus. You don't
have to be a dick about it.

He walks back out the front door, but before he leaves, he
turns around to look at Paul inside.

MATTHEW RICE
I'm just... I'm on your side, okay?

Paul just shuts the door without responding.

He turns around and almost runs into --

LEXY --

--gripping the death mask tightly in her hand.

Paul (the younger version now) jumps, startled.

PAUL

Jesus, you scared me.

(off her silence)

Welcome back. So what did they think--?

--but he stops when he sees her face.

LEXY

They hated it.

She pushes past him into the house, where Lorelei is waiting to greet her. Paul follows her inside.

PAUL

I'm sorry, Lex. For what it's worth, I think it's beautiful.

When he tries to put his arm around her, though, Lexy turns sharply away. She walks across the room toward the fireplace, leaving Paul by the door, helpless. He sighs.

PAUL

So what now?

Lexy shrugs... and then HURLS the mask into the barely lit fire. It cracks in half from the impact.

LEXY

Now I try again.

She heads straight for the basement door and, without another word, she disappears inside of it.

Paul, alone now, walks over to the fireplace and uses the poker to pull the pieces out onto the hearth. He stares at the mask -- it's even more haunting cracked in two.

But then somewhere, a doorbell RINGS, snapping him back to --

THE PRESENT --

--where Older Paul is now standing in the same spot. From the looks of things, the fireplace hasn't been used in months.

The doorbell RINGS again.

PAUL

Go away, Matt!

VOICE FROM OUTSIDE

...Paul?

That's not Matthew's voice. Paul opens the door to find Detective Stack standing on his front stoop.

Lorelei peeks out between Paul's legs, then runs away.

PAUL

Oh, wow. Sorry, I thought you were someone else.

(re: Lorelei)

She's shy around strangers. But you know that. Come on in.

DETECTIVE STACK

It's not a match.

PAUL

What do you mean it's not a match?

DETECTIVE STACK

I mean the person who drank from your wine glass and the person who touched this newspaper are not the same.

PAUL

Are you sure?

DETECTIVE STACK

Yes, Paul. On this, we are absolutely sure.

PAUL

That... can't be right, though.

DETECTIVE STACK

Paul. You know what I'm going to say now, don't you?

(off Paul's silence)

Listen to me. This is a dead end, this road you're on. There is no witness, okay? Even if you somehow find the right guy, he's not going to give you answers. Not to any question you want answered, anyway.

Paul looks away, his mind reeling.

DETECTIVE STACK

Do you understand me, Paul? It's time to move on.

PAUL

I... yeah. I--I'm sorry for wasting your time.

He closes the door.

In a bit of a daze, he wanders into the kitchen. As he stares at something on the wall that we can't see--

BEHIND HIM, IN FLASHBACK--

A middle-aged Couple (ALMA and DON JENKINS, who we recognize from Lexy's funeral) sits on the couch in the living room.

Lexy nervously brings a mask up from the basement and then carefully hands it over to them.

THE NEW MASK -- is the Girl's smiling face again. But this time, instead of a second face beneath the features, her cheeks are colored with a swarm of butterflies, taking flight against fluffy clouds.

Don Jenkins is unable to look away from it, but Alma Jenkins glances up at Lexy with tears in her eyes. She smiles.

ALMA JENKINS

It's perfect.

Alma stands up to hug her. But when Lexy makes eye contact with Young Paul (watching from the kitchen) although she is smiling with her mouth, her eyes are not.

IN THE KITCHEN -- LATER

Younger Paul fiddles with something at the counter. Lexy shows the Jenkins' out the door, then walks into the room.

LEXY

Well, that went much better.

PAUL

Yeah, I heard.

Lexy puts her hands on his shoulders.

LEXY

They didn't touch the cookies, if you're hungry--

She stops when she sees what's in his hands -- it's the first death mask, which he's painstakingly glued back together.

PAUL

Sorry, but I had to. It was too good to let burn.

Lexy reaches out and touches the mask. When she looks up at Paul, she has tears in her eyes now, too.

Paul kisses her on the forehead, then walks past her and carefully hangs it up on a nail in the wall.

He adjusts it a little and smiles, happy with it there, and then he turns to look at Lexy but--

BACK IN THE KITCHEN -- PRESENT DAY --

--Paul's the only person here now. He stares at the same spot on the wall. Although the paint color has changed (it's now a bright, bright yellow) the mask still hangs on the wall.

The rest of the walls are barren. It's the only decoration in the kitchen at all. And it's the only one of Lexy's masks hanging anywhere in the entire house.

Paul slides down the wall to the floor. He stares up at it.

Lorelei comes over and lays down beside him. She puts her head in his lap.

Paul looks down at her. And then, for the first time that we've seen, he gently pets her.

EXT. HILLY STREET - DAY

All is quiet until two figures appear on the horizon, jogging down the road. A person and a dog. They get closer...

...and closer... until they're near enough to recognize. The dog is Lorelei... and this time, the person is Paul.

They run down the road, together.

BACK IN PAUL'S HOUSE --

The place is empty. Then the phone starts to RING. And RING.

Finally, Paul flies through the door, tired and sweaty, Lorelei close behind. He snatches up the phone and answers, almost completely out of breath.

VOICE

Paul? This is Wendell Hollis.

PAUL

Oh, wow. Dr. Hollis. Thanks for calling me back.

WENDELL HOLLIS (V.O.)

Sorry about the delay, but your last message was very interesting. I'm glad to hear you read my work-- you're using the Mann method on a subject right now, you said?

PAUL

Uh-huh. A four-year-old Rhodesian ridgeback.

WENDELL HOLLIS (V.O.)
And are you having any success?

PAUL
Not much, I'm afraid.

WENDELL HOLLIS (V.O.)
No, I wouldn't think so. Have you
made any alterations yet?

PAUL
Alterations? What do you mean?

Hollis pauses, and Paul speaks before he has a chance to.

PAUL (CONT'D)
See, that's the thing -- I have a
million questions -- your papers
are absolutely fascinating, I'd
love to run some of my data by you--

WENDELL HOLLIS (V.O.)
Can I ask you a question, Paul?
(off his 'yes')
Why? Why are you doing this? And
don't say "because I'm a linguistics
professor," because there's a whole
lotta you out there and no one else
is calling me. So-- why you?

Paul pauses, trying to decide how honest to be.

PAUL
I... I'm looking for answers.

WENDELL HOLLIS (V.O.)
To what?

PAUL
I'm not sure.

The phone goes SILENT. Then Hollis chuckles.

WENDELL HOLLIS (V.O.)
I tell you what. You're up in
Ithaca, you said?
(off his 'yes')
That's a four hour drive, but if
you're really interested... why
don't you bring your dog down one
weekend and show me what she can do?

Paul glances at Lorelei, and in no time at all --

INT. PAUL'S CAR -- DAY

Paul, showered and shaved, drives down a highway. Lorelei sits happily next to him, her head hanging out the window.

EXT. WOOSTER, OHIO - NIGHT

Paul's car cruises down one of the streets. He takes a left into a motel. The sign reads ROOMS AVAILABLE, PETS WELCOME.

INT. MOTEL ROOM -

The door opens and Lorelei bounds in to check out the digs. Paul drags his luggage in and closes the door behind him.

EXT. A WOOSTER NEIGHBORHOOD - MORNING

It's a normal middle-class American suburb, and Paul parks his car in front of a normal middle-class American house.

A GRANDFATHERLY MAN sees him through the screen door and walks outside. He waves at Paul as he gets out of his car.

PAUL
Dr. Hollis?

WENDELL HOLLIS
Please... Wendell. You must be
Paul -- how was the drive?

PAUL
It was a breeze. Listen, thank you
again for inviting us--

WENDELL HOLLIS
Nonsense, thanks for coming! It's
always nice to meet a colleague.

Paul opens the passenger door to let Lorelei out. Hollis admires her as she cautiously jumps down to the ground.

WENDELL HOLLIS
Well, will you look at her. Isn't
she something?

Hollis slowly approaches, holding his hand out. But Lorelei retreats, as usual, only this time she also starts BARKING.

PAUL
Lorelei! Be nice.
(to Hollis)
Sorry, she's always a little shy
around strangers.

WENDELL HOLLIS

No problem.

Hollis crouches down and looks her in the eyes, but Lorelei keeps right on BARKING. Hollis watches as Paul tries to soothe her.

WENDELL HOLLIS

She's a pet, isn't she? Not just a test subject, I mean.

PAUL

(a little defensively)

Well... she was my wife's, yeah.
But I'm not all that much of a dog person, to be honest with you.

WENDELL HOLLIS

Really? That's interesting.

Hollis holds eye contact with Lorelei and slowly extends his hand to take hold of her muzzle...

WENDELL HOLLIS

Me, I love dogs. They're amazing creatures, they really are.

...but at the last minute, Lorelei SNARLS and twists her face as if to bite him. Hollis deftly pulls his hand away.

PAUL

Lorelei! Jesus.

WENDELL HOLLIS

My, she's a fiesty one, isn't she?

PAUL

I'm sorry, I've never seen her act like this.

Lorelei shrinks away from Hollis and tries to hide behind Paul's legs. She continues to BARK, but it's a higher pitch now, as if Lorelei's becoming more and more frightened. Paul watches, concerned.

PAUL

You know, I think I should just leave her in the car for the time being.

WENDELL HOLLIS

That's probably a good idea. Let her settle down, get used to all the new smells. We'll bring her in when she's comfortable.

Paul opens the car door and Lorelei quickly jumps in. He cracks the window for air and then shuts the door.

But now Lorelei gets even more frantic. She keeps BARKING and starts scratching at the window as hard as she can. Paul tries in vain to calm her down.

He opens the door and tries petting her, but nothing seems to work. It's almost like Lorelei's having a panic attack.

PAUL

Actually... maybe I'll just run her back to the motel.

WENDELL HOLLIS

I'm sure she'll be fine in the car.

Lorelei starts YELPING now, really ear-piercing. Paul cringes.

PAUL

I'm sorry about this. I won't be long -- the motel's really close.

Hollis stares at Lorelei in the car, his face unreadable.

WENDELL HOLLIS

Where are you staying?

PAUL

The Wooster Inn on Wayne?

WENDELL HOLLIS

Oh sure. That's a nice place.
Very pet friendly.

(as he smiles at Paul)

Well, I'll be right here. I cleared my schedule for you, so I have all day.

INT. MOTEL ROOM --

Paul opens the door again and Lorelei, back to her old self now, bounds in. She turns her head to see if Paul wants to play -- but the door is already SLAMMING shut.

Lorelei stares at it, her tail frozen in mid-wag.

BACK AT WENDELL HOLLIS'S HOUSE -

Paul drives up to find Hollis talking to a TATTOOED MAN in his front yard.

Hollis waves at Paul. The Tattooed Man quietly walks away. A smiling Hollis slaps Paul on the back and brings him--

INSIDE THE HOUSE -- TEN MINUTES LATER

Paul sits on a couch as Hollis makes coffee in the other room. The place is nice enough, but it's cluttered and a bit messy-- not at all unlike Paul's house without Lexy, actually.

Hollis carries on a conversation with Paul from the kitchen.

WENDELL HOLLIS

Honestly, you can stop apologizing.
Wait till you meet my dogs -- they
make Lorelei look like a Westminster
Best In Show.

PAUL

How many do you have?

WENDELL HOLLIS

Just six right now. All rescues,
I'm proud to say.

(off Paul's reaction)

Hey, I told you. I love dogs.

Paul glances around the room. There's no dogs, no dog toys, no sign of any animals at all.

PAUL

Wow. Are they pets, or...?

WENDELL HOLLIS

No no, they're much more than pets.
They're my life's work.

Hollis brings in a pot of coffee on a tray. Paul leans forward in his seat.

PAUL

So you've had some success with them?

WENDELL HOLLIS

Oh yes. My methods are a little
avant garde, I suppose, but it's
hard to argue with my results. How
do you take your coffee?

PAUL

Sugar, no cream. What do you mean--

WENDELL HOLLIS

Well I talk to them every day, Paul.
Of course, so does everyone else --
dogs are great listeners, as my
mother always said. One sugar or two?

PAUL

Just one.

He drops in a cube, then hands the coffee over with a smile.

WENDELL HOLLIS

The difference, though, is that my
dogs talk back.

Paul stares at him, but Hollis busies himself with the cream
and sugar for his own coffee.

WENDELL HOLLIS

I've made some really great strides
on my latest, a lab. Well, I say
latest -- he's been with me for two
years now, but I only started
working seriously with him in the
past few months. We've already
come so far, though... much further
than any of the others.

He sips his coffee, then casually looks up at Paul.

WENDELL HOLLIS

Why... you wanna speak with him?

INT. STAIRWELL -- SECONDS LATER

Paul follows Hollis down a claustrophobic stairwell off the
kitchen. At the bottom is a closed door.

WENDELL HOLLIS

Forgive the mess down here. As you
can imagine, six dogs can be quite
a handful-- say, you're not a
police officer, are you?

Paul looks up at him as the first wave of real uneasiness
sets in. But he shakes his head and mumbles a 'no'.

WENDELL HOLLIS (CONT'D)

Sorry, had to ask. The truth is, I
knew right when I spoke to you on
the phone that you were for real.
But you just can't be too careful
these days.

They reach the bottom of the stairwell. Hollis unlocks the
door and they walk into a cold, dark basement. Paul
immediately covers his nose from the smell.

Although Paul can't see anything, they're greeted by a
commotion -- everything from a DEEP BARK to a RASPY HOWL to
something else, a sound that Paul's unable to place.

It's an odd, disquieting symphony, but Hollis just ignores it. He raps his knuckles on the padding that lines the walls.

WENDELL HOLLIS

Soundproof. 2 inch acoustic vinyl.

(winks at Paul)

Let's em talk as much as they want
without disturbing the neighbors.

He flips a switch and florescent lights flicker on. The room is large and messy, and along with normal basement stuff -- boxes and old furniture -- there are eight very large covered crates spread throughout the room.

WENDELL HOLLIS

If you've read my papers already
then I don't need to go into
detail, but as I'm sure you know,
dogs simply don't have the genetic
makeup to allow speech-- not by our
definition of the term, at least.
The bottom line is dogs have simply
been designed wrong. So it's up to
us to remedy that.

Hollis walks through the room, tidying up, grabbing a few little scraps of trash. Neither the NOISE or the smell seems to bother him much. Paul, however, can't decide whether to cover his ears or his nose.

WENDELL HOLLIS

Anyway, most all of my first
attempts involved various degrees
of reconstruction...

Paul starts to turn pale.

PAUL

Reconstruction?

WENDELL HOLLIS

Unfortunately it's been a long time
since I was in medical school, you
know? I did my research, of course,
but things still got a bit... messy.

They pass by one of the crates, and there is a DEEP BARKING from inside, but the florescent light isn't nearly enough to pierce through the covered crate. There's definitely a dog in there, but Paul can't see what kind.

WENDELL HOLLIS

About two years ago, though, I made a
real breakthrough.

(MORE)

WENDELL HOLLIS (cont'd)

I visited an uncle in the hospital --
throat cancer, heavy smoker, had a
laryngectomy. He was learning to
talk with this -- it's called an
electrolarynx.

Hollis brings an electrolarynx (essentially a metal vibrating tube) out of his pocket and grins proudly at Paul's reaction.

WENDELL HOLLIS

I know, hard to believe no one
thought of this before, huh? I
realized if I could just train a
dog to use their lips and tongue
correctly, only minor surgery would
be necessary.

Hollis reaches the last cage, deep in the back of the room.
This one, unlike all the others, is eerily silent. He kneels
down and unlocks the grated door.

WENDELL HOLLIS

My, they sure can make a mess in one
night, can't they?
(to the unseen dog)
Come on out and say hello. J --
get out here. Come here!

He reaches in and pulls the dog out by his collar.

WENDELL HOLLIS

Paul... meet Dog J.

At first, the dog seems like a normal yellow lab, only too
thin and too mangy. His mouth, though, looks just slightly
off-- like bad plastic surgery on an aging Hollywood actress--
and near the top of his throat, where his larynx would be,
there is a small scar.

Wendell scratches him behind the ears, gently prodding him,
and holds the electrolarynx up to his scar.

WENDELL HOLLIS

Go on, don't be shy. You've got a
guest -- say something.

The dog looks at Paul. When he finally speaks, the sound
that comes out is unearthly.

DOG J

Ayayay. Kafofwayo.

PAUL

Jesus.

DOG J
Woganoo. Jukaluk.

Paul stares at the dog, horrified. But Wendell is too proud to notice.

WENDELL HOLLIS
I know. You have no idea how hard
it's been to get the J's and K's
right.

As the dog continues to BABBLE, the reality of the situation slowly sinks in for Paul.

When he finally glances over at Hollis, his expression is unmistakable -- my God, how did I possibly end up here?

EXT. WENDELL HOLLIS'S HOUSE -- LATER

Hollis walks a still stunned Paul out to his car.

WENDELL HOLLIS
I have a 10:30 class tomorrow, but
I can stop by on my way to school,
if that works for you.

Paul gets in and looks back up at Hollis, no clue what he's talking about. Hollis shrugs.

WENDELL HOLLIS
You know -- to get a look at
Lorelei, see what she's capable of.
I'm sure she'll be much more
relaxed in your room.
(mistaking Paul's expression)
What? You are staying another
night, aren't you?

Paul is unable to do anything except nod.

WENDELL HOLLIS
Great. See you around 9 then?

EXT. MOTEL HALLWAY - LATER THAT AFTERNOON

Paul hurries down the hall to his room. The MAID's cart is outside his door, and when she sees him she starts to say something in Spanish.

PAUL
No, it's okay, go ahead. We're
checking out anyway.

But the maid keeps talking in SPANISH, and when Paul walks in, he finds an empty room. He looks around.

PAUL

Lorelei?

He turns to the Maid, who's still spitting out Spanish. She tries to talk with her hands, but Paul's not getting it.

PAUL

Where is the dog that was in here?

The maid tries one more time, then, frustrated, she hurries out of the room.

PAUL

Hey!

He follows her out to the hallway, but she's already dragging a second, YOUNGER MAID back to Paul's room. The Younger Maid nods, deciphering her Spanish, then translates to Paul.

HOTEL MAID

She says that when she opened the door... he just ran out.

(translating more)

And she tried but -- but she couldn't catch him.

Almost before she can finish the sentence, Paul takes off like a rocket back towards his car.

EXT. WOOSTER STREETS - SERIES OF SHOTS

--as Paul drives around the neighborhood, calling Lorelei's name. His eyes dart everywhere.

A few cars start to back up behind him, but Paul keeps it under 20 m.p.h.

INT. WOOSTER POUND - DAY

The place is pretty small and cramped. Paul hurries in the door to find a young POUND CLERK behind the front desk, reading a magazine.

PAUL

Has a Rhodesian ridgeback come in today? She's got that strip of hair running down her back -- her name's Lorelei, it's on her tag.

POUND CLERK

Sorry, we haven't had any dropoffs since I got in this morning.

Paul's face falls.

PAUL

Okay-- she's reddish brown, 80 pounds or so, and she was last seen on Wayne Avenue. She's my wife's dog and we're not-- she's not from here, so there's nowhere familiar for her to go.

He grabs a piece of paper and scribbles down his info.

POUND CLERK

Don't worry, sir -- I'm sure she'll turn up. They almost always do.

PAUL

The number on her collar is our home phone, so please, call me on my cell as soon as someone finds her, okay? I'm staying at the Wooster Inn -- you can reach me there too.

POUND CLERK

Oh, that's a great little motel, isn't it? Very pet friendly.

Paul stares at her -- the words trigger something. Wendell Hollis's voice rings in his ears...

WENDELL HOLLIS'S VOICE

(eerily now)

*Oh sure. That's a nice place.
Very pet friendly.*

...and Paul starts to turn pale.

PAUL

You don't know a Dr. Hollis by any chance, do you? Dr. Wendell Hollis?

POUND CLERK

Mr. Hollis? Of course. Such a nice man. You know, thanks to him, we haven't had to put down a dog around here in ages.

PAUL

Do you have any idea what he does to those dogs?

POUND CLERK

Sure. He takes them out to his farm in Andersonville, let's them roam wherever they--

Paul reaches over the desk, grabs the phone receiver, and holds it to her.

PAUL
Get the police. Right now.

EXT. WENDELL HOLLIS' HOUSE - DAY

In SLO-MO (similar to the day Lexy died, where Paul came home to find his house swarming with police) Paul watches as cops bring out the dogs from Hollis' basement, one by one.

Red police car lights flash. A crowd gathers. Crime tape is used to keep them at bay. It's turned into quite a scene.

An officer named GARCIA brings Hollis out the front door in handcuffs. Hollis and Paul lock eyes.

WENDELL HOLLIS
How could you do this to me?

PAUL
(to Garcia)
Is she in there?

WENDELL HOLLIS
Is who in--?

OFFICER GARCIA
--we're still looking.

PAUL
(right at Hollis)
If you did anything to Lorelei, you sick fuck, I swear to god...

WENDELL HOLLIS
Are you serious? How would I possibly -- you brought her back to the motel, remember?

PAUL
You asked me where I was staying before I left. Who were you talking to while I was gone, Hollis? What happened to that guy I saw you with?

While Garcia steps away to have a quick word with another COP, Hollis stares at Paul. He finally puts it together.

WENDELL HOLLIS
Oh my. She ran away, didn't she?
(off Paul's face)
Well, isn't that rude. She could've at least left a note.

Paul DECKS Hollis in the face. Garcia catches the tail end of it and pulls Paul away from Hollis.

WENDELL HOLLIS

Did you see that, officer? He just assaulted me!

Garcia glares at Paul, then turns to Hollis and yanks him up.

OFFICER GARCIA

Must've just missed it.
(to the other COP)
Get this sicko out of here.

As Hollis is led away, another OFFICER brings one last crate out the front door. He looks sympathetically at Paul.

OFFICER

Sorry. That's all of them.

Paul's face falls. Hollis, meanwhile, calls out to Paul as he's put into a nearby squad car.

WENDELL HOLLIS

I don't have Lorelei, Dr. Ransome.
But I promise -- I'll keep my eye
out for her.

Garcia glares at him, then turns around to reassure Paul, but Paul's already walking away towards his own car.

OFFICER GARCIA

Sir, we're still gonna need you
down at the station to answer some
ques-- hey! Where are you going?

PAUL

To find my dog.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

PAUL DRIVING THROUGH THE CITY -- calling for Lorelei.

STREET after STREET after STREET.

AT A KINKO'S -- Paul makes copies, the light from the machine flashing steadily beneath him.

BACK ON THE STREETS -- He nails a flier to a post. He carries a big box -- he's got hundreds of these.

DRIVING AGAIN -- late at night now, idling slowly through neighborhoods, calling out for Lorelei.

Lights flip on in houses he passes by, but Paul doesn't seem to notice or care. A voice yells out -- *shut up already!* -- but Paul just ignores it.

INT. PAUL'S CAR -- MORNING

The car is frosted over, and Paul's asleep in the driver's seat. Suddenly there's a KNOCK on his door, and Paul stirs awake. It's Officer Garcia. Paul rolls down the window.

OFFICER GARCIA

Go home, Mr. Ransome.

PAUL

(rubbing the sleep away)
I can't. She's still missing.

OFFICER GARCIA

You said your home number was on her collar, right? Well some nice family probably found her, took her in for the night. Now they're just waiting for you to call them back.

PAUL

I had a neighbor check my machine. No one's called. Besides, Lorelei's shy around strangers. She'd never let anybody take her in.

Garcia sighs. He leans in the window.

OFFICER GARCIA

We had multiple complaints last night, Mr. Ransome. You ever heard the term 'disturbing the peace?'

(off Paul's shrug)

Listen, I have all our squad cars on the lookout. Beth at Animal Control has called every pound within 100 miles of here and given them the heads up. Hollis is locked up. You've posterized the city. You've done all you can do. Go home, Mr. Ransome.

PAUL

Not without my dog.

OFFICER GARCIA

Fine. Just so we know, how long you planning on sticking around then?

PAUL

However long it takes.

OFFICER GARCIA

What if she hasn't shown up after a week?

(MORE)

OFFICER GARCIA (cont'd)
You got enough vacation saved up?
What if it's a month? You just
gonna up and move here?

Paul doesn't answer, just starts to roll up the window.
Garcia looks away. His tone changes.

OFFICER GARCIA
I have two of my own, you know. A
boxer and a beagle.

Paul stops rolling up the window.

OFFICER GARCIA
I love those goddamn dogs. And
that's why you can believe me when
I promise you-- I'll look for her
like she's one of mine, okay?

He pulls out a business car and hands it over.

OFFICER GARCIA
My direct number. Call me everyday
if you want. If she's still here,
Paul... I'll find her.

Paul's eyes well with tears, but he quickly blinks them away.

EXT. HIGHWAY -- MIDDAY

Paul drives home, depressed and alone.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE -- EVENING

Paul walks in the door. There are dog toys in the foyer. He
looks around, almost as if he's waiting for Lorelei to hurry
downstairs to greet him. But of course she doesn't.

It's all too much. He turns around and walks out again.

INT. ITHACA COLLEGE - PAUL'S OFFICE

The hallways are deserted at this late hour. There's a note
taped to Paul's office door. It's one of those *While You Were*
Away post-its. The message is "Your dog called." And then
below it: "Woof woof."

Paul crumples it up as he walks into his office. Papers are
piled on his couch. Unopened mail floods his in-box.
There's a large package on his desk. Paul opens it up.

It's the modified keyboard he asked the engineer to design.
It's sleek, impressively crafted, and now completely useless.

Paul can do nothing except stare at it.

FADE TO:

BLACK.

PAUL'S VOICE

The following is true. It has been documented, researched, and recorded. It is not anecdotal and nothing has been embellished.

ON A MAN'S SAD, WRINKLED FACE -- as he opens his eyes in the morning.

PAUL'S VOICE

Hamburg, Germany. Here there lived an unhappy man who woke up one day and decided he'd had enough.

He stares at himself in the mirror. Then:

QUICK CUTS --

-- of the man frying bacon on the stove --

-- watching his German Shepherd, REXINA, piss in the grass --

-- opening a box stashed high in his closet, the contents of which we cannot see.

PAUL'S VOICE

He made his wife breakfast, took his dog Rexina for a walk, and then left them both in the house while he locked himself in their backyard greenhouse. He said nothing to his wife and wrote no note.

IN THE BACK YARD -- As the man enters the greenhouse, he takes one last look around his prized garden.

INSIDE THE MAIN HOUSE -- Rexina, standing on his hind legs and staring out the window, begins to BARK.

She hurries over to the man's WIFE, who's reading the paper, and runs around her madly, BARKING and WHIMPERING. The wife shushes her, but Rexina only grows more agitated.

PAUL'S VOICE

Back in the house, Rexina became excited, and the man's wife was unable to calm her down.

ON THE BACK DOOR -- as the man's wife opens it to let Rexina out. She cuts across the yard, right at the greenhouse.

The woman, a little puzzled, follows her. Rexina SCRATCHES at the closed greenhouse door, BARKING LOUDLY.

The woman tries the door. Locked. She KNOCKS.

WIFE

Ehemann? Hallo? Sind sie hinein?

Rexina, frantic now, continues to scratch at the door knob, BARKING furiously. When no one answers, she backs up and leaps straight THROUGH the glass, disappearing inside.

The shocked woman reaches through the shattered pane to unlock the door. She hurries into the greenhouse to find --

--her husband, still alive. Rexina has tackled him and is frantically licking his face, quietly whimpering.

Confused, the woman goes to pull Rexina off her husband when she sees a GUN LYING NEARBY. The man looks up at her -- and has tears in his eyes.

He begins to RAMBLE IN GERMAN, then stands up, collapses into her arms and starts to sob.

The woman is too stunned to speak. She just hugs him tightly.

Rexina watches from below, refusing to leave the man's side.

PAUL'S VOICE

The man was so moved by his dog's devotion that he put the gun back in the box in his closet, and never opened it again.

IN HIS CLOSET -- the box is tucked away on the top shelf.

CLOSE ON -- the man's wrinkled face as he opens his eyes in bed the next morning.

Then he leans over and kisses his sleeping wife on her head. Rexina rests peacefully between them.

THE GARDEN -- is full and the flowers are in bloom.

But the man, a few years older now, slowly digs a hole.

PAUL'S VOICE

Four years later, old and weary, the dog passed peacefully away in her sleep. The man buried her by his greenhouse, and on her gravestone, which he carved by hand, he wrote "Here lies our beloved Rexina, to whom I owe the rest of my life."

Then, off a beautiful stone, with those words in German --

FADE TO BLACK

EXT. PAUL'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Paul sits in his car, listening to talk radio. He stares at his house, but it's too empty to go inside.

A CAR PULLS INTO HIS DRIVEWAY -- it's the same car that Paul's in now. Just not as dirty. The door opens...

...and a clean-shaven Paul gets out. He ambles up to the front door while he messes with his palm pilot.

In the car on the street, the Real Paul stares at himself, confused. But he gets out of the car and follows--

INTO THE HOUSE -- where there's music coming from the kitchen. The door closes behind Shaven Paul--

--while Real Paul jumps inside before it shuts--

--and Lexy appears in the hallway. She's dressed in raggedy clothes and is splotched with paint, but she's still radiant. She kisses Shaven Paul as Lorelei happily greets him.

LEXY

You're home! Come in here, I've got a surprise for you.

Although Shaven Paul's still fiddling with his Palm Pilot, he lets Lexy pull him by the shirt into the kitchen.

The real Paul reluctantly follows. He knows what he's in for.

They walk into the kitchen, which has been freshly painted that familiar yellow. The cabinets are taped and covered, and all the decorations from the walls (including the death mask) are lying on the counters. Lexy smiles at Shaven Paul.

LEXY

Whaddaya think? Can you see it?

Shaven Paul looks around. Clearly he's not thrilled.

PAUL

How could I not?

LEXY

C'mon, look harder. You're talking about the color, I'm talking about--

PAUL
That's more than a color, that's a
phosphor.

Shaven Paul shrugs and heads to the fridge, ignoring Lorelei.

PAUL
It's fine, honey. I just wish
you'd asked me first.

Lexy watches him, hurt by his indifferent reaction.

LEXY
I spent all day on this, Paul.

PAUL
Which is exactly why I wish you'd
asked me about it first.

He grabs a diet coke, then heads out of the kitchen, passing--

REAL PAUL, who cringes as he watches Lexy's face pass from
hurt to angry.

LEXY
I should've known. Of course you
wouldn't notice. Why start paying
attention to things now, huh?

PAUL
What are you talking about?

LEXY
What am I talking about? Where are
you going, Paul? Give me one guess.

PAUL
I've got work to do, Lexy. When
dinner's ready, let me know.

LEXY
Fuck dinner.

Paul stops. But he doesn't turn to face her.

LEXY
You're gone all day. When you get
home you head straight to that
office, and after dinner you head
straight back. Then that's it.
Those are our nights. If I'm lucky,
maybe we'll read in bed together for
ten minutes before you fall asleep.

PAUL

Oh, here we go again -- whaa whaa
whaa. You've got it so rough, don't
you? Life must be so hard for you.

LEXY

You're a jerk, you know that?

PAUL

Save it for the talk show, honey.
Women And Their No Good Men. Tell
us, Mrs. Ransome, what's wrong with
your husband? Does he beat you?
Cheat on you? Does he have a
drinking problem? A temper?
(in his best Lexy voice)
"No no, it's worse than all that.
It's much worse. He... he..."
(chewing scenery now)
"...he doesn't pay enough attention
to me!"

LEXY

Don't trivialize this, you son of a
bitch. I hate it when you--

PAUL

I'm not trivializing anything,
Lexy. I'm just trying to give you
perspective.

LEXY

No, you're trying to make me feel
small, and I don't need your
goddamn perspective.

They stare each other down for a second... and then, Paul
laughs. But it's not a friendly laugh.

PAUL

Fine. When you're done with the
drama queen shtick? You know
where to find me.

He turns and heads towards the stairs, but--

Real Paul tries to get in front of him, tries to stop him
somehow, but as he steps up, all of a sudden --

Real Paul and Shaven Paul are one again.

And something CRASHES in the kitchen. Paul turns and hurries
back as there's another CRASH, and they walk in to find --

LEXY -- destroying all the decorations that had been hanging on the wall. Smashing paintings. Breaking decorative plates. Destroying pictures. Lorelei cowers in a corner.

Lexy reaches the death mask... and quickly passes over it, grabbing the framed photo of their wedding day--

PAUL
Lexy, Jesus Ch--

--and she slams it on the floor, shattering it to pieces.

Then she calmly, coldly glares at him... and she walks out, leaving Paul and Lorelei alone together.

BLACK. Then...

Paul pours himself a glass of whiskey. He fills it to the middle, pauses... and keeps going until he hits the top.

BLACK. Then...

Paul tries to work in his office. But he's too distracted. He slams a book closed and takes a sip from his whiskey.

BLACK. Then...

Downstairs, Paul hesitantly tries to open the basement door. It's locked. He KNOCKS, but Lexy doesn't answer.

BLACK. Then...

Paul lays in bed, the lights out but his eyes wide open. Lexy's not next to him.

BLACK. Then...

Paul opens up their medicine cabinet in the bathroom. Pulls out a bottle, and dumps a few pills into his hands.

LEXY (O.S.)
What are you doing?

He turns to find Lexy standing in the doorway. He regards her evenly, then pops one of the pills.

PAUL
Taking a valium.
(and then another)
Or two.

He chases it down with the familiar glass. Lexy glares at it.

LEXY
Is that whiskey?

PAUL
It'll help me sleep.

LEXY
Paul... you remember what happened
last time you mixed those? You
couldn't remember a damn thing the
next morning.

PAUL
I don't care what it's gonna be
like in the morning. I just want
to get there as fast as I can.

She stares at him. Paul takes a seat on the closed toilet
seat. Then he sighs, suddenly vulnerable.

PAUL
I can't sleep if you're mad at me.
Never could.

Lexy regards him. And slowly, her face creases with the
slightest twinge of sympathy.

BLACK. Then...

Paul and Lexy fly into bed, ripping each other's clothes off.

PAUL
God, I'm sorry.

LEXY
No no, I'm sorry. I don't know why
I get like that--

PAUL
C'mon, I'm the asshole here.

LEXY
Yeah, that's what I'm saying-- I
don't know why I get like that when I
already know you're the asshole here.

Lexy kisses him-- but notices his eyes look heavy.

LEXY
Wait a minute... this isn't the
valium apologizing, is it?

Paul shakes his head, tries to kiss her back. She pulls away.

LEXY
Because an apology doesn't mean
anything if you can't remember it
the next morning.

BLACK. Then...

Lexy's kissing Paul lower and lower.

PAUL
For... forgetting our anniversary.
For... letting the garbage pile up.
For...how quickly this may be over.

Lexy laughs. Paul turns his head...and notices Lorelei.

PAUL
Great. What do you want?

BLACK. Then...

Paul SLAMS the door on Lorelei, shutting her out. She SCRATCHES it, trying to get back inside.

PAUL
Dog! Scram! You're damaging my
mojo.
(off another SCRATCH)
Hey, dummy -- go find the Kitty-
cat! Where's the kitty-cat?

Lorelei starts BARKING and Paul grins as he hears her run down the stairs. Then he hurries back to the bed and jumps in.

PAUL
Where were we?

Lexy rolls on top of him. Her head disappears under the sheets. Paul closes his eyes... and they stay closed.

Lexy stops, looks at him, flicks his forehead. Paul wakes up.

PAUL
What? Don't stop now.

Lexy rolls her eyes. Paul smiles up at her... but his eyes flutter again. He starts to fade away.

BLACK. Then...

Paul opens his eyes. Lexy's on top of him. He smiles up at her.

PAUL
(groggily)
I love you...

And then Paul looks up at her face... and he GASPS, because it's GROTESQUELY DISTORTED again, more Munch's THE SCREAM than Lexy, and it SNAPS him back to--

INT. PAUL'S CAR - PRESENT DAY

Paul wakes up in his car for the second consecutive day. It's freezing outside, but he's sweating. He gets his bearings, wipes himself off.

Suddenly there's a KNOCK on his car window, startling him.

It's Eleanor Rice, carrying a big bucket of cleaning supplies.

ELEANOR RICE

Matt told me you might be able to
use a little help around the house.

PAUL

Oh. Thanks, that's very kind, but--

Eleanor, though, just ignores him and walks into the house. Matthew follows her with a stack of dishes in tin foil.

With a SIGH, Paul follows. The place is a wreck -- garbage is piled sky high and a layer of dust has accumulated throughout.

ELEANOR RICE

I made some soup and casseroles to
heat up if you get hungry. Matt,
stick them in the freezer, will
you? And put on a pot of coffee.

Paul stands in the foyer as the two get to work. His face is a melting pot of emotions. But he closes the door anyway.

IN THE BACKYARD -- LATER

Paul and Matt sip coffee out in the yard. In the window behind them, Eleanor busily scrubs the kitchen counter.

MATTHEW RICE

Hey, where's Lorelei?

Paul doesn't answer, just looks up at the looming apple tree.

PAUL

I've been running it over and over
again in my head, you know? Lexy's
last days. Her last years.

The sky is overcast. The branches eerily sway in the breeze.

PAUL

And I can't even see her face
anymore, Matt.

Matt looks over at him. Paul's eyes are hollow. He couldn't cry even if he wanted to.

They stand there together, outside, in the cold.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE -- LATER

Paul shows the Rice's to the door. The house is sparkling clean behind him. Eleanor hugs him. So does Matt.

Then Paul closes the door. He's alone again.

IN THE KITCHEN -- LATER

Paul's on the phone.

PAUL
Officer Garcia please.
(after a wait)
Hey, it's Paul Ransome. Any sign
of Lorelei--?
(his face falls)
Okay... okay... thank you.

He hangs up. And looks around at his clean house.

UP IN HIS BEDROOM -- LATER

Paul walks in. His bed's been made and the dirty dishes have been cleared away. The furniture is visible again.

But Eleanor cleaned off Lexy's nightstand, too, so Paul searches through the bookshelf until he finds the book of fairy tales. He carefully puts it back where Lexy left it, arranging it in the same approximate position.

But then he picks it up again. Opens it to the back flip cover and sees the letters in green highlighter, DRM, and the phone number to go along with it.

AT THE PHONE --

Paul dials again. It only rings once.

AUTOMATED VOICE
*The number you are calling has been
blocked. Please hang up...*

Paul does. But he looks at the phone. Then back at the book.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET -- LATER

Paul sits in his car, a few houses down from David Mackay's place. Right now, the lights are off there and all is quiet.

Binoculars sit on the dash, but Paul leans back in his seat, eating one of Eleanor's cold casseroles. From the look of things, he's been camped out here awhile.

A car passes by him and pulls into the Mackays' driveway. Paul sits up and grabs his binoculars.

PAUL
Welcome home, Dave.

David Mackay gets out of the car. Then a RED-HAIRED WOMAN steps out, too, and goes to help him with the groceries.

PAUL
Who's that? That your girlfriend?
Your wife? Your bosses' wife?

Paul's talking to himself, which is never a good sign. He takes another look at the red-haired lady and he tenses.

PAUL
Wait a minute...

He's seen her before. He racks his brain, trying to place her... and then a lightbulb goes off.

IN PAUL'S HOUSE -- AFTER LEXY'S FUNERAL -- FLASHBACK --

Paul, in the kitchen with Matt and Eleanor, watches the same red-haired woman walk in his front door. Lorelei greets her, tail wagging, and the Woman kneels down to pet her.

BACK IN THE CAR --

Paul grabs his cell phone and quickly dials a number. It rings twice before a WOMAN'S VOICE answers.

PAUL
Eleanor, it's Paul. What'd you find out about that red-haired woman?
(off her confusion)
The woman who came in late to Lexy's funeral -- I asked you to find out who she was. Did you?

ELEANOR RICE (V.O.)
Paul--

PAUL
Just... please, Eleanor. Think.

ELEANOR RICE (V.O.)
The red-haired woman... yeah, I remember her. She was an old friend of Lexy's... her name was Sylvia or Sandra or something with an 'S'. They hadn't seen each other in a long time but she read the obit in the paper and--

Paul hangs up the phone. He stares at the Woman as she comes back out of the house to get another load of groceries.

IN HIS HEAD -- he sees her again as she walks in his door. As she looks around. As Lorelei greets her, tail wagging--

And Paul abruptly opens the car door. He grabs the fairy tale book, then hurries down the street and comes up from behind her as she juggles three bags of groceries.

PAUL

Who are you?

He startles her and she drops one of the grocery bags. When she looks back and sees Paul, though, her face whitens.

PAUL (CONT'D)

You were at my wife's funeral. But who are you?

The woman collects herself. She tries to balance the other groceries as she reaches down to get the bag she dropped.

WOMAN

It's Paul, right? I'm so sorry for your loss -- you disappeared that day before I could ever introduce myself. I'm Sylvia, I was an old friend of Lexy's--

PAUL

--yeah, I heard. You guys hadn't seen each other in a long time.

(off her nod)

So how did Lorelei know you?

Sylvia looks back at him, confused.

PAUL

My dog -- she walked right up to you. But she's scared of strangers. She only approaches people she's familiar with.

SYLVIA MACKAY

Well... we're not that old of friends--

PAUL

Lorelei's four. I've been around since she was a puppy. If she knows you, then I should too.

(he steps forward)

Who are you really? How did you know my wife?

Just then David Mackay walks out to help with the groceries.

DAVID MACKAY
Oh Jesus -- not again.

SYLVIA MACKAY
Hold on, David...

DAVID MACKAY
This is him, this is that wackjob I
told you about! He assaulted me
and then he stole my newspaper--
(to Paul)
Yeah, I watched you do it, buddy.

SYLVIA MACKAY
David...

But Paul holds the book up.

PAUL
This is your number alright. But
she wasn't calling you...
(to Sylvia)
She was calling you. Wasn't she?

DAVID MACKAY
Save it for the cops, pal.

SYLVIA MACKAY (CONT'D)
David! It's okay.
(off his reaction)
Please. Just... go inside.

DAVID MACKAY
You gotta be kiddin me--

SYLVIA MACKAY
Go inside, David.

Mackay stares at her in disbelief. But he eventually does as
he's told, glaring at Paul as he shuts the door.

SYLVIA MACKAY (CONT'D)
He told me about what happened --
the day you showed up here, I mean.
And I knew it was you. But I...I
didn't say anything.

PAUL
How do you know my wife?

SYLVIA MACKAY
(beat)
I can't tell you.
(MORE)

SYLVIA MACKAY (cont'd)
(off his glare)
She didn't want you to know about
me, Paul. She made that very clear.

PAUL
Oh god. Were you two...?

SYLVIA MACKAY
Oh no. No. It was nothing like that.

Paul waits for her to explain, but nothing comes. He takes a
step toward her.

PAUL
Who are you trying to protect here?
Her? Or me?

SYLVIA MACKAY
Both of you.

PAUL
Well it's not working. Cause
whatever secret you're not telling
me? It can't be worse than this.
It can't be worse than not knowing.

Sylvia looks at him. She thinks hard... and then she makes
the decision. She turns away from him and closes her eyes.

SYLVIA MACKAY
My name's Sylvia Mackay.
(re: the book)
Dr. Sylvia Mackay.

Paul glances down at the book, sees the letters DRM... Dr. M.
But then he looks up at her, even more concerned now.

PAUL
What kind of doctor?

Sylvia sighs. There's no going back now.

SYLVIA MACKAY (CONT'D)
Lexy was manic depressive, Paul.

PAUL
Come on. Lexy wasn't--
(off her face)
Lady. I was married to her for four
years, I'm pretty sure I would've
noticed--

SYLVIA MACKAY
No. You wouldn't.

She says it with such assuredness that it makes Paul pause.

PAUL

But she... she didn't have any
medicine. I have medicine. The
valium, the percocet, they're mine,
she never even touched the stuff--

SYLVIA MACKAY

She hid it from you. All of it.

Paul stares at her. Sylvia wearily leans on her car.

SYLVIA MACKAY

We'd meet in the mornings. Tuesdays
and Fridays, when you were at work.

PAUL

For...for how long? Since when?

SYLVIA MACKAY

Off and on for 10 years. Ever
since she was a teenager.

(off Paul's disbelief)

What did she tell you about her
childhood, Paul? Her family?

PAUL

What do you mean? She just had
a... you know...a normal childhood.
Her parents are dead now, but--

SYLVIA MACKAY

(quietly)

Neither of those things are true.

Paul shakes his head, unwilling to believe it. But Sylvia
continues on.

SYLVIA MACKAY

She had it rough when she was
younger. She was... troubled. For
a long time. But then you came
along, and you didn't see her the
way everybody else did. You didn't
see the scared girl with a shaved
head, the girl she kept trying to
leave behind. And that was very
important to her.

Paul just stares back at her emptily.

SYLVIA MACKAY

I tried to get her to talk to you
about it. I did. But...

PAUL
(interrupting)
You're not wearing lipstick.

That confuses Sylvia, but Paul just shakes his head, disappointed in himself for misinterpreting his only clue.

PAUL
You were at our house that day.

SYLVIA MACKAY
It was Friday. Tuesdays and Fridays, remember?

PAUL
Was she in trouble? Was she...
(he trails off)

SYLVIA MACKAY
No. No, Paul. Not at all. That's why we had the wine. She wanted to celebrate.

PAUL
Celebrate what?

SYLVIA MACKAY
(with a shrug)
How happy she was.

Paul bites his lip, almost afraid to ask.

PAUL
Then why'd you come to the funeral?
If she didn't want me to know about you, why'd you come? Why'd you risk blowing your cover?

SYLVIA MACKAY
I...I just felt like I had to be there.

PAUL
No. No, you were looking for answers, too. You're not sure either, are you?

SYLVIA MACKAY
I'm trained to see those signs, okay? There weren't any. There was nothing at all that would even lead me to suspect it might be...
(phrasing this carefully)
...anything but the accident they say it was.

Paul looks away. Then he turns...

PAUL
Thank you. For telling me.

...and walks away, back towards his car. Sylvia watches him go, concerned. She calls after him.

SYLVIA MACKAY
It was an accident, Paul. It had to be.

But Paul just keeps walking away.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE -- EVENING

Paul enters and looks around, like he's seeing everything for the first time.

He heads into the KITCHEN. Flips on the light. There's LAUGHTER from somewhere, and --

Lexy and Sylvia appear, laughing and breezily gabbing. Lexy uncorks a bottle of wine, then pours Sylvia a glass.

SYLVIA MACKAY
Wow, this is delicious. What is it?

LEXY
It's a Caymus cabernet. '97. I'd been saving it.

SYLVIA MACKAY
For what?

She looks right at Present Day Paul, and her smile disappears.

LEXY
I can't remember anymore.

BACK IN THE PRESENT --

Paul's alone again. He goes over to the window and looks out. Sees the apple tree looming against the darkening sky. And then there's a flash of LIGHT, and --

LEXY'S OUTSIDE --

--staring up at the tree. A tear cuts down her cheek.

LEXY (V.O.)
(reading from the journal)
I've never told anyone this, but sometimes I think about how much better it would be if I wasn't here.

And suddenly, her face DISTORTS horribly, and --

LORELEI RUNS OUTSIDE --

--right to the base of the apple tree, and she looks up and BARKS once, then AGAIN, sensing something's wrong, because --

NOW LEXY CLIMBS THE BRANCHES --

--going higher and higher.

LEXY'S VOICE

And what's worse, I believe it --
in that moment, it doesn't matter
if people love me or if the sun is
shining or if there's a movie
coming out the next day that I'm
dying to see. I believe it.

Lexy reaches the top but, scared now, she clings to the trunk. She closes her eyes, trying to push everything out.

And before her face DISTORTS again, it flashes from confusion to frustration, because below her, Lorelei's BARKING up a storm, beside herself, doing anything she can to save her, and Lexy can't concentrate, so --

IN THE KITCHEN --

--a steak SIZZLES as it's thrown on the frying pan.

LEXY'S VOICE

But that's all it is -- a moment.
And when the moment's gone, I don't
believe it anymore, and I'm happy.

BUT THEN OUT AT THE TREE AGAIN --

Lexy starts to climb, her face DISTORTING once more, and --

NOW LORELEI LAYS ON THE LIVING ROOM FLOOR --

--happily tearing into the steak, unaware of what's going on--

UP IN THE TREE --

--where Lexy climbs higher and higher, her face DISTORTING again and again now, while --

DOWN BELOW --

A lone apple falls to the ground, shaken out of the branches.

LEXY'S VOICE

The trouble is, even when I'm at my happiest, in the back of my mind I always know... all it takes is a moment.

UP IN THE TREE --

Lexy reaches the big branch at the top, inches out towards the leaves, precariously keeping her balance, and --

PAUL'S IN BED WITH LEXY --

--and she's parting her hair for him, and he sees the ink from the tattoo and he runs his finger against it, and then she looks him in the eyes...

LEXY

I love you, Paul. But you don't know enough about me yet.

Her face DISTORTS again, and --

UP IN THE TREE --

Lexy frees her hands from the branches she'd been clutching and she sticks her arms out wide and her basket falls away and her face is permanently DISTORTED now and --

LEXY'S ON TOP OF PAUL IN BED --

--where Paul's having trouble keeping his eyes open because of the valium, but her face is still frozen in that horrible DISTORTION, and Paul moans, trapped in his own mind now --

PAUL

No... Lexy, no...

And then her face RACKS into focus. Suddenly it's not distorted at all... but it's much worse.

Lexy's wearing the death mask. Paul looks at her, terrified.

PAUL

Oh God, Lexy. Take that off. Please. Take it off.

Lexy stops. Slowly, she pulls it off, and she's crying now.

LEXY

You weren't supposed to remember this, Paul. You were never supposed to remember this.

Her tears fall onto his chest, but Paul can't move.

LEXY (CONT'D)
*Why couldn't you listen to the
 Detective? Hunh? Why couldn't you
 leave well enough alone?*

Paul, unable to handle anymore, closes his eyes and--

LEXY'S BACK IN THE TREE --

*--where she's perched on the branch, her arms outstretched,
 and even though it's her real face now, it's more twisted and
 anguished than ever, and just as she starts to fall backwards--*

LORELEI'S INSIDE THE HOUSE --

*-- and all that's left of the Porterhouse is the bone now,
 which she happily takes over to the fishtank, and just as she
 goes to hide it...*

*...suddenly something makes Lorelei tense up. The bone flies
 out of her mouth, deep behind the fishtank, and as Lorelei
 looks off-screen, we can't hear the THUD but we can feel it
 and with a FLASH --*

WE'RE IN THE KITCHEN --

*--and Paul's covered in sweat, but at least he's back in
 present day. He glances up, over by the death mask, though--*

*--and Lexy's there, too. As Paul watches her run her fingers
 over the mask, something starts to boil up from inside of him.*

PAUL
*You did it, didn't you? You made a
 choice and you did it.*

Lexy turns and looks at him sadly, but doesn't say anything.

PAUL (CONT'D)
*Answer me! Admit it, goddammit! I
 want to hear you say it!*

She just looks back at him silently. Her eyes fill with tears.

PAUL (CONT'D)
*Why didn't you tell me? Lexy... it
 wouldn't have mattered. Whatever
 happened to you back then, it
 wouldn't have changed anything.
 (angry again)
Why didn't you tell me? I could've
 done something! I could've helped
 you! I could've stopped you!*

But Lexy doesn't answer. Paul glares at her.

PAUL (CONT'D)

What else was a lie? Hunh? How am I supposed to know? What else did you leave out? What else did you not tell me?

Again, Lexy doesn't answer.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Was any of it true? Was anything true, Lexy? I'm asking you a question -- was there anything in our marriage that was actually true?

Paul knocks some dishes off the counter, startling her.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Don't just sit there, goddammit, say something! Speak! Speak! Speak, goddammit, speak!

Lexy stares at him, scared and vulnerable. When she finally opens her mouth, the voice of Dog J comes out.

LEXY

Woganoo. Jukaluk.

And then, with another FLASH OF LIGHT --

IT'S THE NEXT MORNING --

And it's actually present day. Paul stirs awake, curled up on the floor of the kitchen. He really is all alone now.

He looks around. Sunlight streams in from the windows. But there's the death mask, all that's left on the yellow walls.

He jumps up and pulls it off. He stares at it in his hands -- but it's like it's burning, it's too hot to hold -- so he HURLS IT TO THE GROUND, shattering it into dozens of pieces.

He sinks to the ground, exhausted and drained.

After a beat, he grabs the phone off the counter and dials.

PAUL

Officer Garcia please.

(after a wait)

It's Paul. Any sign of Lorel--?

Paul stops, listening to Garcia. His reaction tells us all we need to know. He hangs up the phone without saying goodbye.

He closes his eyes, and lays there on the floor, shards of the shattered mask all around him.

EXT. HILLY STREET -

The same hilly street that Paul once jogged with Lorelei, and before then, that Lexy jogged with her. But now, all is quiet.

And then, in the distance, a figure appears on the horizon, trotting down the road. But it's not a person.

It's a dog.

BACK IN PAUL'S KITCHEN --

Paul opens his eyes. He stares upward. And then, suddenly, he sees something that makes him freeze.

Somehow, right where the wall meets the ceiling, the word "YOU" glints in the sunlight.

Paul slowly stands. Next to "YOU", the word "I" comes into focus, and then "LOVE", and then "YOU" again.

Paul looks around, sees that the room is bordered with the words "I LOVE YOU", written in translucent glaze lettering, over and over again. It can only be seen in the morning and late afternoon, when the right light shines in.

As Paul stares up at this message from his dead wife--

FADE TO:

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

There are moving boxes stacked all over. Younger Paul unpacks all his stuff in Lexy's house. She helps, hanging up a photo. She steps back to make sure it's straight and makes a face (here the walls are painted a dreary gray).

LEXY

God, I hate the color of this room.

PAUL

Then let's paint it.

She looks around the kitchen.

LEXY

I will. One day, I will. What's your favorite color?

PAUL

I dunno. Yellow.

LEXY

(making a face)
Yellow? Really?

Paul shrugs as he sits down on the floor, dumping a box of utensils into one of the bottom cabinet drawers.

Suddenly he pauses. He pulls something out...

...it's the square egg press. He smiles, then turns and shows it to Lexy. She grins back at him.

LEXY

Ah. Reunited at last.

As Paul stares at the egg press in his hands, Lorelei walks into the kitchen, sees him on the floor.

Still wary of him, she keeps her distance. But Lexy sits down behind Paul, resting her head on his shoulder.

LEXY

I can't wait to share this house with you.

PAUL

(re: Lorelei)

I'm not sure she feels the same way.

LEXY

She'll come around. You both will.

Lexy playfully grabs Lorelei and rolls with her on the floor. Paul watches dubiously. She coos to Lorelei in that familiar baby voice.

LEXY

*Wanna go for a run, girl? Hunh?
You wanna go for a run?*

Lorelei jumps up, tail wagging, and goes to fetch her leash.

PAUL

You two jog a lot.

Lexy smiles as she clips Lorelei's leash on. Then, still on the floor, she leans over and kisses him.

He kisses her back. She pulls away, stares at him. No one has ever looked more sincere.

LEXY

*You have no idea how much better my
life is with you in it.
(with another kiss)
Welcome home.*

Then she stands up and leads Lorelei out the front door.

Paul watches them go.

FADE TO:

EXT. THE HILLY STREET -- PRESENT DAY

Closer now on the same dog from before, jogging down the road. It's Lorelei -- definitely Lorelei, wet, dirty, tired.

But she trots on, past house after house, street after street.

BACK IN PAUL'S KITCHEN --

Paul is still on the floor, eyes wide, unable to look away from the words painted into the yellow walls.

Lexy's voice rings in his ears --

LEXY'S VOICE

*You're home! Come in here, I've
got a surprise for you!*

Paul flinches and glances out the window. And there's the apple tree, towering over his backyard. He stands up.

In some sort of trance now, he heads--

OUTSIDE --

--where he slowly walks over to the base of the tree, staring up into the branches.

He grabs hold of one, lifts himself up, and starts to climb.

OUT ON THE HILLY STREET --

Lorelei comes to the end of the road. She can turn left or right. She lifts her nose, smells the air.

Without breaking stride, she turns right. And she starts to run faster.

UP IN THE TREE IN THE BACKYARD --

-- where Paul climbs, higher and higher, until he reaches the branch at the top, the one where Lexy fell from, and he looks out to the end of it and--

There she is, her arms outstretched--

OUT ON A STREET -- WHO KNOWS HOW CLOSE --

-- Lorelei flies through a cross street, narrowly avoiding a car, which SKIDS to a halt.

But Lorelei doesn't stop. She runs even faster.

UP IN THE TREE --

--Paul's still stuck in the same moment, where Lexy's just about to fall, right at the cusp. Her face is still permanently distorted. Paul's eyes are wide.

PAUL
You were thinking of me.

She silently looks back at him.

PAUL
That's why you came up here. Because you were trying to protect me. Because you wanted me to think it was an accident. Because then I wouldn't second guess everything, right? Then I'd always look at you... the way I've always looked at you.

The distorted Lexy mask just stares back at him.

PAUL
Tell me you were always going to end up here then. Tell me it wasn't me that made you come up in this tree. Tell me that for the last four years, I've been the only thing keeping you out of it.

Paul fights back tears.

PAUL
Lexy. I need to know. Was there anything I could've done?

Right then, from somewhere close there's a familiar BARK.

Paul freezes. And just as he turns to look out to the road--

--Lexy's face rack focuses back to normal. And finally, he can clearly see her face again.

But it isn't twisted and anguished like he used to imagine it. This time, her face is serene and peaceful, almost beatific.

PAUL
Lexy, wait.

Time stands still. Lexy somehow pauses in midair. Paul looks at her one last time.

PAUL
I love you, too.

She smiles. And then she's gone, disappearing from view--

WHILE IN FRONT OF THE HOUSE --

Lorelei gallops up into the yard, takes a quick look at the closed front door, and then hurries around to the side.

There's the apple tree, looming over the back yard. Branches RUSTLE and RUMBLE.

Lorelei flies towards it, YELPING. She reaches the tree trunk and tries to jump up into it, making a huge COMMOTION.

UP IN THE TREE --

Paul looks down and sees... something below him. His eyes widen-- there's no way, though. Clearly he's still seeing things.

He takes a step over to get a better look --

...and the branch SNAPS. He falls.

He CRASHES through the tree, trying to grab hold of something, able to slow himself down but only barely, and he breaks through one last branch and there's the ground and --

CUT TO BLACK

STILL BLACK.

Still black. And then, a WHIMPER fades up, and --

PAUL OPENS HIS EYES --

--to find Lorelei furiously licking his face, trying to wake him, her tail wagging a mile a minute.

In spite of the pain, Paul instinctively grabs hold of her, hardly able to believe she's real. Lorelei WHIMPERS loudly.

PAUL
I don't-- my god, I don't believe it.

Lorelei keeps WHIMPERING, hysterical.

PAUL
Thank you. Oh god, thank you.
Shhhh. You're back. You're safe.
(as she keeps WHIMPERING)
Shhh, it's okay. I hear you. I
hear you.

Lorelei suddenly jerks out of his arms and runs to the apple tree again, manically YELPING and jumping up, looking for Lexy up in the branches now.

Paul watches, heartstruck. Then he heads over and gathers Lorelei in his arms, holding on tight, trying to soothe her.

He whispers into her ear.

PAUL

It's not your fault. Okay? It's not your fault. You did everything you could do. It's not your fault.

The fight drains out of Lorelei's body. And out of Paul's too. Finally, he starts to CRY.

PAUL

All that time I spent trying to get you to talk... you'd already told me who was in the house that day. You'd already told me everything I needed to know. But I just wasn't listening.

Lorelei tries to lick his tears away.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, girl.

DRIFT AWAY --

-- leaving Paul and Lorelei alone, in the grass of his backyard, beneath the apple tree.

CLOSE ON A GRILL --

A Porterhouse SIZZLES as Paul lays it over the flames.

ON LORELEI'S FACE --

--as Paul sets the cooked steak down on the floor for her.

He quietly watches her eat, then grabs the tape recorder on the kitchen counter, and as he CLICKS it on--

PAUL'S VOICE

The following is true. It has been documented, researched, and recorded. It is not anecdotal and nothing has been embellished.

ON LORELEI'S FACE --

-- as she happily drinks water out of her bowl.

PAUL'S VOICE

*Ithaca, New York. Here there lived
a woman who fell out of an apple
tree, leaving behind a man,
suddenly without his wife, and a
dog, suddenly without her owner.*

-- as she proudly carries the bone from the Porterhouse over
to the couch and hides it right next to her other bone.

PAUL'S VOICE

*But the woman also left behind some
questions. Questions that the man
could not answer.*

-- as Paul scrubs the dirt off her in the bathtub.

PAUL'S VOICE

*In his grief, the man hatched a
plan to teach the dog how to speak,
so that she might tell him what
happened to his wife in her final
day on this earth.*

-- as a wet Lorelei sniffs under the basement door... then
hurries back over to Paul, who waits for her with a towel.

PAUL'S VOICE

*So the man and the dog traveled to
Ohio to meet someone who said he
could help, someone who might
somehow provide answers.*

ON LORELEI'S FACE --

As she watches Paul root around in the kitchen cabinet. He
knocks over a cookie sheet and it CLATTERS to the floor,
startling Lorelei.

Paul keeps searching until he finds what he's looking for.

PAUL'S VOICE

*Instead, though, the man lost his
wife's dog in Ohio, and after
searching high and low, eventually he
had to drive home, alone, afraid he'd
never see her again.*

He takes whatever it is and walks out of the room--

PAUL'S VOICE

*But the worst part was, when the man
returned to his empty house, only
then did he realize that the answers
he'd been looking for...*

--passing under the words "I LOVE YOU," glistening above him in the morning sun.

PAUL'S VOICE
...had been in front of his eyes the
entire time.

ON LORELEI'S FACE --

--sitting in the passenger seat of a parked car, staring at her reflection in the sideview mirror.

PAUL'S VOICE
Somehow, though, somehow, over five
days and four nights, the dog
traveled 300 miles and found her way
back to him. Found her way back home.

Paul's in the driver's seat, talking into the tape recorder. Lorelei sits silently beside him, listening.

PAUL'S VOICE
The man promised his dog he'd never
abandon her again. And the dog
promised the man the same thing.

ON LORELEI'S FACE --

--as she hops out of the car. She sees a squirrel nearby and darts after it, running across the parking lot--

--she's almost caught it now, gaining fast -- but there's a WHISTLE from the car.

PAUL'S VOICE
And then the man made himself one
last promise.

She looks back, sees Paul waiting for her... and without another glance at the squirrel, she trots back over to him.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

Paul and Lorelei walk through the gravestones, which go on as far as the eye can see.

PAUL'S VOICE
I remember my wife in white.

BETWEEN THE ROWS --

There's a vision of Lexy walking down the aisle in her wedding dress. Paul, in his tux, pulls the Princess mask up like it's a veil.

PAUL'S VOICE (CONT'D)
I remember her face when she walked
toward me on our wedding day.

AT A FRESHLY LAID GRAVESTONE --

Paul kneels down... pulls the tape recorder out of a pocket... rests it against the stone.

PAUL'S VOICE (CONT'D)
And I'll always remember that for
every dark moment, there was a
moment of such brightness I almost
couldn't bear to look at it head on.

Then, like Lexy had done for his mother all those years before, Paul pulls a small present out of another pocket and lays it there as well.

Finally, after brushing a few stray blades of grass away from Lexy's grave, Paul stands up. And he and Lorelei head back the way they came.

FADE TO BLACK.