

FAMILY DANCING

screenplay by

Ron Cowen and Daniel Lipman

Based on the collection of  
short stories by David Leavitt

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FAMILY DANCING

FADE IN:

ON A STRING OF TIN CANS

Rattling, tumbling NOISILY along, tied to the back end of a boy's bicycle.

EXT. DEMPSON HOUSE - DAY

A sunny morning in late June. DANNY DEMPSON (a.k.a. BEAR), age 8, is riding his two-wheeler with the training wheels up and down the driveway of his family's large, traditional two-story house in a quiet, conservative suburb. Danny's short for his age, thin, with sandy hair and serious eyes. He's furiously pumping the pedals, unperturbed by the CLATTER kicking up behind him.

INT. DEMPSON HOUSE - LYDIA AND ALEX'S BEDROOM - DAY

LYDIA DEMPSON is also pumping away on the pedals of her exercycle. Her lean, tanned limbs, exposed beneath her white tennis shirt and shorts, glisten with perspiration. Her soft, sandy hair, the same color as her youngest son's, is pulled back. If it weren't for a few lines next to her eyes, which actually give her fine sculpted features a certain warmth and humanity, one would guess her age to be about 35. Actually, she's a few years older than that.

Never a person to do only one thing at a time when she can do two or even four, she's talking on the phone as well as cycling, as well as going over a list she's neatly composed on lined paper. There are several items, including "Cleaners," "Post Office," "Kennel," "Empty Fridge," "Dr. Sanchez," and "Call Mark" -- which she is in the process of scratching out.

LYDIA

(into phone)

Mark, I know you think spending time with your family is like being held hostage by the contras, but it's important that you be there.

(a beat; then  
exasperated)

Important to me, that's who. Now, we're leaving at sunrise.

We hear a loud "What?" over the receiver.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA

(continuing)

You heard me. Which happens to be at 5:48 a.m.

(after a beat)

No, I don't know that because I'm God. I know it because I called the Weather Service.

Just then, a highly sensitive alarm that comes as standard equipment on all mothers suddenly goes off in Lydia: the SOUND OF TIN CANS rattling outside has stopped. She quickly dismounts from her exercycle, takes the phone with her to the window.

LYDIA

(continuing)

Bear, I don't hear you!

(into phone)

Hold on --!

She runs from the room, leaving the phone on the seat and the receiver dangling from the handlebars of the exercycle. PULL IN CLOSE to the receiver as it swings back and forth, helplessly.

MARK'S VOICE

(from phone)

Mom --? Mom! Shit.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY.

FOLLOW Lydia as she runs down the hall, past an open door:

INT. ELLEN'S ROOM

Lydia's daughter, ELLEN DEMPSON, is sixteen, cute, chubby. At the moment, she's chewing gum and doing something ridiculous to her hair. She catches a glimpse of her mother dashing by in the mirror, yelling:

LYDIA

Bear!

Ellen looks up, curious.

INT. KITCHEN

Lydia flies through the cozy, country kitchen. Her three Airedales, Abby, Lucy and Fern look up from their beanbag beds, ears perked.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA

(calling)

Bear!

She bolts outside, followed by the three dogs.

EXT. DEMPSON HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - DAY

Lydia stops, sees:

DANNY

sitting on his bicycle, calmly reading a sci-fi comic book. She looks at him -- breathless, relieved, annoyed.

LYDIA

Why didn't you answer me? Didn't you hear me calling you?

DANNY

(nonchalant; flipping a page)

I was reading.

LYDIA

You're supposed to be bicycling.

DANNY

I got tired.

LYDIA

Then you let me know. Otherwise, I want to hear those cans!

DANNY

Yes, Your Highness.

She looks at him, wonders where he got that one.

INT. KITCHEN

Lydia comes back inside, finds Ellen polishing off a container of ice cream.

ELLEN

What's up?

LYDIA

Nothing, false alarm.

ELLEN

See you later --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA

Where're you going?

ELLEN

Carlene said if I didn't tell her  
goodbye she'd have a nervous  
breakdown.

LYDIA

I need you to stay with Danny --

ELLEN

But, Mom --!

LYDIA

I've got to take the ladies to the  
kennel, sit in front of the post  
office --

ELLEN

She's my best friend!

LYDIA

Then I'm sure she'll understand.

ELLEN

She'll probably never speak to me  
again.

She slouches to the phone. Lydia presses a drinking  
glass against the ice cube dispenser on the front of  
the freezer door. Ice cubes come flying out in  
machine-gun bursts, spraying the kitchen and Lydia.

LYDIA

Damnit, I just had this thing  
fixed!

Ellen picks up the receiver to call her friend, finds  
Mark on the line?

ELLEN

Hello --? Mom, Mark's on the  
phone!

LYDIA

Mark --!

(taking the receiver)

Sorry, honey, I forgot I left you  
there. Listen, I can't talk to  
you now -- we're having a  
hailstorm in the kitchen.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Danny and the dogs come in from outside. The dogs start eating the ice cubes. Ellen, who's trying to clean up the mess, shoos them away:

ELLEN

Stop it, get out of here!

LYDIA

(finishing with Mark)

Just be here on time -- or we'll leave without you.

She hangs up, mutters to herself:

LYDIA

(continuing)

Which I'm sure would please him no end.

CUT TO:

EXT. POST OFFICE - DAY

That afternoon. Lydia is seated at a cardtable in front of the post office, a hand-printed sign proclaims: "MOTHERS, FIGHT FOR YOUR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS! SUPPORT A NON-NUCLEAR FUTURE!" She addresses a couple of women.

LYDIA

Picture it -- I mean, just imagine a world in which everything you know is gone. Your family, your home, your friends, the park, the playground, the post office -- not that you'd miss it, the service couldn't get any slower.

The women all chuckle, agree.

LYDIA

(continuing)

Then ask yourself, how could such a thing have happened -- what could cause all that destruction, all that despair?

(a beat)

Because in one insane moment, one man put his finger on one button and it all began. And ended. Every hope, destroyed. Every promise, broken. Every heart, stopped. Every child's voice, silenced.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A small CHILD raises her voice:

CHILD  
(impatiently)  
Mommy, can we go?

HER MOTHER  
(shushing her up)  
Be quiet!

LYDIA  
Now you know why we're called  
"Mothers Against Nuclear Arms".  
Who else would have the patience  
to put up with such a thankless  
chore as fighting for world peace?

As the women sign up, take pamphlets, Lydia stops a MAN coming out of the post office.

LYDIA  
(continuing)  
Excuse me, sir -- but can you  
imagine a world in which  
everything you know is gone?

MAN  
(without stopping)  
It'd be a goddamn blessing!

CUT TO:

EXT. DEMPSON HOUSE - NIGHT

The front of the house is dark. Then, as if by magic, the lights pop on, one after the next, along with the muffled sounds of rock MUSIC on the radio and a NEWS PROGRAM on TV.

ALEX (O.S.)  
You know, for a usually sane,  
sensible person you turn into a  
total paranoid when it comes to  
leaving.

EXT. DEMPSON HOUSE - GARAGE - NIGHT

Filled to bursting with 23 years of artifacts, memorabilia and junk. Lydia watches as her husband, ALEX DEMPSON, tries to fit more boxes, suitcases, camping equipment and sleeping bags into the back of an already stuffed station wagon. Alex is a tall, good-looking, youthful man in his early 40's -- a perfect counterpart to Lydia.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA

Why -- because I set a few timers?

ALEX

A few --? What burglar in his right mind's going to fall for your Sound and Light Spectacular?

He stops packing, frustrated.

ALEX

(continuing)

How is it every year this family manages to take more and more?

LYDIA

No more than last year.

ALEX

Then the car must be shrinking.

ANGLE ON ELLEN

calling from her bedroom window.

ELLEN

Mom, which sweater should I take -- the green pullover or the blue cableknit?

ALEX

(calling back)

Neither! We've got enough sweaters up there to clothe the entire island!

LYDIA

(calling to Ellen)

Bring them both, honey.

(then to Alex;

calming him)

We'll find room.

Alex shakes his head.

LYDIA

(continuing)

You know, you always get like this.

ALEX

Like what?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA

Crazy.

ALEX

If you saw what I had on my agenda --! I've got three cases coming to court, that goddamn seminar I agreed to teach --

(a beat)

Maybe you and the kids should go without me.

(then)

I could come up and meet you in a week --

LYDIA

(almost a plea)

Alex, this is our time -- together. We planned it. You promised me that.

She puts a loving arm around him.

LYDIA

(continuing)

You know once we get up there by the water, you'll start to relax, unwind, have a good time -- like you always do. Then you'll say you wish it would never end -- that we could stay forever.

He looks at her for a beat, silently concedes. She gives him a kiss. He slams the tailgate.

ALEX

Now we just have to figure out where to put the kids.

LYDIA

Strap 'em to the fender?

Off their laugh:

CUT TO:

INT. THE STATION WAGON - DAY

Danny is behind the wheel, steering the car carefully. Alex is beside him in the passenger seat, snoozing under his yachting cap.

IN THE BACK SEAT

Lydia is seated between Ellen and MARK DEMPSON, her oldest son. Mark is 21, dark-haired, good-looking like his father. He and his sister are playing a childhood game across Lydia.

MARK

In my grandmother's trunk, I found an addlepatated aardvark, a bellicose bovine -- and a crenellated chrysanthemum.

ELLEN

(challenging)

A what --?

MARK

"Crenellated." It's a word. Look it up.

ELLEN

I don't happen to have a dictionary on my person.

Danny BLASTS THE HORN, hollers:

DANNY

Move it, you sons-of-bitches!

ALEX

(to Danny)

Cool it, squirt --

LYDIA

Some of the things that come out of his mouth, I truly wonder where he gets them.

MARK

(to Ellen)

Your turn.

ELLEN

In my grandmother's trunk, I found --

Something out the window catches Danny's eye:

DANNY

Look!

He flings the car door open, leaps out.

## EXT. DEMPSON - CAR - DAY

We now see that the family and the car are not on the road, or even, for that matter, on land, but on:

## A FERRY BOAT

An old, rusted tub that chugs dutifully between the mainland and the islands off-shore.

## INCLUDE THE OTHERS

getting out of the car, clustering together at the rail.

## ANGLE ON ISLAND - FAMILY'S POV

Dark green with pines and a tan border of beach. For an instant, one has the impression that the ferry is standing still while the coastline slides closer.

## MARK

(in a deep; sonorous  
tone)

"Devil's Island -- from which no  
family has ever returned!"

Ellen gives him a shove, then notices Lydia, wiping away a tear.

## ELLEN

Mom, you're not crying, are you?

## LYDIA

Who's crying -- it's the wind!

.CUT TO:

## EXT. THE DOCK

The ferry bobs and glides into port. A small crowd of friends and relatives is gathered, waiting for the latest wave of summer visitors to wash ashore.

## ANOTHER ANGLE

A stream of cars pours off the ferry: 4X4's, Winnebagos, an occasional Mercedes -- and the Dempson's station wagon. Alex is now behind the wheel.

## EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Dense with pines, dappled green in the sunlight. Summer cottages drift past, each with its own distinctive, christened name on a signpost out front.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARK (O.S.)

"Weak Moment" --

INT. CAR - DAY

Mark is in the front seat, his eyes covered by Danny's hands reaching up from the back seat. He's guessing the names of the signposts before they appear.

MARK

"Terra Cottage" --

Another cottage floats by.

ELLEN

(joining in)

Well, come on, come on -- we're almost passing it.

Mark seems stumped, at the last moment blurts out:

MARK

"Seldom Inn"!

ANGLE ON SIGNPOST

"Seldom Inn" zips past, proving him right.

DANNY

You peeked!

MARK

I ought to know 'em by now. I've only been coming up here since before I was born.

The car turns into a dirt driveway, past a wood-carved sign that reads: "Under The Weather". Up ahead, a small, wood-framed cottage comes INTO VIEW.

ANGLE ON "UNDER THE WEATHER"

It more than lives up to its name. The rotting porch could use repair, the shutters could stand a coat of paint -- still, it's a charming invalid. The car pulls up, everyone piles out.

ELLEN

Still standing.

MARK

Just don't sneeze.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA

Smell the air! It doesn't smell like this anywhere else in the world.

ALEX

(opening the rear tailgate)

If we all grab something, we'll only have to make a couple of trips.

ELLEN

(running ahead)

I'll go open the windows!

LYDIA

(calling)

Mrs. Riley left the key under the mat --!

DANNY

I have to pee.

ALEX

Just be careful when you flush -- remember what happened last year.

MARK

(to Danny)

"Small Boy Proves Big Bang Theory".

(then to his Dad)

Did you bring the football?

ALEX

Right here --

He tosses it to him.

MARK

See you at the beach!

As he runs off:

ALEX

Thanks for the help!

Lydia and Alex are left alone. Alex unpacking, Lydia staring at the cottage, lost in private thought. A beat, then she turns to him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA

Maybe this is the year you'll make good on your threat.

A beat. Off his curious look:

LYDIA

(continuing)

To fix the porch. That way it'll be in tip-top shape for next year.

She turns, looks at the house, as Alex, his arms laden with luggage, mounts the rickety porch steps.

CUT TO:

A CLOSEUP OF THE REFRIGERATOR DOOR

A series of snapshots have been taped up: a pictorial history of the family's visits over the years to the summer cottage -- starting with Lydia and Alex as newlyweds, then as new parents, all the way up to the present. Throughout the sequence, the kids change and grow. Alex ages, his hair gets longer, shorter. A moustache makes a brief appearance, disappears. Only Lydia looks the same. She doesn't seem to change.

MARK (O.S.)

Great corn, Mom!

INT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

The Dempsons are having dinner, exuberant in the celebration of being together. The wine hasn't hurt, either. Their cheeks are flushed from the chardonnay and the candlelight, which is Lydia's touch even here in the wilderness.

LYDIA

Tell your father -- he shucked it himself.

ALEX

That's right -- I asked your mother to help me, but she told me to go shuck myself.

Mark howls with laughter.

ELLEN

(groaning)

Daddy --!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DANNY

What's so funny?

MARK

Tell you later.

LYDIA

Don't you dare, he'll be repeating  
it all summer! Now, I've made a  
list --

MARK

Another one of Mom's lists!  
(taking it, playfully)  
I learned to read off these  
things!

LYDIA

(taking it back)  
This year we're going to do all  
the things we always say we're  
going to do, but never get around  
to doing.

ELLEN

Like what?

LYDIA

Like hiking to Deception Pass --

ELLEN

I'll call a cab and meet you.

LYDIA

And a whale watch --

ALEX

(to Danny)  
You need a really big wrist to  
wear one of those!

Everyone groans, Danny jumps up.

DANNY

I'm done!

LYDIA

Not so fast.  
(announcing)  
House Rule: When you're through  
eating, you take your plate to the  
sink and wash it --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARK

Yes, Your Highness.

Lydia glances at him, now knows where Danny got the expression.

LYDIA

-- and then we can all go to Bud's.

DANNY

Yay, Bud's!

ELLEN

There goes my diet --

Alex gets up from the table, taking his plate with him.

ALEX

Well, everybody, if you don't mind, it's been a long day --

LYDIA

Where're you going?

ALEX

(obediently)

First to the sink, then for a little walk, then to bed.

LYDIA

What about Bud's?

ALEX

Honey, I've been driving since six in the morning --

LYDIA

But we always go.

MARK

Yeah -- come on, Dad!

A beat. Alex sighs, surrenders.

CUT TO:

INT. BUD'S ICE CREAM PARLOR - NIGHT

With its pink booths and pink patent-leather chairs that resemble lawn flamingos, Bud's has remained unchanged since the early fifties when Bud and his wife, DOLORES, first started dishing out the best homemade ice cream on the island, and possibly, on earth.

A TRAY OF HOT FUDGE SUNDAES

floats past, as if magically suspended, but in reality carried overhead by BUD.

AT THE JUKEBOX

Danny is punching out selections that are older than he is by at least three decades.

AT THE COUNTER

Mark is talking to Dolores in her pink uniform.

IN THE CENTER OF THE FLOOR

Alex and Ellen are jitterbugging to a lively fifties tune.

ELLEN

Remember when I was little, you'd swing me in the air like I didn't weigh anything?

ALEX

Like this?

He sweeps her up into his arms as if she were weightless, spins her, shrieking.

ELLEN

(dizzy, raptured)  
Am I still your favorite partner?

ALEX

You bet!

ELLEN

(teasing)  
Better than Mom?

ALEX

(in a whisper)  
Better than Mom.

ANGLE ON A PINK VINYL BOOTH

where Lydia sits alone, amidst the debris of an ice cream sundae pig-out, watching Alex and Ellen dance.

Mark comes over to her, slips into the seat opposite her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARK

(watching Alex and  
Ellen)

Lose your partner?

LYDIA

(smiling)

Just waiting for the slow dance.

MARK

Don't wait too long. Dolores just  
told me they're planning to tear  
this place down and put up a mini-  
mall.

LYDIA

A mini-mall -- on this island?

MARK

I told her not to worry, that  
you'd get up a petition, throw  
yourself in front of the bulldozer  
-- "Save the Sundaes!"

She looks at him, not appreciating his humor or the  
thought of losing Bud's. The MUSIC on the jukebox  
changes: "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes," the 1958 version  
by The Platters.

MARK

(continuing)

I didn't play that.

LYDIA

I did.

She rises from the booth, goes over to Alex and Ellen.

LYDIA

(continuing)

Mind if I cut in?

ALEX

It's getting late --

LYDIA

Just once around the floor.

DANNY

(breaking in)

I want to dance, too!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLEN

Come on, leave Mom and Dad alone.

As Ellen drags Danny away, Lydia puts her arms around Alex. They start to dance.

LYDIA

Don't we still have this record somewhere?

ALEX

Probably --

ANGLE ON THE KIDS

packed into the booth. Ellen is enthralled by her parents' slow, graceful circles. Danny watches too, fascinated by the movement and the MUSIC. Only Mark sits silently staring at the blueberry sundae melting in his dish.

CLOSEUP ON LYDIA AND ALEX

as they dance. Her head on his shoulder, her eyes closed -- lost in the MUSIC, in time.

CUT TO:

EXT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

The house is dark.

INT. COTTAGE - MARK AND DANNY'S ROOM - NIGHT

A tiny room, barely big enough for two small cots. Mark, too tall for this short bed he's been sleeping in since he was a child, flips over, trying to find a comfortable position, his feet hanging over the end. Danny is in the other bed, asleep, breathing heavily. The quiet is suddenly interrupted by the SOUND OF MUFFLED VOICES coming through the wall. Mark opens his eyes, wonders if he's hearing things or dreaming. The SOUND OF A DOOR OPENING, THEN SLAMMING SHUT, then silence again. Mark turns over, drifts back into sleep. The dark stillness of the cottage is only disturbed now by the SOUND OF A DISTANT SOB.

MARK (O.S.)

Did you hear them arguing last night?

CUT TO:

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Danny is playing in the waves.

ANGLE ON MARK AND ELLEN

lying on the beach. Ellen is applying so much sun-screen to her face she looks like something out of a Kabuki. Mark has a writing pad and pen on his lap.

ELLEN

Who?

MARK

Mom and Dad -- who do you think?

ELLEN

About what?

MARK

I don't know. I couldn't make it out. I thought I heard shouts and sobs --

ELLEN

You must've been dreaming.

(then; with a naughty  
glint in her eye)

Or maybe they were doing something else.

MARK

(remembering)

When I was little I used to hear them knocking around all the time -- their room was next to mine. I didn't know if they were making love or fighting. So, one night I went in.

ELLEN

Did you see anything?

MARK

(shaking his head)

Mom quick pulled the sheet up over her head and Dad disappeared under the bed -- like he was looking for his glasses. That's all I knew about sex until that summer I was fifteen, up here in a rowboat with Erroll.

ELLEN

Erroll -- ?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARK

One of the fisherman's sons. He  
smelled like an anchovy.

(irritated by the  
memory)

Even now, every time I have an  
anchovy pizza, I think of him.

ELLEN

(calling)

Bear, don't go too far out -- !

Mark stares out at the waves. They try to escape onto  
shore, but are pulled back in.

MARK

Last night at Bud's, I was  
finishing my blueberry sundae --  
and it suddenly hit me how tired I  
am of it.

ELLEN

So order another flavor.

MARK

I mean of being here -- the whole  
damn ritual. Every year it's the  
same thing!

ELLEN

Then why'd you come?

MARK

I thought I could get some writing  
done.

He tosses the pad aside, frustrated.

MARK

(continuing)

And you know Mom would've killed  
me if I hadn't.

ELLEN

It's important to her -- it's  
tradition.

MARK

It's not just the tradition --  
it's the mattress.

(off her look)

I'm still sleeping in the same bed  
I slept in when I was Danny's age  
-- only nobody seems to notice my  
feet are hanging over the end!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLEN

(with an edge)

Sounds like it's more than the bed  
you've outgrown.

Feeling slightly betrayed, she lies back, closes her  
eyes. Mark continues to stare at the waves.

CUT TO:

LOBSTERS IN A TRAP

writhing, snapping.

EXT. TRAYLOR'S LOBSTER BOAT - DAY

The family is aboard a lobster boat owned and operated  
by HENRY TRAYLOR and his son, HENRY TRAYLOR. Both men  
have fleshy faces as red as cooked lobsters.

ANGLE ON HENRY THE ELDER

His huge belly protrudes from beneath his dirty under-  
shirt. He's instructing Danny how to secure a lobster.

HENRY ELDER

First you grab the little bugger,  
like this --

He reaches his hand into the trap, pulls out a wrig-  
gling creature. Danny backs away, Lydia assures him.

LYDIA

Don't be afraid, honey, Henry's  
got him --

HENRY ELDER

Now, you take your rubber band and  
shut him tight. Simple!

Danny hesitates, then puts the rubber band around one  
claw.

HENRY ELDER

(continuing)

That's it. Now the other --

LYDIA

(praising Danny)

There, you see? That wasn't so  
hard.

HENRY ELDER

(to Danny)

Now he can't snap your pecker off!

Lydia looks at Henry, wishing he hadn't said that.

## ANGLE ON HENRY JUNIOR

shirtless, pulling in a trap. Mark watches him with interest. Ellen notices, teases him:

ELLEN

Anchovies, anyone?

He grabs her, tickling her. She screams, breaks free, runs to the other side of the boat, finds:

ALEX

standing at the railing smoking a cigarette.

ELLEN

Can I bum one?

ALEX

(looking up;  
surprised)

When'd you start that?

ELLEN

It's less calories than ice cream.

ALEX

Does your mother know?

ELLEN

She'd have a shit-fit.

ALEX

I can't say I'm too pleased,  
myself.

Against his better judgment, he takes out a cigarette, lights it, gives it to her. She smiles, takes a drag, lets the wind blow through her hair. Alex puts his arm around her as they share this clandestine moment together, standing at the railing, watching the distant shore.

ELLEN

(after a beat)

Mark says he hates it here because nothing ever changes. But that's why I like it.

ALEX

Things have a way of changing,  
whether you want them to or not.

ELLEN

Mom never changes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX

That's because she's one of those rare phenomena -- like the Sphinx. Oceans can evaporate, continents can crumble, but your mother will always be --

LYDIA (O.S.)

(calling)

Alex -- Ellen!

ALEX

(smiling)

-- your mother.

They quickly pitch their cigarettes overboard like two kids caught in the school bathroom.

ANGLE ON DANNY - THROUGH A CAMERA LENS

He holds up a lobster proudly, smiling.

LYDIA (O.S.)

Come on, everybody -- move in!

ANGLE ON LYDIA

directing a reluctant Mark, Alex and Ellen to squeeze in around Danny and his lobster. She turns to Henry the younger.

LYDIA

Henry, would you mind -- ?

She hands him the camera, scurries over to join the others.

LYDIA

(continuing)

Okay now, a big smile!

She puts her arm around Alex, pulls him close, as Henry snaps the picture.

CUT TO:

INT. CLIFF'S MARKET - DAY

A small mom-and-pop operation for the locals.

LYDIA AND DANNY

are at the checkout line. No computerized registers here. MARTHA, the checkout girl, pounds out the order on the old kind you ring up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARTHA

Stocking up for the Fourth, Mrs. Dempson?

LYDIA

We're having a lobster bake on the beach.

(suddenly remembering)

Don't ring it up yet, Martha -- I forgot butter.

(cautioning Danny)

I'll be right back -- don't move!

She apologizes to the customers behind her and hurries off. Danny helps himself to a jaw-breaker from a glass jar.

MARTHA

Having a good time, Danny?

DANNY

(his cheek stuck out)

Fair-to-middling.

FOLLOW LYDIA

as she rushes down the narrow, tightly-packed aisle to the dairy case. She grabs a pound of butter, starts to head back, stops abruptly.

LYDIA'S POV - ANGLE ON A WOMAN

Attractive, in her early 30's. She's selecting various flavors of yogurt, placing them in her basket.

BACK TO LYDIA

unable to move, as if someone has hit her in the stomach. She keeps staring at her, intently, the blood draining from her face. Unaware of Lydia's scrutiny, the young woman turns, walks off down the aisle in the opposite direction.

HOLD ON LYDIA

watching her go.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

The surf is rough. It washes angrily onto the beach, then retreats meekly back to the sea. Against a glowing sunset, the family is gathered on blankets around a fire.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They've boiled their lobsters in a large pot and now, in this almost-primal setting, they crack open the shells and suck out the sweet meat inside.

ALEX

(to Danny)

The first time I took Mark to see the lobstermen -- he must've been younger than you -- he screamed and yelled. He thought the lobstermen were some kind of creatures with big red claws instead of arms, and antennas coming out of their heads with eyes on them --

DANNY

Like Kro-Nath!

ELLEN

Who?

DANNY

(as if it were common knowledge)

The Emperor of Zaldan.

In the b.g., distant EXPLOSIONS are heard. Danny jumps up.

DANNY

(continuing)

I want to see the fireworks!

LYDIA

(subdued)

That's just some kids playing down the beach. The display doesn't start for an hour yet.

DANNY

(pointing off)

Look -- !

ANGLE ON MARK

coming toward them with a lit sparkler. Danny runs over to him.

LYDIA

Bear, come back here!

She goes over to Mark, angrily.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA

(continuing)

Where'd you get that?

MARK

In town. They were selling them.

DANNY

I want to hold it!

LYDIA

Put it out, this minute!

MARK

It's just a sparkler --

LYDIA

I told you never to play with fireworks!

She grabs it from him, throws it on the sand, stamps it out, buries it. Then goes back to the fire.

ALEX

Lydia, calm down --

LYDIA

(turning on him,  
unexpectedly)I've been plenty calm.

She begins to clean up, silent.

ELLEN

Let me help you, Mom --

LYDIA

I can do it.

After a beat, Alex gets up.

ALEX

Listen, I'll meet you down at the dock. I'm going to go into town, get some cigarettes.

Lydia stops what she's doing, looks at him. Then, bluntly:

LYDIA

What's the matter -- haven't you seen her once today already?

Alex stops, doesn't answer.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLEN

Seen who?

Lydia doesn't say anything more. She gathers up a handful of blankets, heads back to the cottage.

INT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

Alex follows Lydia in. She throws the blankets down. He goes to her.

ALEX

Lydia --

She turns, strikes him, suddenly, knocking his glasses off. He stands there, stunned, but doesn't do anything, doesn't retaliate. After a beat, she bends down, picks up the glasses, hands them back to him, proud of her effort to regain self-control. But when she speaks her voice shakes.

LYDIA

Did you really think you'd get away with it? That I wouldn't find out?

ALEX

I suppose that's what I was hoping for.

Her mouth tears open like a gaping wound, her voice a shrill cry of pain and humiliation.

LYDIA

You goddamn son-of-a-bitch!

Alex looks away, also in pain, but of a different sort. That of someone caught in an act of deceit, desperate to appear reasonable in the light of exposure.

ALEX

(calmly)

Look, there's no reason to get yourself all worked up --

LYDIA

You promised me! You gave me your word!

ANGLE ON ELLEN

standing in the doorway, an innocent bystander caught in the crossfire of a surprise attack.

INCLUDE MARK AND DANNY

coming in now from the beach, too.

MARK

What's going on?

ELLEN

I don't know --  
(then; to her parents)  
What's happened?

ALEX

(downplaying it)  
You mother and I are having a  
discussion, that's all --

LYDIA

(laughing)  
A discussion! Is that what we're  
having? All right, then -- tell  
them what we're discussing -- only  
try being honest for a change!

But Alex can't bring himself to confess to his children. Lydia does it for him.

LYDIA

(continuing)  
Your father's girlfriend is here.

MARK

Girlfriend -- ?

LYDIA

They've been planning it all along  
-- thinking I wouldn't find out!

ELLEN

(disbelieving)  
Daddy -- ?

LYDIA

No doubt things would've gone on  
their merry way if I hadn't seen  
her in Cliff's market!

ALEX

(calmly)  
I thought I could see her and  
still be here for all the family  
things -- but I can see it was a  
bad idea, I shouldn't have let her  
come --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA

Don't make excuses for yourself!

ALEX

I'm not making excuses, I was just trying to be fair.

That word detonates an explosion.

LYDIA

Fair? Fair to who -- to her?  
These three weeks were supposed to be fair to me!

She takes out a tissue, rubs her nose and eyes.

ALEX

I thought I made it clear the first night -- I only came up here as your friend and their father, nothing more.

ELLEN

(to Alex; upset)  
What're you talking about -- ?

MARK

Who is she?

A beat. Lydia can't speak her name because it sticks in her throat like a shard of glass and would make her cry out in pain.

ALEX

(finally)  
Marian Hollister.

MARK

Marian? From your office?

ALEX

We've been involved for some time now.

MARK

How long?

ALEX

(after a beat)  
A year or so --

ELLEN

A year -- ?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX

Your mother's known about it.

Mark looks at his mother in disbelief.

MARK

You've known -- ?

Lydia's unable to respond.

ALEX

(trying to explain)

Up until now, all that's mattered to your mother and me has been to provide you kids with a stable home. But now the time's come to face certain facts about our relationship --

(a long beat)

-- and we've decided that we'd be happier if we went on from here separately.

LYDIA

(correcting him;  
bitterly)

You've decided.

ALEX

With or without Marian, this would have been necessary.

(to the kids)

I think once your mother calms down, she'll agree with me on that.

ELLEN

(starting to cry)

I can't believe you're saying this -- !

MARK

(to Alex; sarcastic)

Sounds like you had it memorized.

Danny goes over to Lydia, wanting her to hold him. She does.

ALEX

I know this is hard for you to accept, but we need you to be adults now. We've gotten used to the idea and so will you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Alex looks at them. A few words and a family is blown apart. There is silence for several beats as the devastation is absorbed.

MARK

(breaking the silence)

So that's it. You drop the bomb and in a couple of seconds, it's all over -- just like that!

(after a beat)

Well, what do we do now -- all go down to Bud's for ice cream?

ELLEN

(screaming at him)

Shut up, Mark -- shut up!

MARK

(angrily; to Lydia)

I just want to know what the fuck we're doing here -- why you dragged us up here! So we could pretend we're still a family?

LYDIA

We are still a family!

ALEX

I wanted to tell you before we came, but your mother insisted we wait until after the vacation.

LYDIA

Is that too much to ask for after 23 years?

ALEX

Things can't always be the way you want them to be, Lydia. You can't expect us to always behave the way you want -- !

A beat, then exasperated, he goes into the bedroom.

ELLEN

(in a panic)

But we have to talk about this!

MARK

What's left to be said?

ELLEN

Everything! We can't just let this happen!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARK

Sounds like it already has.

LYDIA

(finally)

Be quiet, both of you.

(then)

You don't know anything about this.

She blows her nose into a tissue, tries to regain control. Almost has to laugh.

LYDIA

(continuing)

There's really only one thing to be said -- and that is, that I love your father and I'll always love your father. But he doesn't love me -- and he never will.

INT. BEDROOM

Alex finishes throwing some things in a bag, comes back into:

THE LIVING ROOM

Outside, FIREWORKS EXPLODE in the night sky. The display at the dock has begun. Lights flash in the darkened windows, as if the house were a war zone, under siege. Alex goes to Lydia, sitting huddled on the couch.

ALEX

(gently)

If you need me, you can reach me at the office.

Danny runs to him, Alex hugs him. He looks over at Mark and Ellen. Mark says nothing. Ellen turns away, refusing to even look at him. A beat, then he goes to the door, walks out.

EXT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

Alex stands on the porch for a beat, then walks down the path away from the cottage.

ANGLE ON LYDIA

suddenly appearing at the door. She runs after him, calling:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA

I love you, Alex!

(a beat)

Do you hear me? I love you! You  
can escape me, but you can never  
escape that!

But he doesn't look back. He keeps walking.

HOLD ON LYDIA

watching him go, EXPLOSIONS lighting up the sky above  
her.

SLOW DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DEMPSON HOUSE - PALO ALTO - DAY

Several weeks later. A yard sale in progress. Years  
of artifacts, memorabilia and junk that once filled the  
garage, stuffed the closets and cluttered the attic  
have been poured out onto the front lawn like the de-  
bris washed ashore after a shipwreck.

VARIOUS ANGLES

of friends, neighbors and strangers who have descended  
like a plague of locusts to pick through the Dempsons'  
lives, searching the tables and boxes of old kitchen  
utensils, dishes, books, clothes, stuffed animals,  
toys, record albums, sporting equipment, furniture and  
appliances.

ANGLE ON LYDIA

at the epicenter of the storm, cashbox in hand. With  
her is her good friend, URSULA LEVINSON.

URSULA

You're amazing, Lydia, you really  
are. I swear if it'd been me, I'd  
have gone to bed for a month.

LYDIA

Who's got time for that?

(bravely)

I'm making a clean sweep.

URSULA

Are you going to have anything  
left?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA

(determined)

I don't intend to be one of those divorced women who carry the rubble of their lives around with them like they were earthquake victims.

URSULA

Well, as Ted would say, the sooner you divest yourself of past holdings, the sooner you can concentrate on future investments.

Lydia looks at her blankly.

URSULA

(continuing)

I mean finding a man.

LYDIA

(laughing; nervously)

I'm not ready for that yet, Ursie -- it's too soon.

URSULA

And before you know it, it'll be too late.

LYDIA

But how would it look if I suddenly started going out?

URSULA

Alex didn't die, he left you.

(then)

Listen, we're taking a new client of Ted's to dinner next Friday. He's a widower. Why don't you join us?

LYDIA

Thanks -- but I don't think so. Anyway, why would he be interested in me?

URSULA

Why not? You're young, you're beautiful, you're single --

LYDIA

I'm 42, I'm separated, I have three kids --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A WOMAN comes over to Lydia, carrying a macrame wall hanging.

WOMAN

How much do you want for this?

LYDIA

It's marked twenty.

WOMAN

I'll give you ten.

URSULA

(whispering to Lydia)

It's worth fifty.

LYDIA

How do you know?

URSULA

I gave it to you.

LYDIA

(to the Woman; with  
an embarrassed smile)

Fifteen and it's yours.

The Woman pays up, leaves. Ursula turns to Lydia, confidently:

URSULA

You see? If somebody wants that old thing, why wouldn't somebody want you?

Off Lydia's look:

CUT TO:

BRUCE KINGMAN

a man in his mid-40's, wearing a sports jacket, no tie. He's not exactly what you'd call a handsome man, but there's a magnetism that's undeniable.

BRUCE

Try some cous-cous.

He scoops up a mound on his fingers, offers it to Lydia with a good-natured grin.

LYDIA

(uncomfortably)

No, thanks.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRUCE  
(tempting her)  
Go on -- you'll love it.

LYDIA  
I'd really rather not.

He shrugs, stuffs his fingers into his mouth. PULL  
BACK to reveal:

INT. A MOROCCAN RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Lydia, Bruce, Ursula and her husband, TED, are seated on the floor on gaudy pillows around a low mosaic table eating cous-cous and bistilla with their fingers and drinking mahia. Lots of it. Except for Lydia, who is quiet and reserved, nervous as a teenager on her first date; the others are feeling no pain.

BRUCE  
(calling to the waiter)  
Some more mahia!

TED  
What's in this stuff, anyway?

BRUCE  
Figs. Amazing what you can  
squeeze booze out of, isn't it?  
(to Lydia)  
So, Ted tells me you're getting  
divorced.

LYDIA  
That's right.

BRUCE  
How long were you married?

LYDIA  
Twenty-three years.

BRUCE  
Must've been a child bride.

Ursula emits a high-pitched giggle.

BRUCE  
(continuing)  
So what happened? Did he leave  
you for another woman?

LYDIA  
(matching his directness)  
Yes, as a matter-of-fact.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRUCE

I could've guessed.

LYDIA

You just did.

Bruce reclines back on his pillow, shakes his head, sadly.

BRUCE

It's all so predictable. I mean, a guy reaches a certain age, gets dissatisfied, starts looking around. Pretty soon he finds what he's looking for. Next thing you know, he's gone and his wife's left holding a bag of dirty laundry.

(turning to her)

I guess you must be pretty broken up.

LYDIA

I've managed to hold myself together.

BRUCE

(with a smile)

And quite nicely, too -- if you don't mind my saying so.

The waiter brings over another bottle of mahia.

BRUCE

(continuing)

Have some more.

LYDIA

No, thank you, Mr. Kingman.

BRUCE

Bruce.

TED

(boasting)

"Big Bruce," Lydia -- "The Discount King!"

Lydia stops, stares at Bruce.

LYDIA

You're Big Bruce?

(then, laughing out loud)

I bought my refrigerator from you!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TED

(nudging Bruce)

What do you know!

BRUCE

(pleased)

You're a smart shopper.

LYDIA

It hasn't worked since the day I  
got it.

BRUCE

Yeah? What's wrong with it?

LYDIA

It spits ice cubes at me.

BRUCE

Well, why don't you try spitting  
them back?

Ted and Ursula laugh nervously. Bruce grabs the bottle of wine, starts to fill Lydia's glass, misses, spills it onto her skirt instead.

BRUCE

(continuing)

Oops. Sorry about that.

URSULA

Quick, put some water on it --

LYDIA

It's all right --

BRUCE

Here, this'll lift it right out.

He sticks his napkin into a water glass, dabs at her lap.

LYDIA

Do you mind -- ?

BRUCE

(with a naughty grin)

Not a bit, Lydia. Not a bit.

She pushes his hand away, struggles to her feet.

LYDIA

If you'll excuse me --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

URSULA

Lydia, are you all right -- ?

LYDIA

Something's not agreeing with me. I'm sorry -- I'd really like to go.

URSULA

(volunteering)

Ted'll drive you.

LYDIA

No, it's all right. I'll call a cab.

(a beat)

Goodbye, Mr. Kingman.

She starts across the room. Bruce gets up, follows her.

BRUCE

Hey, come back -- I was just trying to have a little fun.

LYDIA

I don't think your idea of fun and my idea of fun are the same idea of fun.

BRUCE

Well, how're you going to know unless you remove that pineapple you've been sitting on all night and loosen up?

She stops, seething. He tries to break through to her.

BRUCE

(continuing)

Look, I know it's tough getting fixed up with someone you never laid eyes on, trying to find some way to connect -- hell, I've gone through it a hundred times myself.

LYDIA

I really wouldn't know. I haven't been out on a date in twenty-three years. But if this is any indication of what I have to look forward to, it's going to be another twenty-three before I go out on another!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She turns and walks out of the restaurant, leaving Bruce standing there.

CUT TO:

INT. DRY CLEANERS - DAY

MITCH, the clerk, is holding up Lydia's stained skirt.

MITCH

What'd you get on this?

LYDIA

Fig wine. Can you get it out?

MITCH

We'll try.

(filling out a ticket)

Thursday all right?

LYDIA

Thanks, Mitch.

MITCH

Oh, by the way--

He goes over to the clothes carousel, removes a cashmere sports jacket.

MITCH

(continuing)

Your husband dropped this off last summer before you left.

CLOSE ON LYDIA

staring at it, barely hearing him.

MITCH (O.S.)

We're only supposed to hold things for ninety days, but it's such a nice jacket -- cashmere -- I figured he just forgot to pick it up.

A beat. Lydia doesn't respond.

MITCH

Mrs. Dempson -- ?

CUT TO:

CLOSEUP - A TELEVISION SCREEN

Space heroes, cheaply animated, move stiffly about as if they all had pokers up their animated asses. One of them, ZONAR, speaks in a dull, flat monotone.

ZONAR

(on screen)

"You, Dith-Ram, take Ibzig. I'll take Lagthra and Worm Man. We shall get to Landruz by way of Zildar -- "

INT. DEMPSON HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Danny sits in front of the television, transfixed by his favorite afternoon cartoon show, "Defenders of the Universe." He's surrounded by all the merchandising tie-ins the toy manufacturers have dreamed up: the action-figures, the Zonar space-cruiser, the Dandrill Slime Pit.

ABBY, LUCY AND FERN

are transfixed, too -- by the Pringles Potato Chips Danny is passing from the cannister to his mouth. Considerately, he tosses them one. All three dogs dive for it.

INT. LYDIA'S BEDROOM

The cashmere sports jacket is lying on Alex's side of the bed. Lydia, just back from the cleaners, is lying on her side of the bed, staring at it. She gently strokes its cashmere sleeve, then takes the coat on top of her, wrapping herself in its embrace. The tears she's fought so hard to hold back start to flow. Loud sobs soon follow.

INT. FAMILY ROOM

On screen: Zonar leaps into his space-cruiser.

ZONAR

"Defenders -- away!"

ANGLE ON DANNY

He hears Lydia crying, takes the remote, TURNS THE VOLUME FULL UP to drown out the sounds.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DEMPSON HOUSE - DAY

Several days later. A red Rabbit convertible, driven by CARLENE, pulls up in front of the house with a cargo of teenage GIRLS, including Ellen.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CARLENE

Want to come with us tonight to  
the movies?

ELLEN

Can't. Mom's taking me shopping,  
then to dinner.

STACEY

I always heard if you play it  
right, you can turn your parents'  
divorce to your advantage.

CARLENE

Especially at Christmas and  
birthdays -- that's when I really  
clean up.

Ellen collects her books, climbs out of the car, waves cheerfully to her friends as they drive off. Then she turns toward the house, her cheerful expression fading as she walks past several days' worth of newspapers left on the front walk.

INT. DEMPSON HOUSE - FRONT HALLWAY - DAY

Ellen steps over a growing pile of mail left uncollected under the slot in the door, into the darkened house.

ELLEN

(calling)

Anybody home?

FOLLOW her into:

THE KITCHEN

She finds Danny ferreting out the remains from the bottom of an empty peanut butter jar.

ELLEN

Thanks for saving me some.

She snatches the peanut butter away from him, greedily wipes a finger around the inside, trying to collect the last glob. Danny opens the refrigerator, finds it empty.

DANNY

What's for dinner?

ELLEN

Macaroni and cheese.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DANNY

I'd rather eat dog chow.

ELLEN

Fine, I'll put down an extra bowl!

She tosses the empty jar onto the pile of unemptied trash collecting in the can under the sink. She hesitates, then:

ELLEN

(continuing)

Where's Mom?

Danny glances silently upstairs. Ellen's eyes follow his, as if seeing through the ceiling.

INT. LYDIA'S ROOM

The shades are drawn blocking out any light. Slowly PAN across the floor, past the empty cracker boxes and teacups to:

THE FOOT OF THE BED

where Abby, Lucy and Fern lie like carved lions on a Roman sarcophagus, imperiously guarding their mistress. PAN UP the bed, past Alex's cashmere jacket to:

LYDIA

lying lifeless in a nightgown, her hair all the hell over the place. A KNOCK at the door. It opens a crack, letting in a ray of light. The DOGS GROWL.

ELLEN

Mom -- ?

No response. She comes into the room.

ELLEN

(continuing)

I'm home.

Still no response.

ELLEN

(continuing)

On the way back from school, we were in a terrible accident. A cement-mixer hit Carlene's car head-on. We were all killed, instantly.

Again, no response. Ellen goes to her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLEN

(continuing)

Mom, don't you think it's time you got out of bed? You've been there for almost seventeen years. Danny's already grown up and moved away. He has three kids.

Still nothing from Lydia.

ELLEN

(continuing; exasperated)

Mother -- !

LYDIA

(finally)

Go do your homework.

ELLEN

You want some dinner?

Lydia shakes her head, turns her face to the pillow.

ELLEN

(continuing; after  
a beat)

Well, are you just going to stay here forever?

Lydia doesn't answer. Ellen looks at her, frustrated, helpless. She starts to leave, then stops, storms over to the curtains and with one furious tug, yanks them open, flooding the room with mocking brightness. Lydia screams, shields her eyes like a vampire seeing day-break.

LYDIA

What are you doing?

ELLEN

(opening more curtains)

Get out of that bed!

LYDIA

Stop it!

Ellen doesn't listen. She pushes the dogs down off the bed, throws off the teacups, the cracker boxes, the magazines.

LYDIA

(continuing)

Did you hear me? I said stop it!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLEN

No, you stop! Daddy's not worth it!

LYDIA

Don't talk about him like that! He's still your father, even if he's not my husband!

ELLEN

He's not my father -- and if he's not your husband, you should forget about him!

(delivering the  
coup-de-grace)

You can damn well be sure he's forgotten about you!

LYDIA

(agonizing)

Don't you think I've tried?

Lydia looks at her daughter for a long beat.

LYDIA

(continuing)

I sold everything of his I could find -- everything he left behind. I thought I got rid of it all.

(clutching the cash-  
mere jacket)

But no matter what I do, there'll always be something -- something I either overlooked, or didn't know was there --

DANNY (O.S.)

(screaming from  
downstairs)

Mom -- !

LYDIA

(starting to cry)

I'll take down a book from the bookcase one day and there'll be an inscription he once wrote to me -- or I'll go to the mailbox and there'll be a letter addressed to him -- or a photograph stuck in the back of a drawer --

DANNY (O.S.)

Mom -- !

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA

And even if I could forget him, all I'd have to do is look in your face -- or Mark's or Danny's -- and I'd be reminded all over again.

Danny runs into the room.

DANNY

(screaming)

Mom!

LYDIA

(screaming back)

What is it?

DANNY

There's a big truck in the driveway!

CUT TO:

EXT. DEMPSON HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - DAY

An enormous brand-new refrigerator is being lowered off the back of a delivery truck. Lydia, a robe thrown over her nightgown, is trying to explain to two DELIVERY MEN.

LYDIA

But I didn't order this! You must have the wrong house.

DELIVERY MAN

(checking the order)

Dempson, right?

LYDIA

Yes, but -- do you mind?

She takes the clipboard, checks the order herself.

LYDIA

(continuing)

I'm sorry -- but I can't accept this.

DELIVERY MAN

Look, ma'am, if there's a problem, take it up with the boss. Now, where do you want it?

LYDIA

(giving up)

The kitchen would be nice.

CUT TO:

## INT. "BIG BRUCE'S" - DAY

A large discount appliance warehouse, where shoppers armed with credit cards stalk bargains like prey up and down endless aisles of television sets, VCR's, stereo components and washing machines.

## ANGLE ON CUSTOMER SERVICE DESK

GRACE, an elderly woman, sits behind the counter in front of a microphone.

GRACE

(into microphone)

Bruce, to Customer Service.

Bruce, darling --

Bruce comes over, his shirtsleeves rolled up, sipping a mug of coffee.

BRUCE

Mom, how many times to do I have to ask you not to call me "darling" over the p.a.?

GRACE

(ignoring that)

There's a lady to see you.

She gestures behind him. Bruce turns, sees:

## BRUCE'S POV - LYDIA

looking at a life-size cardboard cut-out of Big Bruce, The Discount King, wearing a crown, a mantle, holding a scepter and sitting on a throne of video equipment. He goes over to her.

BRUCE

Well, well. Look who it is.

She turns to him, pleasant, but cool. Eager to resolve this as soon as possible.

LYDIA

Hello, Mr. Kingman.

BRUCE

What an unexpected -- and I might add, delightful -- surprise. What brings you here? A purchase, a return? If it's a complaint --

(gesturing to Grace)

-- you'll have to take it up with the Queen Mother.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA

Actually, I have a question.  
(beat)

Why did your men just deliver a  
new refrigerator to my house?

BRUCE

Why?

LYDIA

Yes, why?

BRUCE

(he shrugs)

Probably because I told them to.

LYDIA

Well, I'm sorry, but I can't  
accept a gift like that --  
especially from someone I don't  
even know --

BRUCE

Who said it's a gift?

LYDIA

(nonplussed)

Then what is it?

BRUCE

Store policy. If a customer buys  
an appliance from me and they're  
not satisfied with it, one hundred  
percent -- I replace it. Free of  
charge. No questions asked.

LYDIA

Well, I don't know how you expect  
to make any money sending out free  
refrigerators.

BRUCE

Don't worry about me -- I'm doing  
okay.

She looks at him for a beat, contrite.

LYDIA

That's -- very generous of you.

BRUCE

It's not generous, it's good  
business. Now, if you'll excuse  
me, there's some work I have to --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He starts to go.

LYDIA

Bruce, wait --

He stops, smiles.

BRUCE

I must be making headway -- you called me Bruce.

LYDIA

I'm sorry -- I didn't mean to question your integrity. It's just that after the other night --

BRUCE

Do you mind if we forget about the other night?

LYDIA

That's fine with me.

BRUCE

I've never had a worse time in my life.

LYDIA

That makes two of us.

They look at each other, start to laugh, relieved to be off the hook.

BRUCE

Look, what do you say we forget the whole thing?  
(he offers her his hand)  
No hard feelings?

A beat. She accepts it.

LYDIA

No hard feelings.

They stand looking at each other. And looking. Their hands still clasped together.

BRUCE

Well, I guess I'll see you around, Lydia.

(then)

Oh, and from now on -- watch who you go out with.

He walks away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOLD on Lydia, watching him go.

DISSOLVE TO:

A LONG SHOT OF LYDIA

seated at her card table in front of the post office, observed through a plate glass window across the street.

ANGLE ON MARK

watching her, his face reflected in the glass over Lydia's image.

EXT. POST OFFICE - DAY

Lydia is talking to an older woman who appears appalled by what she's hearing.

LYDIA

It's called "Nuclear Winter,"  
Scientists have made a study of  
it. Clouds of smoke will hang  
over the earth, blocking out the  
sun. There'll be years of  
darkness and freezing  
temperatures. Those of us "lucky"  
enough to survive'll die from  
starvation and disease --

As the woman signs the petition:

MARK (O.S.)

Where do I sign?

Lydia turns, is surprised to see him.

LYDIA

Mark, what're you doing here?

MARK

I stopped by the house -- no one  
was home.

LYDIA

Bear's with your father this  
weekend and Ellen's at  
Carlene's --

MARK

(nervously)

Mom, this is Andrew --

ANGLE TO INCLUDE ANDREW

Good looking, confident, a couple of years older than Mark.

MARK

Andrew, this is my mother.

ANDREW

(putting out his hand)

Mrs. Dempson --

She looks at him for a beat, then with a fail-proof smile, guaranteed to charm and dispel all doubt, she extends her hand.

LYDIA

Lydia, please!

CUT TO:

INT., DEMPSON HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Lydia, Mark and Andrew are having dinner.

LYDIA

(to Andrew)

Would you like some more wine?

ANDREW

Thanks, Lydia.

Mark reacts to his lover calling his mother by her first name.

LYDIA

You know, I've been trying to get Mark to come for dinner for weeks, but every time I ask him, he says he's too busy --

MARK

Mom, I'm trying to write --

LYDIA

Even writers have parents. What about your family, Andrew? Do they live around here?

ANDREW

No, back East -- Connecticut.

MARK

Andrew's invited me home with him for Christmas.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Lydia looks at him for a beat, her ebullience suddenly subdued. She doesn't say anything.

MARK

(to Andrew)

Can you believe I've never seen a white Christmas?

ANDREW

Well, I can't guarantee you snow -- but if you come to my parent's house, I can guarantee you the "whitest" Christmas you've ever had.

He reaches over, puts his hand on Mark's. Lydia's eyes flicker, she glances away. Just then, Abby, Lucy and Fern come sniffing around Andrew looking for a handout.

LYDIA

Abby! Just push them away, they know they're not supposed to do that.

(to Mark)

Remember when you put her in Ellen's dress and danced around with her?

MARK

Jesus, Mom! Do you have to --

LYDIA

(teasing)

It's a mother's privilege to embarrass her son.

She smiles at Andrew for support. Suddenly, Lucy jumps into Andrew's lap, steals the veal chop bone off his plate.

LYDIA

(continuing)

Lucy! Down!

She pushes Lucy off Andrew's lap.

ANDREW

(in horror)

It peed on me!

Mark nearly chokes from laughing.

LYDIA

(embarrassed)

I'm sorry, Andrew --

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA (CONT'D)  
(passing him  
her napkin)

I'm afraid it goes with the  
territory.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Mark comes in, finds Lydia ironing Andrew's pants.

LYDIA  
I hope he's not upset about his  
pants.

MARK  
He's too in love with you to  
notice.

LYDIA  
I like him, too.

MARK  
You really bulldozed him with the  
old charm.

LYDIA  
I wanted him to feel welcome.  
(a beat)  
I wanted both of you to.

Mark looks at her for a beat, embarrassed, reads the  
latest list stuck to the refrigerator.

MARK  
"Mail flyers for rally," "Write  
Senator Cranston" -- who's Dr.  
Sanchez?

LYDIA  
Someone I'm having a mad,  
passionate affair with.  
(after a beat)  
So, you're going with Andrew for  
Christmas?

MARK  
I'd like to -- if it's all right  
with you.

LYDIA  
Why wouldn't it be?

MARK  
Well, it's the first Christmas --  
I mean, since Dad --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA

No reason for that to stop you.  
We're not doing anything special  
this year, anyway.

MARK

I just thought you might want me  
to stick around -- you know?

LYDIA

Ellen and Bear'll be here.

He's surprised, even a bit hurt by her reaction.

MARK

Then it doesn't matter to you if  
I'm here or not?

LYDIA

I didn't say that. I just meant  
it's your decision. I can't make  
up your mind for you.

MARK

You never had any problem making  
up my mind for me before!

LYDIA

What's that supposed to mean?

Mark looks at her for a beat, exasperated.

MARK

All right, if you want me to stay,  
I will.

LYDIA

No, I don't want you doing it for  
me. After all the years I've had  
to put up with your snide remarks,  
your sarcasm, I know perfectly  
well how you feel about the --  
what do you call them? -- "empty  
family rituals!"

MARK

I was just joking --

LYDIA

Sometimes your jokes can hurt. So  
go to Connecticut --

She throws Andrew's pants at him. He fumbles, catches  
them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA

(continuing)

I wouldn't want you to lose  
anything on my account!

As Mark looks at her, confused, hurt by her sudden  
outburst:

CUT TO:

INT. DEMPSON HOUSE - FRONT HALLWAY - DAY (A FEW DAYS LATER)

Lydia is on a stepladder, taking boxes of Christmas  
decorations off the shelf. She struggles with some  
cords of tree lights that have become entangled, drops  
them.

LYDIA

Damn --!

She climbs off the ladder, kneels to pick them up,  
stops. She feels something damp between her legs,  
looks down.

ANGLE ON LYDIA'S SKIRT

As she sees blood soaking through her cream-colored  
jersey:

CUT TO:

INT. DR. SANCHEZ'S OFFICE - WAITING ROOM - DAY

Paper Santa Clauses are pasted on the walls. A small  
artificial tree and worn tinsel wreath that have been  
packed and unpacked for years are hung up once more in  
an attempt to make the season, and the waiting room,  
bright. Lydia sits, updating her list. She crosses  
off "Dr. Sanchez."

ANGLE ON ANOTHER WOMAN

MRS. HARRINGTON, seated across from her, reading a copy  
of Life magazine. Suddenly, Mrs. Harrington gasps,  
whoops air, can't breathe, as if she's just been hit in  
the stomach. The magazine slips from her fingers onto  
the floor. She clutches herself.

LYDIA

(rising, alarmed)

Are you all right?

MRS. HARRINGTON

The room -- it's spinning around,  
like in a washing machine --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA

I'll call the nurse.

MRS. HARRINGTON

No. I'll be all right --

She takes several deep breaths, regains composure. Lydia picks up the magazine from the floor, hands it to her.

MRS. HARRINGTON

(continuing)

Thank you --

Still concerned, Lydia returns to her seat as Mrs. Harrington pulls herself together. After a beat, she turns to Lydia.

MRS. HARRINGTON

(continuing)

I have a chicken in the refrigerator.

LYDIA

(confused)

Pardon me?

MRS. HARRINGTON

A chicken. I was thinking how I should prepare it. Should I broil it? "Shake 'n Bake" it? That's when I saw the date -- on the magazine.

(showing it to Lydia)

December first. It stuck in my mind. Who was born on that date? Did something historic happen? Then I realized --

(a beat)

I was supposed to be dead by then.

ANGLE ON NURSE

opening the door to the inner office, calling cheerfully:

NURSE

Mrs. Dempson, Dr. Sanchez will see you now.

CUT TO:

## INT. LYDIA'S CAR - NIGHT

Lydia's driving, looking anxious, trying hard to concentrate on the task at hand, nothing else. Ellen is next to her. The windshield wipers are brushing away the winter drizzle in time to the CHRISTMAS CAROL ON THE RADIO. Cheerful voices chirping:

RADIO

"Our cheeks are red and rosy,  
And comfy cozy are we,  
We're snuggled up together,  
Like birds of a feather should  
be -- "

## IN THE BACK SEAT

Danny is having a temper tantrum, screaming with rage, pounding the upholstery.

DANNY

I don't want to go! I don't want  
to go!

ELLEN

You're such a baby!

Which only makes him scream louder:

DANNY

I'm not a baby!

LYDIA

If you two don't stop it right  
now, I'm going to turn the car  
around!

ELLEN

Promise?

LYDIA

(not thrilled to  
be going herself)

It was sweet of the Levinsons to  
invite us -- so let's try and have  
a good time.

ELLEN

I wonder if Greg'll be there.  
Carlene said he's "born-again."

LYDIA

It's just a phase. Last year he  
was stealing cars.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLEN  
(after a beat)  
Has Mark called?

LYDIA  
(hiding her hurt)  
No. Not yet.

ELLEN  
Probably having too much fun.

DANNY  
I'm glad somebody is.

Lydia and Ellen give him a look.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

A traffic light changes from green to yellow to red.  
The car pulls to a stop.

INT. CAR

The red light shines in the windshield, illuminating  
their faces.

ELLEN/DANNY  
(in unison)  
Red light, green light!

ELLEN  
I called it first!

DANNY  
I did!

LYDIA  
You both did. Now make a wish and  
count to three -- if the light  
turns green, your wish'll come  
true.

ANGLE ON ELLEN AND DANNY

counting to themselves.

ANGLE ON LYDIA

Secretly playing the game, too. She closes her eyes,  
counts to three. From her expression, it appears the  
stakes are very high. She opens them.

LYDIA'S POV - THE RED LIGHT

turning green.

CUT TO:

## INT. LEVINSON HOUSE - NIGHT

The Levinson's annual Christmas party. The slow, steady murmur of conversation is punctuated by the STACCATO CLINKING of glasses and ice. A floor-to-ceiling Christmas tree dripping with ornaments dominates the room, totally eclipsing a small, gold menorah that sits unnoticed on the mantel.

## ANGLE ON THE BUFFET TABLE

laden with everything from a giant ham to lox and bagels. Lydia is absently piling food on her plate.

A WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Well, I'm glad to see one of us  
isn't on a diet!

Lydia turns, sees JOAN LENSKY, a woman in her late 40's, well-preserved, although somewhat hardened in the process. She's all in black, from head to toe, including her Johnny Walker Black Label.

LYDIA

Joan --

(looking at her  
plate, embarrassed)

You know, I have no idea why I  
took all this.

JOAN

Spirit of the season -- gluttony  
and greed! So, how are you?

LYDIA

Fine.

JOAN

(intensely personal)

No, I mean really.

LYDIA

(returning the  
intensity)

Fine. Really.

JOAN

I'm glad to hear it. I'm sure it  
hasn't been easy for you.

LYDIA

I'm surviving.

JOAN

Of course you are. You're a  
survivor -- like me!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She spots a friend, then:

JOAN

(continuing)

Poor Greta -- she looks awful.

(confiding a secret)

Can you believe she told me that  
as soon as she dies, George is  
going to marry Corinne Wheeler --  
the one whose husband died last  
year? It's all been arranged.  
She's going to step right in, take  
over the house, raise her kids --

She shakes her head, sigh profoundly, then raises her  
half-empty glass of spirits in a half-spirited toast.

JOAN

(continuing)

Well, here's to the end of a  
shitty year -- the next one can't  
be much worse.

Off Lydia's silence:

CUT TO:

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING

Lydia comes in, closes the door behind her, shutting  
out the party, the guests, the world. The bed is an  
Everest of coats. She turns, catches sight of herself  
in:

LYDIA'S POV - THE DRESSER MIRROR

She stares at her image, pale in the light of the bed-  
stand lamp, then turns away, goes to the bed, sits on  
the coats, clutching an anonymous fur to her. She  
buries her face in it and starts to sob. In the b.g.,  
the SOUND OF A TOILET FLUSHING.

ANGLE ON BATHROOM DOOR

Bruce Kingman comes out, sees her.

BRUCE

Lydia?

LYDIA

(startled)

Bruce --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She quickly jumps off the bed, wipes her nose, smooths the front of her dress and tries to look bright -- all at once. After a uncomfortable beat:

BRUCE

You just get here?

LYDIA

A few minutes ago.

BRUCE

You by yourself?

LYDIA

Yes -- I mean, no -- my two youngest are with me. My son Mark's away -- with a friend.

Then, trying valiantly to be sociable:

LYDIA

(continuing)

Ursie didn't mention you'd be here.

BRUCE

I was planning to take my boys skiing -- but at the last minute they both came down with the flu.

She smiles, nods, spirits fading fast. He looks at her for a beat, gestures to the party below.

BRUCE

(continuing)

What do you say we -- ?

LYDIA

No, you go ahead -- I'll be down in a few minutes. I just need to -- to --

But she can't find any excuse or even the strength to keep up the appearance of holiday cheer. She collapses onto the pile of coats, in tears. Bruce stands looking at her, not knowing what the hell to do.

BRUCE

Lydia -- ?

He goes over to her, touches her shoulder.

BRUCE

(continuing)

You all right?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Her sobs come even harder now.

BRUCE

(continuing; to himself)

Christ --

(then to her)

Listen, I know it's none of my business why you're up here, sobbing your heart out -- but if you feel like talking about it --

She shakes her head, continues to cry. He shrugs.

BRUCE

(continuing)

Then again, sometimes it's best just to get all the tears out.

He starts to go, but for some reason, he can't leave her there. He goes over, sits beside her, makes a clumsy attempt at offering comfort.

BRUCE

(continuing)

You know, Christmas can be a pretty depressing time for a lot of people -- especially if you're alone. In fact, I read someplace the suicide rate goes through the roof. That's why we tell our customers they don't have to pay until after the first of the year. I sure as hell wouldn't want someone sticking their head in an oven they bought from me --

She suddenly stops crying, sits up, looks at him, red-eyed, like he's nuts. Then without warning, she kisses him directly and passionately on the mouth with such force that it knocks them both -- and the coats -- off the bed. They cling together as they hit the floor. When their lips finally part, they look at each other, shocked, dazed, bewildered.

LYDIA

(mortified)

I'm so sorry. Please, forgive me -- I must be insane. That's what it is, I am insane. I'm out of my mind --

BRUCE

(considering)

I've heard of crazier things --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Just then, the bedroom door opens. A COUPLE comes in. Lydia leaps up, horrified.

BRUCE

(continuing; to  
the Couple)

Jesus Christ! Can't you knock  
before you come into a room?

WOMAN

(flustered)

I'm sorry, we didn't know anyone  
was in here --

BRUCE

Well, what do you want?

The Couple is now totally intimidated.

MAN

Our coats - we'd like to leave.

BRUCE

Well, go on --  
(ordering them)  
-- get them!

MAN

(scurrying)

Thank you!

He quickly searches through the tangled mass of coats on the floor. By now, Lydia has found her coat, as well as Ellen's and Danny's. She runs from the room.

BRUCE

(calling after her)

Lydia -- !

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A group of CAROLERS is singing "Silent Night."

ANGLE ON URSULA AND TED

TED

I'll kill him! I'll goddamn kill  
him!

ANGLE ON LYDIA

running down the stairs, right into them.

URSULA

How could he do this to us? How?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA  
(baffled)

Who?

URSULA

Greg!

Lydia turns, sees:

THE GROUP OF CAROLERS

A collection of STREET PEOPLE that Greg Levinson's BORN-AGAIN GROUP (the ones with the matching striped scarves and beatific smiles) has brought in to his parents' home. GREG leads them in song on his guitar.

STREET PEOPLE

(singing)

"Christ the Savior is bo-orn,  
Christ the Savior is born -- "

BACK TO URSULA

clutching onto Lydia like a vise.

URSULA

He was getting so much better.  
Then one day he comes home and  
tells us he's found Jesus! Jesus,  
for Chrissakes!

TED

I'll reason with him.

URSULA

You've already tried that  
bullshit!

Lydia breaks loose, flees, finds Ellen watching the Carolers with a couple of girlfriends. Lydia grabs her by the arm.

LYDIA

Come on, let's go!

ELLEN

But we just got here!

Just then, Danny and two other kids run by, laughing, stumbling. Lydia captures him.

LYDIA

Put on your coat, we're leaving.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DANNY  
(screaming)  
I don't want to go!

LYDIA  
(screaming back)  
Don't make me raise my voice!

She drags them both to:

THE FRONT DOOR

past the guests, the Carolers, Ted and Ursula.

LYDIA  
(to the Levinsons)  
Thanks, Ursie, Ted -- we had a  
lovely time!

ANGLE ON BRUCE

on the stairs, watching, as Lydia pushes her kids out  
the door.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - INTENSIVE CARE UNIT - DAY

Mark and Ellen sit together in the hallway outside  
Lydia's room on the ICU, where she is recovering after  
surgery. Both are weary from too little sleep and too  
much worry. Ellen gets up, goes to the window of  
Lydia's room, looks in.

ELLEN'S POV - LYDIA

She lies unconscious beneath the shadowless white sheet  
of the hospital bed.

ELLEN (O.S.)  
God, she looks beautiful. Even  
now.

Ellen sniffs away a tear, searches in her bag for some-  
thing to put in her mouth, finds a roll of candy. She  
offers one to Mark.

ELLEN  
Lifesaver?

He looks up at her, unshaven, his eyes red, doesn't  
answer.

CUT TO:

## INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - DAY

A few days later. To ESTABLISH. A Nurse is wheeling a patient in a wheelchair. An Attendant is delivering lunch trays to the rooms.

## INT. HOSPITAL - LYDIA'S ROOM

Lydia is in bed, looking tired, weak. Ellen is plumping her pillows, adjusting her blanket, pausing only to steal a chocolate from the candy box by the bed.

ELLEN

Mrs. Levinson said she'd take care of Danny, but I told her I could do it.

LYDIA

Poor Bear --

ELLEN

He's fine, don't worry.

Lydia shifts uncomfortably in her bed.

ELLEN

(continuing; over-reacting)

What's the matter?

LYDIA

Nothing --

ELLEN

Are you in pain?

LYDIA

My leg's asleep, that's all.

A hospital ATTENDANT comes in with a lunch tray and a smile.

ATTENDANT

Ready for lunch?

Ellen takes the tray from her, officiously.

ELLEN

I'll take that.

(then, inspecting it)

There's no fruit cup.

LYDIA

Honey, it's all right --

ELLEN

We ordered a fruit cup.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ATTENDANT

(to Lydia)

I'll bring you one.

Lydia smiles weakly, appreciatively.

ELLEN

And make sure it's fresh.

The Attendant gives Ellen a look, leaves.

ELLEN

(continuing)

Can't they do anything right?

LYDIA

It's just a mistake -- they're really very nice.

ELLEN

Who said they weren't?

She pops a stringbean from Lydia's plate into her mouth, as Mark comes into the room, carrying flowers.

MARK

(to Lydia, cheery,  
relieved)

You look better.

He gives her a kiss.

ELLEN

You mind, I want her to eat her lunch.

MARK

So, who's stopping her?

LYDIA

(intervening)

Ellen, sweetie -- would you do me a favor?

ELLEN

(eagerly)

Sure, anything -- what is it?

LYDIA

Would you go down to the newsstand and get me a copy of "Cosmopolitan"?

ELLEN

You want a "Cosmopolitan"?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA

Please?

ELLEN

I've never seen you read  
"Cosmopolitan."

LYDIA

I just feel like a "Cosmopolitan."

MARK

(yelling)

Would you get her a "Cosmopolitan"?

ELLEN

Okay, I'll get you a "Cosmopolitan."

(warning Mark)

Make sure she eats.

They watch her go. The moment the door swings shut:

LYDIA

She's driving me out of my fucking  
mind!

Startled by his mother's language, Mark starts to  
laugh.

LYDIA

(continuing)

I mean it! She won't leave me  
alone for a minute. Fussing over  
me like I was a baby, making a big  
deal over every little thing--  
I've never seen her like that.  
Where do you suppose it comes  
from?

MARK

(innocently)

Beats me.

He dumps out the old flowers by her bed and replaces  
them with the fresh one.

LYDIA

You don't have to bring me these  
every day -- the other ones aren't  
even dead yet.

MARK

I want to, you mind?

LYDIA

The doctor said I might be able to  
go home this weekend.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARK

Really? That's great!

LYDIA

(hesitating)

He wants me to start radiation.

He looks at her, fearfully.

MARK

Radiation -- ?

LYDIA

(with a brave smile)

It's standard procedure. At least, that's what he says.

He nods, sets the fresh flowers down, fighting back his emotion. But he starts to cry. She draws him into her arms, presses him close, comforting him.

LYDIA

(continuing)

It's all right -- this happens to a lot of people. It doesn't automatically mean what you think.

She gently kisses the top of his head.

LYDIA

(continuing)

Now, stop worrying about me.

He sits up, dries his eyes.

LYDIA

(continuing; reaching)

Could you hand me that -- ?

He hands her a glass of water from the bedstand.

LYDIA

(continuing)

Thanks.

(after she takes a sip)

So, how was Connecticut? Did you have a good time?

(as he nods)

Tell me about Andrew's parents -- were they nice to you?

MARK

They were great --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA

Did it snow?

MARK

Two feet --

(then, with difficulty)

Only, I should've been here with you. I feel like a real asshole.

LYDIA

Stop it --

MARK

I mean it!

LYDIA

There's nothing you could've done, anyway. Really, there's no reason for you to feel guilty.

(then adding)

In fact, if anyone should feel that way, it's me.

MARK

You? For what?

LYDIA

For holding on to you too tight. For being too possessive. Dad always said I was. I guess he was right.

She looks at him for a beat, then:

LYDIA

(continuing)

Mark -- I just want you to know, if I ever did anything to hold you back, to stop you from living your life -- I'm sorry. I didn't mean to --

MARK

You didn't, Mom --

LYDIA

Come on, I know I can be too demanding at times -- and maybe I expect too much, it's true. But not just of you -- of everyone. Myself.

MARK

I know --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA

It's just that -- I love you. And Ellen. And Bear. You're not just my kids, you know -- you're my creations.

MARK

That's why I feel I let you down.

LYDIA

You could never let me down. It doesn't matter if we don't see eye to eye -- or if we fight -- or even if we leave each other. Just as long as we come back.

A beat. She touches his cheek.

LYDIA

(continuing)

You're here now and that's enough. That's enough.

EXT. HOSPITAL - ESTABLISHING - NIGHT

INT. HOSPITAL - LYDIA'S ROOM - NIGHT

A couple of days later. Lydia is now sitting up in a chair by the window. Her hair is washed and combed; she even wears a little makeup. She has on earphones, lost in some classical music on a Walkman, which we can hear faintly.

CLOSE ON A HAND

coming INTO FRAME, touching her gently. She jumps a little, turns to see:

ALEX

standing over her shoulder.

ALEX

I didn't mean to startle you --

LYDIA

(taking off the earphones)

I was just listening to some music -- Ellen loaned me her Walkman.

After a beat, she pulls herself up.

LYDIA

(continuing)

Here, sit down.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX

No, stay -- I'll sit over here.

He sits on the bed, looks at her.

LYDIA

So, how are you?

ALEX

Me? I'm fine. What about you?

LYDIA

Well;, remember that time we went to the Chinese restaurant and my fortune cookie said, "Among the lucky, you are the chosen one" -- and that night I woke up with food poisoning?

(she laughs)

I wish I wasn't so damn lucky.

They look at each other for a beat, see the fear in each other's eyes.

ALEX

So, how long have you -- ? I mean, when did you first -- ?

LYDIA

I went to the doctor for a check-up, just before Christmas. I knew something was wrong. I really hadn't been feeling well since last summer.

ALEX

Last summer -- ?

LYDIA

I figured it was because of all the other things that were going on.

ALEX

You should've seen someone.

LYDIA

I know, but I kept putting it off and putting it off. I guess I just didn't want to have to deal with anything else.

ALEX

It's just like you not to tell anyone -- to think you can handle it alone.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He goes to the window, upset.

LYDIA

(after a beat)

You know the last time we were here?

He turns to her, remembers.

ALEX

When we had Danny.

LYDIA

Can you believe it's been eight years?

ALEX

Christ, you were amazing! There we were in the delivery room -- I'm taking pictures, you're in the middle of labor -- and you're screaming: "Alex, here comes the head -- make sure you get a good shot!"

LYDIA

(laughing)

Well, we got some great pictures, didn't we?

Reliving the scene, they forget for a moment the reason she's in the hospital this time. But the memory fades and so does the laughter.

ALEX

You shouldn't have to go through this by yourself.

LYDIA

I have the kids --

ALEX

That's just one more thing you have to deal with. Who's taking care of Danny?

LYDIA

Ellen, at the moment --

ALEX

Ellen's not prepared to shoulder that kind of responsibility -- and she shouldn't have to.

(after a beat)

How about letting me take him?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Lydia looks at him, cautious. Defensive. Alex feels it.

ALEX

(continuing)

Just until you're better.

LYDIA

(sharply)

I'm better already.

ALEX

Look, I'm just trying to help you, all right? I think we could share this -- like we've done everything else. What's the matter with that?

LYDIA

He's staying with me.

ALEX

(after a beat)

And what if you're not able to take care of him?

LYDIA

If I have to crawl out of my deathbed on all fours to drive him to the dentist, then I'll goddamn do it! But no one else is going to feed him when he's hungry or hold him when he cries or tell him I love you when he wakes up from a bad dream except me! At least not while I'm still alive!

INT. HOSPITAL - LOUNGE

The TV SET IS ON, candy bar wrappers and used styrofoam coffee cups are littered about. Ellen is smoking nervously. Mark sits nearby, a notebook in his lap, writing. As he flips a page over, Alex comes in, comes over to them.

ALEX

She seems to be doing better. Ready to bite my head off.

ELLEN

(to Mark, rising)

I'll go check on her.

She puts out her cigarette, starts to leave.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX

Christ, I haven't seen you for months! Couldn't you stay for a minute?

She looks at her father, doesn't say anything, brushes past him. A beat, then Alex turns to his son.

ALEX

(continuing)

You know, I never figured anything like this would happen. I mean, your mother's always taken such good care of herself. She's never even had a cold.

He takes out a cigarette, lights it, sits down, watches Mark for a beat.

ALEX

(continuing)

So, how's your work coming?

MARK

What work? I'm still on unemployment.

ALEX

(gesturing to  
the notebook)

I mean your writing. What is it -- a story?

MARK

It hasn't made up its mind yet.

ALEX

What's it about?

MARK

A family that goes away to a cottage for the summer.

(a beat)

I'm thinking of calling it "The Lost Cottage."

Alex gets the point.

ALEX

Are we all in it?

MARK

More or less.

(then, directly)

Mostly more.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX

I guess I don't have to ask who the villain is. Although it would've been nice if you and your sister bothered to talk to me first before you passed sentence. You might even have found out a few things you didn't know.

(off Mark's look)

Like maybe I wanted it this way.

MARK

What -- to be the villain?

ALEX

I thought it'd be best for all concerned if I were the bad guy. That way, there'd be no tug-of-war -- no question whose side you were on -- you and Ellen and Danny would be hers.

MARK

(pissed)

So, you just gave us to her.

ALEX

I thought she was losing enough.

(a beat)

Anyway, you kids were always more hers than mine to begin with. I don't know why -- it just turned out that way.

A long beat. Mark doesn't say anything. Finally, he asks:

MARK

Last summer -- if you'd known Mom was sick -- would you still have left her?

Alex looks at Mark for a hard beat. Finally, he crushes out his cigarette, either unable or unwilling to answer his son's question. Probably both. For Mark, the silence is answer enough. He goes back to his writing.

CUT TO:

INT. RADIATION CENTER - DAY

A couple of weeks later. Cheerful in contrast to its grim purpose, with plush carpeting and O'Keeffe posters on the walls.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

There are two little girls playing "Chutes and Ladders" at a table in the children's play area. One of the little girls spills the dice, moves her piece across the board. The CAMERA PANS TO:

DANNY

standing in front of a large plate glass window, watching:

DANNY'S POV - LYDIA

lying motionless under a white sheet on an icy metal table standing like an island in the center of the therapy room. Above the table, a large instrument resembling a ray gun points down from the ceiling. It looks like something from one of Danny's afternoon science fiction cartoon shows. A technician is at the far side, operating the controls. The ray gun passes over Lydia is a dark sweep, zeroes in on its target.

BACK TO DANNY

watching.

DANNY (V.O.)

In the Fourth Millennium, the Brolian Force attacked the planet Abdur.

CUT TO:

INT. PHARMACY - DAY

Lydia waits at the prescription counter, looking pale and weak. Danny is with her, telling her a story.

DANNY

Ismul the Great Father and his followers raced to their space-cruisers. They escaped to Dandrill, just in time!

LYDIA

Honey, do you mind saving your story for later? I'm not feeling too good right now.

DANNY

It's not a story. It's real.

She gives him a look, as the PHARMACIST comes over.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PHARMACIST

Here's your prescription, Mrs.  
Dempson.

LYDIA

Thank you.

JOAN (O.S.)

Lydia -- ?

Lydia turns, sees Joan Lensky, the woman from the  
Levinsons' party. Dressed in black, as usual.

JOAN

I thought that was you.

LYDIA

(trapped)

Oh -- hi, Joan.

JOAN

I'm surprised to see you out.

(intensely)

How are you?

LYDIA

Fine.

Joan gives Danny a smile and a pat, then back to Lydia.

JOAN

I hear you've started radiation,  
poor thing. How's it going?

LYDIA

Not too bad.

JOAN

What about your hair -- is that a  
wig?

LYDIA

No, it's mine.

She signals to Joan with a look not to talk about  
things in front of Danny, but she just goes on.

JOAN

Well, for God's sake, whatever you  
do, don't let them give you that  
awful chemo. My sister had it and  
I'm convinced it's what killed  
her.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOAN (CONT'D)

(after a beat)

By the way, I've been saving this  
for you --

She searches in her bag, pulls out a pamphlet.

JOAN

(continuing)

It's an organization you should  
know about. It arranges for  
things -- before you go. So your  
children won't have to worry about  
it. They take care of everything.  
Everything.

She offers it to Lydia with a sympathetic smile.

LYDIA

(sweetly)

That's very thoughtful of you,  
Joan. I can't tell you how much I  
appreciate it. But, I've already  
joined an organization.

JOAN

Oh, really?

LYDIA

Yes, it's called the -- uh, the  
Snowflake Society.

JOAN

The Snowflake Society? I don't  
think I've heard of that one.

LYDIA

You haven't? Well, you see, they  
freeze-dry your remains, then  
mount you on the wall. I've  
chosen to be placed above the  
mantel. Of course, the kids'll  
have to keep the temperature low,  
so I don't defrost. But I figure  
if there's any problem, they can  
always hang me in cold storage --  
along with my fur coat!

She grabs Danny and drags him out of the pharmacy,  
leaving Joan standing there with her mouth open.

CUT TO:

## INT. DEMPSON HOUSE - DEN - NIGHT

Danny is glued to the TELEVISION, watching his favorite ANIMATED SCI-FI SHOW. The DOORBELL RINGS. Lydia calls from the kitchen:

LYDIA (O.S.)

Danny, can you get that?

Begrudgingly, he rises. FOLLOW him through the house to:

## THE FRONT DOOR

He throws it open, sees an unfamiliar man standing there.

BRUCE

Hey, sport.

LYDIA (O.S.)

(calling)

Bear, who is it?

## INT. KITCHEN

Danny comes running in. Lydia and Ellen are making dinner.

DANNY

Mom -- !

Lydia turns around, sees Bruce following Danny into the room.

LYDIA

Bruce --

(nervously running  
a hand through  
her hair)

We were just making dinner.

BRUCE

Smells good.

Ellen and Danny look at their mother, then at Bruce, then at each other.

CUT TO:

## INT. LIVING ROOM

Bruce is seated on the sofa.

BRUCE

I heard you were sick, so I figured I'd stop by.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Lydia comes over, hands him a drink.

LYDIA

Thanks. I'm feeling much better.

BRUCE

(pleased to hear it)

I was wondering what happened to you ever since the party.

LYDIA

(embarrassed)

Oh, that -- don't remind me. I feel like such an idiot.

BRUCE

Come on, it was a great kiss!

LYDIA

Here I'd just been to the doctor's, I'd just found out that -- that I was sick -- and the next thing you know, I'm throwing myself at a total stranger.

BRUCE

Well, not a total stranger --

LYDIA

I don't know what got into me.

BRUCE

Listen, I felt the same way at my wife's funeral. I should've been inconsolable. Instead, I was staring at my sister-in-law's legs. But you know what I think it was? I think I was trying to convince myself that I hadn't died, too -- that I was still alive.

She looks at him for a beat, some of her fear showing.

LYDIA

Sometimes it takes a lot of convincing.

BRUCE

(cheering her)

Listen, how about dinner?

LYDIA

You're welcome to stay --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRUCE

You and me.

LYDIA

(surprised)

Are you asking me out?

BRUCE

(just as surprised)

I think so -- yeah.

LYDIA

After what happened the last time?

BRUCE

I'm willing to take my chances if  
you are.

LYDIA

Thanks, but I really don't feel  
like going someplace where I'm  
going to run into a lot of people,  
have to answer a lot of  
questions --

(a beat)

Maybe some other time.

BRUCE

Sure, I understand. You've got  
all the time in the world, right?

Off her reaction:

CUT TO:

CLOSEUP - MICROWAVE OVEN

The timer bell goes off with a PING.

INT. BIG BRUCE'S - NIGHT

Bruce opens the door of the microwave, one of many on  
display, removes a couple of plates of take-out  
Chinese, carries them over to his desk where Lydia is  
sitting in his chair. They're alone in the vastness of  
the empty store.

BRUCE

It's hot --

She blows on it, takes a bite.

LYDIA

Ow -- !

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRUCE

Warned you.

He pulls up another chair opposite her. She smiles, glances at a framed photograph on his desk, taken a few years back: Bruce, two young boys, a pretty woman with dark hair and a big smile.

LYDIA

Is this your wife?

BRUCE

(nodding)

Karen, and those are the two monsters --

Lydia stares at the picture for a beat.

LYDIA

How long ago did she -- ?

BRUCE

Four years. It'll be four years in May.

LYDIA

Was she -- sick?

BRUCE

No, it was an accident.

But that's all he'll say. She doesn't press it. Then, asking as much for herself as him:

LYDIA

It must've been hard on your boys.

BRUCE

At first. They don't talk much about it any more.

He takes a bite of food.

LYDIA

I was thinking last night how my kids would get along without me -- what they'd do if I died. Probably have dinner at the Levinson's -- not yet believing that I was really gone --

BRUCE

Wait a second. Who said you're going to die?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA

Kids can't hide it -- I can see it  
in their faces.

(trying to joke)

Better get your black suit  
pressed!

He looks at her for a beat.

BRUCE

Like to dance?

Off her reaction:

BRUCE

(continuing)

Come on.

He suddenly takes her hand, pulls her up.

INT. STORE - STEREO DEPARTMENT

An old '50's LP PLAYS on one of the TURNTABLES. Bruce and Lydia are dancing to a slow song, feeling slightly uncomfortable with the touch of each other.

He pulls her closer. She leans her head on his shoulder feeling warm and safe, happy to be held. Suddenly, he stops. They look at each other, neither moving away. Then they kiss, Lydia holding onto him for dear life.

CUT TO:

INT. DEMPSON HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Lydia climbs the stairs. Abby, Lucy and Fern wait for her at the top of the landing, their tails beating as if she were a long-lost friend.

LYDIA

(whispering)

It's just me, ladies. Go back to bed.

She starts down the hall, quietly. Ellen comes out of her room, awakened.

ELLEN

Mom -- ? Are you all right?

LYDIA

Hi, sweetie. Sorry I woke you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLEN

Where've you been?

LYDIA

(matter-of-fact)

Dining and dancing.

Ellen gives her a look. Lydia gives her a kiss.

LYDIA

(continuing)

Tell you about it in the morning.

Ellen watches as Lydia goes into her room.

INT. LYDIA'S BEDROOM

Lydia is in her nightgown, getting ready for bed. She turns back the spread, goes to the window to close the shades. She stops when she sees:

LYDIA'S POV - THE BACK YARD

Danny standing there in his bathrobe, staring up at the sky.

BACK TO LYDIA

Confused, she checks the clock by the bed, sees it's very late, puts on her robe.

CUT TO:

EXT. DEMPSON HOUSE - BACK YARD - NIGHT

Danny stares up at the sky, vast and full of stars.

LYDIA (O.S.)

Bear -- ?

He turns, looks at her.

LYDIA

(continuing)

What're you doing out here? Do you know what time it is?

Danny doesn't say anything at first, then offering a simple explanation:

DANNY

They're coming for me.

LYDIA

Who's coming for you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DANNY

My people.

LYDIA

Your people?

DANNY

(explaining)

They sent me here to observe your world, but now I have to go back. They're dying out. I have to help save them.

(a beat)

It's only fair you should know.

LYDIA

I appreciate your telling me -- only, I thought the reason you're here on Earth is because I'm your mother.

DANNY

I was implanted in you, but you don't remember.

LYDIA

I remember the exact moment. Daddy and I were in Honolulu for a convention. Now, let's go in --

But he looks back up to the sky.

DANNY

I can't. They're coming to take me back to Danril, tonight.

She turns him around to her, gently.

LYDIA

Bear, sweetheart --

DANNY

I told them you've always been good to me. And they're very grateful. That's why they're going to make you better. They have a special invisible ray -- like the radiation -- that can cure you just like that!

LYDIA

(finally understanding)

I see --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DANNY

But first, I have to return to my origins.

LYDIA

Bear, I'm your origins -- and I need you here to help me come back to life.

(after a beat)

Couldn't you ask them to let you stay -- just a little while longer?

Danny looks at her, then up to his planet, then back at her.

DANNY

(finally)

They say it's all right. I can stay.

LYDIA

(looking up to the sky)

Thank you.

As she tenderly puts her arm around him, the CAMERA SLOWLY PANS UP to the black, infinite sky, beneath which Lydia and Danny seem tiny, significant only to each other.

DISSOLVE TO:

A BASEBALL

making a graceful arc, back and forth, across a green lawn.

EXT. BRUCE'S HOUSE - BACK YARD - DAY

Bruce's two boys, RONNIE, 14, and JEFF, 10, are playing catch. Danny waits impatiently for his turn, but neither of the boys throw the ball to him.

ANGLE ON PATIO

Lydia, Mark and Ellen are seated at a table sipping sodas. Bruce is at the grill, barbecuing hamburgers. He calls to the boys.

BRUCE

Hey, how about giving Danny a turn? And keep that pitch steady, Jeff -- remember, good wrist action!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

As he flips a burger, Lydia comes over to him. He puts an arm around her.

LYDIA

Can I help?

BRUCE

Nope, everything's done.

(calling)

Come on, boys!

(then to Mark

and Ellen)

Hope you kids are hungry.

He hands Ellen a plate.

ELLEN

(refusing coolly)

I'm on a diet.

LYDIA

That's the first I've heard of it.

ELLEN

I just started. Today.

Undaunted, Bruce hands a plate to Mark.

BRUCE

Your Mom tells me you're a writer.

MARK

Trying to be.

BRUCE

I don't have much time to read --  
but when I do, I like a good  
adventure with lots of action.

MARK

I don't write that.

BRUCE

You work on a computer?.

MARK

(with a laugh)

I can barely afford pencils.

BRUCE

Stop by the store -- maybe we can  
work something out.

Ellen listens to this, none too pleased to see her brother being won over by Bruce.

INCLUDE RONNIE AND JEFF

running over in a rage.

RONNIE

(about Danny)

He threw the ball in the pool!

BRUCE

Take it easy --

LYDIA

I'm sure it was an accident.

JEFF

He did it on purpose!

Danny trudges over.

LYDIA

Bear, did you throw the ball in  
the pool?

DANNY

He threw it too hard!

JEFF

See?

BRUCE

Pipe down and eat!

RONNIE

(grabbing a burger)

Pass the ketchup.

BRUCE

Please! Where the hell are your  
manners?

(to the table)

So, who's going to win the  
pennant?

JEFF

Oakland!

RONNIE

Chicago!

BRUCE

Danny?

MARK

Don't ask him -- he hates  
baseball.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRUCE

We're a bunch of baseball nuts  
around here. The boys are going  
to Slugger Camp this summer. Hey,  
Danny -- you want to go?

DANNY

(letting out a wail)

Noooooo!

Ronnie and Jeff exchange a look, start to laugh.

LYDIA

(calming him)

It's all right, Bear --

ELLEN

(smugly, to Bruce)

He can't go anyway. We always go  
to our cottage every summer.

Lydia looks at her, about to say something. Decides  
against it.

CUT TO:

INT. DEMPSON HOUSE - LYDIA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Lydia is packing an overnight bag. Ellen watches,  
objecting.

ELLEN

I don't know why I couldn't have  
gone with you!

LYDIA

Because I need you to stay here  
with Bear.

ELLEN

Well, I think it's too soon --  
you're not well enough to go.

LYDIA

The doctor said as long as I was  
up to it, he had no problem.

ELLEN

What if something happens?

LYDIA

Nothing's going to happen.  
Anyway, I won't be alone.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLEN

(resentful)

I know.

LYDIA

Know what?

ELLEN

What's going on. You don't have to hide it from me.

LYDIA

I think it's time you stopped being so concerned about me and started thinking about yourself. You're going to have enough to do getting ready to go to college in the fall.

ELLEN

I don't want to go.

LYDIA

What -- ?

ELLEN

I said I don't want to go. I want to stay here -- to take care of you.

LYDIA

Believe me, you already have. But I'll be damned if I'm going to let you sacrifice your life --

ELLEN

It's not a sacrifice!

LYDIA

You may not think so now, but one day you'll look back and you'll hate me for it.

ELLEN

I won't hate you!

She throws her arms around her mother, holding on, wanting to be held.

LYDIA

Well, I'd hate myself.

She comforts Ellen, gives her a kiss, releases her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA

(continuing)

Now I don't want to hear any more about it. This is going to be difficult enough.

(rushed)

Would you hand me those -- ?

She points to several bottles of pills on the dresser. Ellen gets them, brings them to her mother, watches resentfully as Lydia finishes packing.

CUT TO:

EXT. ISLAND - COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Lydia and Bruce are driving down a familiar road, past the cottages with the strange names. He pulls into the driveway.

BRUCE

"Under the Weather?"

LYDIA

That's just what it was called when we came here on our honeymoon.

He pulls the car into the dirt driveway, stops in front of the cottage. He's totally immune to its rustic charm.

BRUCE

You should've gone to Acapulco.

INT. COTTAGE - DAY

Dark. Musty. The front door opens. It's like unsealing a tomb. Particles of dust dance in the air, reflected in the shaft of light.

ANGLE ON LYDIA

looking at the scene of last summer's devastation: Ellen's sweater still bunched up in a corner of the sofa, the lobster pot left in the sink, one of Danny's action-figures abandoned on the floor.

LYDIA

We left in such a hurry, we didn't even clean up.

She crosses to the window, opens the shades, flooding the room with light. The mood is broken, the past dispelled.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRUCE

I'll get the cartons.

He goes back out to the car, leaving her alone. Slowly, she begins to make order. She picks up Ellen's sweater, holds it against herself.

INT. COTTAGE

Several hours later. Cartons stuffed with clothes, kitchen utensils, sheets and blankets are stacked on top of each other by the front door. PAN across to:

THE KITCHEN

where Lydia is packing a carton of dishes, wrapping each one carefully in newspaper, as if it were fine china. She runs her hand across her face, wiping off some perspiration.

BRUCE (O.S.)

Don't wear yourself out.

She turns, smiles appreciatively.

LYDIA

I'm fine -- I just had no idea there was so much.

BRUCE

What about this guy?

He holds up a lamp, the base is a fisherman reeling in his catch.

LYDIA

He came with the house. Better leave him for the next people.

He sets it back down, goes to her, puts his arms around her.

BRUCE

So, what do you do around here at night for fun?

LYDIA

Fun?

BRUCE

Yeah. There's no TV, no stereo, not even a radio -- !

He shakes his head, uncomprehending.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA

(laughing)

That's what we come here to get  
away from.

(then, tempting him)

But don't worry -- we'll think of  
something.

Bruce gives her an interested look.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lydia and Bruce are in the midst of lovemaking. They  
seem to be enjoying it at first, but then Lydia stops.

BRUCE

(concerned)

What's the matter? I'm not  
hurting you, am I?

LYDIA

No, it's not that --

BRUCE

Well, what is it?

LYDIA

I don't know --

(but she does)

Maybe it's being here -- this  
bed --

BRUCE

The bed?

LYDIA

I've never slept in it with anyone  
but Alex. We spent our honeymoon  
on this mattress.

BRUCE

You want me to flip it over?

(then, off her look)

Aw, come on, Lydia -- !

LYDIA

I know I'm being ridiculous --

BRUCE

So, what do you want me to do --  
sleep in the other room?

She looks at him, doesn't say anything.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRUCE

(continuing)

For Chrissakes -- !

She gets defensive, gets up.

LYDIA

I'm sorry to disappoint you, but  
if that's the only reason you came  
up here --

BRUCE

Listen, I don't have to drive  
three hours to some godforsaken  
cabin in the woods to get laid!

She throws on her robe and leaves the room. A beat,  
then Bruce hurls his pillow across the room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Bruce comes out of the bedroom, finds Lydia mopping the  
floor.

BRUCE

You always do your housekeeping in  
the middle of the night?

LYDIA

(agitatedly)

I just want to leave things in  
order before I go!

She looks at Bruce, realizing the unintended  
implications of what she's said. He goes to her, puts  
his arms around her.

BRUCE

Come on. Come back to bed.

But she can't. She moves out of his arms, struggles  
with what she has to say.

LYDIA

Bruce -- I --

(a beat)

Oh, Christ --

(then)

I don't think it's a good idea for  
us to see each other any more. I  
mean, what kind of future's in it,  
for either of us? We'd just be  
kidding ourselves --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRUCE

Who's thinking about the future? What about now -- tonight?

LYDIA

And what about tomorrow -- and next week -- and next year? The doctors have told me that if I'm still alive in five years it won't be a miracle, but if I'm not it won't be unexpected.

(a beat)

So, what's the point?

BRUCE

Listen... I haven't told you about my kidneys and my high blood pressure and my clogged arteries from all the crap I eat -- and I'm a man! Hell, I could go like that!

LYDIA

(sharp)

Then you shouldn't be wasting what little time you have left with me!!

She goes into the kitchen, starts peeling the family snapshots off the refrigerator door with the careful precision of an archaeologist preserving the pieces of the past. He follows her, angrily.

BRUCE

You know something, Lydia? You can be a real pain-in-the-ass sometimes -- a first class pain-in-the-ass!

LYDIA

Well, you're no goddamn prize yourself!

He suddenly slams the palm of his' hand on the refrigerator door over the snapshots forcing her to stop.

BRUCE

Would you listen to me, damnit! I'm trying to tell you something.

(after a beat)

I like you, Lydia. More than any woman I've known since Karen.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRUCE (CONT'D)

And I'd like to be with you for  
however long that may be.

She doesn't respond.

BRUCE

(continuing)

Well, did you hear what I said?

She looks at him for a beat, angry -- upset.

LYDIA

What are you -- some kind of a  
Bluebeard? You already buried one  
wife, now you want to bury me?!

He glares at her for a beat.

BRUCE

I don't need this shit.

• He starts to go.

LYDIA

Don't you understand? I've had  
enough changes in my life! I've  
lost enough! Don't ask me to give  
up any more!

BRUCE

I'm not asking you to give up  
anything! Keep it all!

He rips open a packed carton, throws its contents all  
over the room. Dishes CLATTER, utensils fly.

BRUCE

(continuing)

Unpack and move back in if that's  
what you want -- I don't give a  
good goddamn!

Then with a wave, banishing her to her own self-  
inflicted hell, he heads for the bedroom. She stands,  
paralyzed, looking at the remaining photographs  
clinging to the refrigerator door. A few beats, then  
he comes back out, throwing on his clothes. He gives  
her a look, slams out of the cabin.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lydia is in bed, asleep.

## ANGLE ON DANNY

He comes over, stands looking at his mother, then leans over, whispering in her ear:

DANNY

Ly-di-a!

She doesn't wake up.

## ANGLE ON MARK

coming over, standing beside Danny.

MARK

Mom -- ?

## ANGLE ON ELLEN

joining them. She reaches out, touches Lydia. She doesn't move.

## ANGLE ON ALEX

at the foot of the bed. He looks at Lydia, then at his children.

ALEX

We've lost her. She's gone.

## CLOSEUP - LYDIA

opening her eyes with a start. She sits up, frightened, looks around the room, sees that she's alone. She gets up, goes into:

## THE LIVING ROOM

LYDIA

(calling)

Bruce -- ?

Dead silence. He's not there.

CUT TO:

## INT. TAVERN - NIGHT

Knotty-pine, fishing nets, stuffed fish mounted on the wall. Pretty much deserted, except for Bruce, who sits at the bar. He knocks back a belt of scotch.

## ANGLE ON LYDIA

coming in, a trenchcoat thrown over her nightgown. Outside it's started to rain. She sees him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA

What'd you do, walk?

He shrugs.

LYDIA

(continuing)

It's two miles.

BRUCE

I needed the exercise --

(lifting his glass)

And one of these. Want one?

She shakes her head, takes a seat beside him on one of the red leatherette barstools.

LYDIA

Look, I'm sorry --

BRUCE

Skip the apologies. You said what was on your mind -- we both did.

Let's let it go at that.

He glances down the bar at the cocktail waitress, gives her a smile.

BRUCE

(continuing)

Besides, I'm a big boy -- I can take care of myself.

LYDIA

(with a twinge of jealousy)

I'm sure of that.

BRUCE

(turning back to her, pointedly)

I don't intend to stop living. At least, not until I have to.

She looks away. A beat, then softly:

LYDIA

When I said I didn't want to lose anything more --

(a beat)

I meant you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRUCE

(shrugs)

There're no lifetime guarantees.  
I learned that when Karen died.

He polishes off his drink, signals the bartender for another. Then he turns to her.

BRUCE

(continuing)

Ever been to the Holy Land?

She looks at him, confused by the question, then shakes her head.

BRUCE

(continuing)

You should go sometime -- it's an amazing place. Karen always dreamed of going -- visiting Bethlehem, seeing the Old Walled City of Jerusalem -- she'd been planning it for years. Books, maps, travel agents -- took her longer than it took to build the fucking pyramids.

(a beat)

Finally -- finally -- we take the goddamn trip. I have to admit we had a great time -- best time of our lives. The last day we were there, she had only one thing left on her list -- "Buy souvenirs for the boys." I was bushed, so I said, you go. I stayed in the hotel to take a nap.

(a beat, finally)

She never came back. The bus she was riding on -- there was a bomb. Seven people killed.

LYDIA

(shaken)

My God, Bruce --

The bartender refills his glass. He downs it, turns to Lydia:

BRUCE

You're right -- You've lost enough. So have I. So what do you say we just be friends?

EXT. TAVERN - NIGHT

It's still raining. Lydia helps Bruce, somewhat slobbered, to the car.

LYDIA

Watch out for the puddle --

As he steps right in it, she looks across the street and sees:

A SIGN - LYDIA'S POV

announcing the construction of a new mini-mall. In spite of the rain, Lydia crosses the street to:

EXT. BUD'S ICE CREAM PARLOR

Or rather, what used to be Bud's Ice Cream Parlor. It's now an excavation pit with a construction fence around it.

ANGLE ON LYDIA

staring through the fence, into the dark empty hole. It's like somebody dropped a bomb.

LYDIA

Bud's --

As the loss registers on her face:

CUT TO:

INT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

Bruce and Lydia come into the cottage, drenched.

LYDIA

It's freezing in here. Want me to make some coffee?

BRUCE

It'll keep me up all night.

They stand looking at each other for a beat, uncomfortably.

LYDIA

We'd better get some sleep.

BRUCE

Yeah --

(looking around)

Guess I'll crash on the couch.

He flops down. She starts toward the bedroom, stops.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA

You're not going to be very comfortable there.

CLOSE on Bruce. One eye opening.

INT. BEDROOM

They lie side by side in the bed in silence, a "friendly" space between them, listening to the rain. Finally, Lydia moves close to him. He puts his arm around her, she rests her head on his shoulder.

BRUCE

(after a beat)

This isn't going to work.

LYDIA

I know.

BRUCE

I mean, my arm. It's falling asleep.

They try another position. She turns on her side, her back to him, fitting against his body like a spoon.

LYDIA

How's this?

BRUCE

Better. Only now I can't see you.

They try again, facing each other. Third time lucky.

LYDIA

Now -- ?

BRUCE.

Perfect.

(then)

You know, all the commotion about this mattress -- it's lumpy as shit!

LYDIA

Are you going to complain all night?

BRUCE

(looking at her)

Not all night.

He leans in, kisses her on the mouth. As she returns it, passionately; and they start to make love.

DISSOLVE TO:

## A LARGE PATÉ HEART

on a garnished platter. PULL BACK to reveal we are now in:

INT. BRUCE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

A bright, sunny morning in June a couple of months later. A small force of CATERERS, all black women, have taken over the kitchen. GRACE is admiring the heart as Lydia comes in, still in her bathrobe.

GRACE

It's gorgeous!  
(to Lydia)  
Darling, come see!

Lydia smiles, too preoccupied to fully appreciate its beauty. MRS. FERGUSON, a large, stern-faced black woman whose uniform signals supreme command of the troops, goes over to her.

MRS. FERGUSON

My girls can't find your basting tube.

LYDIA

Basting tube -- I'm sorry, I just moved in --

Mrs. Ferguson taps her foot impatiently, as:

BRUCE

stomps into the kitchen in his gym shorts, breathing hard, perspiration pouring off his face. Mrs. Ferguson shrinks away from him, as if his sweating male presence might contaminate the food.

LYDIA

Mrs. Ferguson can't find the basting tube.

He reaches in a drawer, produces one magically.

BRUCE

Voila!

Lydia passes it to Mrs. Ferguson, relieved. Then to Bruce:

LYDIA

You getter get ready -- the guests'll be here soon.

BRUCE

(teasing her)  
I thought I'd wear this.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA

Where're the boys?

BRUCE

Out back --

She goes to the door.

EXT. BACK YARD - DAY

Danny, Ronnie and Jeff are playing a game of Laser Tag around the pool. Jeff is "tagged," drops to the ground just as Lydia calls:

LYDIA

Boys, time to come in!

They stop playing, look at her.

INT. KITCHEN

Lydia turns to Bruce:

LYDIA

They're giving me their "wicked witch" look.

BRUCE

(comforting her)

Take it easy, everything's going to be fine.

LYDIA

(adding breezily)

And if it's not, we can all leave town!

He gives her a kiss, as:

THE THREE BOYS

run in from outside, followed by Abby, Lucy and Fern.

LYDIA

Don't let the dogs in -- !

But it's too late. Their wagging tails and wet, intrusive noses create havoc. The caterers try to shoo them away. One of the women, terrified of dogs, backs up against the counter, sending the paté heart CRASHING to the floor. The dogs make a nose-dive for it. As Grace lets out a shriek:

CUT TO:

## EXT. BRUCE'S BACK YARD - DAY

A lawn party is in progress. Flowers have been placed around the yard, rented tables and chairs with bright umbrellas have been set up by the pool. A combo is playing on the patio.

## ONE OF THE CATERER'S GIRLS

in a clean, white apron, passes among the guests with a tray of hors d'oeuvres. FOLLOW her over to:

## LYDIA AND BRUCE

dressed up now, exchanging hugs and kisses with the Levinsons.

## URSULA

Lydia, Bruce -- we're so happy for you!

## LYDIA

Thanks, Ursie --

## URSULA

And to think it's all our fault!

## TED

(pumping Bruce's arm)

You two work fast -- like Alka-Seltzer!

## URSULA

Have you heard the wonderful news about Greg? He's not "born-again" any more -- he's going into film!

Lydia's smile drops a quarter of an inch as she looks over Ursula's shoulder, through the crowd, and sees:

## LYDIA'S POV - ALEX

making an entrance in a black-striped suit and red tie with a good-looking young blonde, SELENA, on his arm. Following closely behind them is:

## ELLEN

looking like a walking bruise in a pinching purple dress. Her hair appears to have had shock treatment, and topping it all off, like a cherry on a melting blueberry sundae, is an exotic pink flower stuck behind her ear.

## BACK TO LYDIA

reacting to the sight of them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA

Jesus Christ --

FOLLOW Alex and company over to her.

ALEX

Lydia -- !

LYDIA

(warmly)

Alex -- I'm glad you could come.

ALEX

Congratulations!

He surprises her by throwing his arms around her, giving her a giant hug and kiss.

ALEX

(continuing)

This is Selena --

(choosing his words precisely)

Selena, this is my friend, Lydia.

LYDIA

Nice to meet you. And this is Bruce.

(choosing her words just as precisely)

Bruce, this is my ex-husband, Alex.

As the two men shake hands, exchange greetings, Lydia turns to Ellen:

LYDIA

(continuing)

So, you decided to come after all.

ELLEN

(puffing on her cigarette)

Daddy said I should make an appearance.

LYDIA

(with a glance)

You certainly have.

Just then, one of Mrs. Ferguson's girls comes up to Ellen. Offers a tray of hors d'oeuvres.

CATERER'S GIRL

Sweet and sour turkey balls?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLEN

Thanks --

She helps herself not only to one -- but to the entire tray, walks off with it. The girl, left empty-handed, stands looking bewildered. Lydia watches Ellen go. Mrs. Ferguson comes up to her.

MRS. FERGUSON

We're ready to start serving whenever you are, Mrs. Kingman.

LYDIA

Oh, I'm ready, Mrs. Ferguson --  
 (taking a deep breath)  
 -- I'm ready for anything.

CUT TO:

ANGLE ON MARK AND ANDREW

sitting on the diving board in their good suits, drinking champagne.

ELLEN (O.S.)

Well, I have to admit it -- he looks better in a suit.

Mark looks up, sees Ellen standing over them on the diving board, munching off the tray of hors d'oeuvres, dropping the used toothpicks into the pool.

MARK

Who?

ELLEN

Big Bruce.

She plops down next to them.

ELLEN

Some men, like Daddy, look good in anything. Others -- well, you have to dress them up before they look halfway decent.

MARK

Would you knock it off?

ELLEN

It's not my fault -- she's the one who married him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANDREW

(teasing her)

Don't be cruel.

She takes the flower from behind her ear, sticks it behind his. Mark glares across the pool.

MARK

(about Selena)

Who's the bimbo?

ELLEN

She's not a bimbo.

MARK

He had a hell of a nerve bringing her here. Hasn't he caused Mom enough pain?

(a beat)

They living together?

ELLEN

No, it's just the two of us.

MARK

(sarcastic)

Daddy's little dumpling.

ELLEN

Well, I'm not going to live here -- !

And with that, she angrily crams another turkey ball into her mouth.

.CUT TO:

ANGLE ON JOAN LENSKY

in black, of course, making a beeline for Lydia.

JOAN

Lydia -- !

LYDIA

(matching her)

Joan -- !

JOAN

How are you?

LYDIA

Fine.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOAN

I can't believe it. I mean, the last time I saw you I thought for sure it was all over, that you didn't stand a chance.

(almost disappointed)

But here you are -- !

LYDIA

Here I am.

JOAN

Well, I guess it says something about something, doesn't it?

CLOSE ON LYDIA

smiling, victorious.

CUT TO:

ANGLE ON LYDIA AND ALEX

walking together by the pool, nodding to curious friends.

LYDIA

I've a feeling some of our friends figured the next time they'd see me would be at my funeral.

ALEX

You sure fooled them, didn't you?

Just then, Danny runs by, through the guests' legs, chasing Jeff with his laser gun. He suddenly swept off his feet.

ALEX

(continuing)

Hey, Bear -- not so fast!

(hoisting him up)

Don't I get a kiss?

Danny gives him a peck.

ALEX

(continuing)

That's better.

(then)

Where'd you get the gun?

DANNY

Bruce bought it for me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX

(glancing at Lydia)

I'm sure your mother must've had something to say about that.

(setting him back down)

So, how do you like your new house?

DANNY

It's okay -- I have to share a room with Jeff.

ALEX

That's not so bad, is it?

(a beat)

What do you say this Saturday we go over to the Paper Palace? Buy some comic books, get some ice cream --

DANNY

Bruce is taking us to the ballgame.

Alex nods.

JEFF

(calling)

Hey, Dempson!

Danny runs off. Alex watches him, turns to Lydia.

ALEX

Bruce seems like a hell of a nice guy.

LYDIA

He is.

(after a beat, generously)

I'm sorry things didn't work out with Marian.

ALEX

It was inevitable, I guess -- that once we could have each other we were no longer interested.

He smiles, accepting it.

ALEX

(continuing)

But I can tell you this now, as a friend --

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX (CONT'D)

-- that our getting a divorce was  
the best thing that ever happened  
-- to both of us.

(then, confiding  
in her)

You know, I used to feel my life  
was over. We'd done everything  
we'd set out to do -- had our  
family, paid off the house, bought  
everything there was to buy --  
there was nowhere else to go. I  
felt -- dead. But now, Lydia,  
now! I'm reassessing my entire  
value system, my whole life! I'm,  
a brand-new person -- we both  
are! Two brand-new people with  
our own brand-new lives! Isn't  
that incredible?

HOLD on Lydia, smiling, nodding thinking it's incred-  
ible, all right.

LYDIA (V.O.)

I couldn't believe the things he  
was telling me -- !

CUT TO:

PARTY - ANOTHER ANGLE

Bruce is pointing a video camera at a table of guests.  
They look up from their plates, smile and wave.

LYDIA

(to Bruce)

It was like I was talking to some  
stranger who'd wandered into the  
party off the street. All I could  
think was, "You're not Alex. The  
Alex I knew. The father of my  
children -- "

BRUCE

People change.

LYDIA

I guess so.

BRUCE

I mean you.

He points the camera at her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA

The way he confided in me about  
his new life -- to hear him talk,  
I must've been a real bitch!

She suddenly bursts out laughing. Then:

LYDIA

(continuing)

You didn't record that, did you?  
(swatting him)

Bruce!

He spots Ellen nearby, calls:

BRUCE

Hey, Ellen, come over here and  
I'll shoot you and your mother!

ELLEN

That's okay -- you can just shoot  
her.

As she casually walks away:

CUT TO:

THE BUFFET TABLE

set up poolside. Mrs. Ferguson's girls now wear tall  
chef's toques and are carving legs of lamb and spooning  
out cheesy souffles to the line of guests.

ANGLE ON ELLEN

constructing an immense pyramid of food on her plate.  
Lydia sees her, comes over to her, as Ellen shovels a  
forkful of pasta shells into her mouth.

LYDIA

You know, that wasn't very nice of  
you -- walking away like that.

ELLEN

I was hungry.

LYDIA

Bruce just wanted the two of us on  
tape.

ELLEN

(with a shrug)

I didn't feel like it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA

You never minded when Daddy used to take our picture.

ELLEN

Big Bruce isn't Daddy.

A beat, Lydia looks at her, concerned.

LYDIA

How're you two getting along?

ELLEN

Great! We have a terrific time together. Last weekend, we went to see "Giselle" -- it was incredible! Afterwards, we went for a ferryboat ride. Daddy took me in his arms and we danced a pas de deux together, right there on the deck in the moonlight.

LYDIA

You always loved to dance with him.

ELLEN

So did you.

She looks over at Alex and Selena, sitting together at one of the umbrella-covered tables.

ELLEN

(continuing)

Doesn't it upset you?

LYDIA

What?

ELLEN

Seeing how much Daddy and Selena love each other?

LYDIA

Why should it? I'm married to Bruce.

ELLEN

Big Bruce doesn't look like much of a dancer.

LYDIA

I'd appreciate it if you'd stop calling him that.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLEN

That's his name, isn't it?

LYDIA

It's the way you say it -- with such contempt. He's never given you any reason to feel that way, and as long as you're in our house -- whether you choose to live here or not -- I expect you to show him some respect!

ELLEN

Fine, then I'll leave.

She puts her plate down, walks away. Lydia takes off after her, shouting:

LYDIA

Come back here -- ! Don't you walk away from me when I'm talking to you!

(stopping her)

Do you hear me?

ELLEN

We all hear you.

Lydia turns, sees some of the guests watching.

LYDIA

(lowering her voice)

I want an apology.

ELLEN

An apology?

LYDIA

You heard me.

ELLEN

(with a laugh of disbelief)

For what?

LYDIA

For coming to my party looking like something out of a freak show, for one thing -- !

ELLEN

(with a shrug)

I dressed for the occasion.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA

And for trying to humiliate me,  
for another!

ELLEN

(noticing the  
onlookers)

I'd say you didn't need any help  
from me.

Bruce muscles his way through the collecting crowd,  
confronts them, irritated.

BRUCE

What the hell's going on? If you  
two want to mud-wrestle, I'll  
throw some topsoil into the pool!

ELLEN

You'll have to excuse my mother,  
Bruce. She seems to have lost her  
manners -- along with her sanity.

LYDIA

(raising her voice)

I want to know why you're doing  
this!

BRUCE

Jesus Christ, Lydia -- can't you  
wait until the guests leave?

LYDIA

No! I want it all out in the open  
-- now!

Bruce glances around, shrugs.

BRUCE

You got it.

LYDIA

(to Ellen)

Is it because I married Bruce, is  
that why? Well, I'm sorry you  
resent me -- !

ELLEN

If anyone resents somebody around  
here, it's you!

(off Lydia's look)

Because I still have the one thing  
you've lost that you can never get  
back.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA

And what's that?

ELLEN

(zinging it to  
her good)

Daddy's love!

Lydia has stood all she can take. She smacks Ellen in the face. A beat. More hurt that Lydia has struck her than by the actual pain, Ellen bursts into tears.

ANGLE ON ALEX

seeing what's happened, rushing over.

ALEX

(angrily, to Lydia)

What's the matter with you --  
why'd you hit her?

LYDIA

If you heard what she said to me -- !

BRUCE

It's just a little family  
disagreement --

ALEX

If you don't mind, it's my family.

INCLUDE MARK

hearing this, joining in.

MARK

Is that so? Since when?

Ellen throws herself into her father's arms, her mascara running down her cheeks and onto his white shirt.

ELLEN

Daddy -- !

ALEX

It's all right, baby --

LYDIA

(fuming at the sight)

Well, that's just perfect! Coddle  
her, why don't you? She's only  
doing this because she knows  
you'll take her side!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX

I'm not taking anyone's side.

LYDIA

Oh, I can see that!

BRUCE

What do you say we all try and  
keep a lid on this -- ?

LYDIA

(to Bruce)

It's just typical!

MARK

(about Ellen)

She's been a real bitch ever since  
she got here!

ELLEN

Shut up, Mark!

MARK

Pig!

ELLEN

Faggot!

She pounds on him. He gives her a shove. Alex yanks  
him away.

ALEX

(to Mark)

You want to take a swing at  
somebody, swing at me!

MARK

Fine!

LYDIA

(to both of them)

Don't you dare start a fight!

ALEX

Me --

(to Mark)

I'm still your father, whether you  
like it or not!

MARK

You gave up any claims to that  
when you left!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLEN

(to Alex)

I want to leave!

LYDIA

You're not going anywhere! This is my wedding party, and you're going to have to suffer through it along with the rest of us!

She looks at them all for a beat, then pushes past them, walks back to the party.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BACK YARD - DAY

Later. The party is winding down. The guests have thinned out. The afternoon sun is beginning to fade.

AT THE BUFFET TABLE

Mrs. Ferguson's crew is clearing away trays and dishes.

ANDREW (O.S.)

Come on, please -- dance with me!

ON THE PATIO

The combo is playing a rock song. Andrew is pleading with Grace to dance with him.

ANDREW

You'll break my heart if you don't!

GRACE

(shaking her head,  
laughing)

No, no -- !

Some guests and relatives cluster around, coaxing her on.

A GUEST

Go on, Grace!

AN UNCLE

You used to love to dance with the young men!

She finally relents. Then, with amazing energy, she imitates Andrew's long-legged style, dancing to the rock beat. Everyone whoops with laughter, cheers them on.

## ANGLE ON MARK

Even he is drawn in, smiles and claps in spite of himself.

## AT A TABLE BY THE POOL

Alex, Selena and Ellen sit watching the spectacle like tourists at a native dance. Ellen blows her nose into a monogrammed cocktail napkin, her makeup smeared in wet, purple rings under her eyes. After a beat, Alex turns to her.

ALEX

How about a little dance with your dad?

ELLEN

Now -- ?

ALEX

Come on -- one quick spin around the floor.

She shakes her head "no," feeling sorry for herself.

ALEX

(continuing)

You never turned me down before.

A beat, then he takes her by the hand, leads her to the floor.

## ON THE PATIO

Andrew and Grace finish their dance to cheers and applause. Andrew falls to his knees, begs Grace for another turn. But she turns him down, breathless. The combo segues into a slow song. Alex takes Ellen in his arms, holds her tight, protected. They dance together, lost in the music.

## ANGLE ON LYDIA AND BRUCE

saying goodbye to some guests. Lydia turns, watches Alex and Ellen dancing.

LYDIA

(remorseful)

I can't believe I hit her, my own daughter -- in front of everyone. I've never -- never -- raised a hand to my children.

BRUCE

Well, for the first time it was a good, solid wallop.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYDIA

I have to talk to her --

He stops her.

BRUCE

We haven't even had a dance yet.

He takes her hand, leads her to the patio. They begin moving to the music, circling with the other couples. As they pass Alex and Ellen, Lydia offers her daughter a look of reconciliation, but Ellen looks away. The dance continues. Suddenly, inexplicably, the music changes. The combo begins to play "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes," an old song we once heard in an ice cream parlor on an island a long-lost summer ago.

ANGLE ON ALEX

He whispers something to Ellen. Grudgingly, she nods. They stop dancing. He goes over to Lydia and Bruce.

ALEX

(to Bruce)

Do you mind if I dance with the bride?

BRUCE

If it's all right with the bride.

ALEX

(to Lydia)

May I?

She looks at Bruce, who steps aside. She gives Bruce a kiss, moves into Alex's arms.

MARK

who's been talking to Andrew, stops to watch, intently.

DANNY

sneaking icing off the wedding cake with Ronnie and Jeff, stops his finger halfway to his mouth, to look.

ELLEN

even though she's upset, stands transfixed by the sight of her parents dancing together.

ON THE DANCE FLOOR

Alex holds Lydia comfortably. Their bodies are familiar, if no longer intimate.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX

I'm sorry about what happened.

LYDIA

I'm not surprised, knowing this family.

(resigned)  
I just thought we could all still be together.

As they continue to dance, she sees Mark, Danny and Ellen each watching from a different corner. As they pass Mark, she suddenly reaches out to him:

LYDIA

(continuing)

Come on, dance with us.

Before he can object, she pulls him to them. Now the three of them start to sway to the music. Lydia beckons Danny.

LYDIA

(continuing)

Bear -- ?

Getting into the spirit, Grace gives Danny a push as they dance past:

GRACE

Go on, darling -- dance with the family!

In an instant, he's engulfed in a flash of open arms. Now the four of them dance for a beat. Lydia beckons to Ellen. But Ellen shakes her head, obstinately, wanting to feel left out.

BRUCE

(to Ellen)

Go on, dance with them.

ELLEN

(stubbornly  
refusing)

I don't want to!

BRUCE

Go on!

He pushes her, plummeting, into the reeling inner circle of the family. She's swallowed whole.

**INSIDE THE CIRCLE**

A cheek brushes against another cheek, a hand clasps another hand. A stumble. A giggle. Lydia pulls Ellen close to her.

LYDIA

I love you, sweetie.

She kisses her, tenderly. Ellen starts to cry. They hold each other tight, all moving together to the music.

**THE GUESTS WATCHING**

Andrew, Grace, Selena and the others -- all suddenly struck silent.

**ANGLE ON BRUCE**

his eyes reflecting Lydia.

**HOLD ON FAMILY DANCING**

The SOUND OF HEARTBEATS, as if Lydia, Alex, Mark, Ellen and Danny were one living, breathing organism. The circle tightens, uniting them together for one brief moment, forever. Then the MUSIC STOPS. They look at each other in silence, not sure what to do now that the dance is over. But then the MUSIC STARTS UP again. ANOTHER SONG. Life goes on. Couples move onto the floor to dance. Alex puts his arm around Ellen, they join Selena. Danny runs off to play with his new brothers. Andrew comes over to Mark. Lydia goes to Bruce. As she moves into his arms to begin their dance:

FADE OUT.

THE END

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TYPING  
WORD PROCESSING  
&  
DUPLICATING

7925 Santa Monica Blvd.  
West Hollywood, CA 90046  
213/654-5902