

OCEAN BEACH

by
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Based on the novel by
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Fourth Draft
10/19/06
(OB_Revised_30.fdr)

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INT. PETER'S BEDROOM -- SUNSET - THE PRESENT

Peter, a brooding twenty-five-year-old with large, dark glassy eyes, is lying face up on his bed in a crowded but orderly room, its walls lined with filled bookshelves. Dusk light pours in through the window, splashing over him.

PETER (V.O.)

My life takes place in a room. It's a very clean room. Clean as in neat. Clean also as in not dirty. I spend the majority of my time here, and I sleep whenever possible. It's not so much sleeping as napping. Drowsiness or fatigue has little to do with it. I don't have to be tired to nap. In fact I enjoy it more when I'm not.

Shadows creep up and overtake him, enshrouding his body.

INT. HALLWAY/SISTERS' ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Peter gets up and walks down the hallway, standing outside his sister's room hesitantly.

PETER (V.O.)

Straight down my hallway is my sister's room. My father had it completely redone. One morning, the doorbell rang, a crew of five workers came in, and at the end of the day the room bore no evidence of her whatsoever. My mother kept the sheets from her bed. She insisted.

EXT./INT. SISTERS' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Peter carefully opens the door. The room is dark, but clearly that of a college girl. Peter stares at the neatly made bed, then walks over slowly, sits on the edge and gently caresses the smooth surface. He slides his legs up and buries his face in the pillow.

PETER (V.O.)

She was very young when she began to sneak out after the lights were off and crawl into my bed.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT - THE PAST

The SMALL BARE FEET of a young girl slowly tip-toe down the hallway.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT - THE PAST

The shadowy figure of 7 year-old girl stands in the doorway in a long white nightgown. Peter, 8, sits up in bed and squints at her.

PETER
Severine?

SEVERINE
Peter?

Lightning momentarily illuminates her features, tears streaking down her otherwise placid face. Peter pulls away the sheets for her and she walks silently over to the bed.

SEVERINE
(timidly)
I'm scared to sleep alone.

PETER
It's okay. I'm here.

Severine curls up against him in a fetal ball and they both stare out into the dark room.

PETER (V.O.)
Severine. She got the elegant gallic name. I get the nondescript Peter. I don't fit into Peter. Like a swimsuit model named Bertha or Marge; there's nothing inherently ugly about these names, they simply don't fit my image of a bathing beauty, and that's the problem: I'm like a stranger to my own name.

INT. SEVERINE'S ROOM - THE PRESENT

It is no longer Severine's old room, but the remodeled version the Father created -- an empty space. Peter stands in the center taking it all in, then walks out of the room.

Chopin's Nocturne, No. 2 starts to play in the distance.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY - THE PAST

Peter (8) sits at the top of the stairs listening to Severine (7) play piano. She plays a "Nocturnes."

PETER (V.O.)

My sister, on the other hand, has always been everything her name promised. She was fated to be a Severine, even though it is something of an anomaly in a family rife with Vinnies, Frankies and Johnnies. I've always disliked my name, except when it came off her lips.

She finishes and turns to look lovingly at Peter, her flowing hair moving to the last remnants of the music.

INT. PETER'S KITCHEN - EARLY EVENING - THE PAST

The family is around the dinner table in their assigned seats, with classical music playing in the background while they eat. The father is a grave-looking man with a shock of salt-and-pepper hair and thick square glasses. The mother is quiet and pretty, with shoulder-length blonde hair and perfectly applied makeup.

PETER (V.O.)

I still wonder how my parents saw nothing awkward in naming one child Severine and the other Peter. There is no continuity between the two, as if we weren't really brother and sister, or shouldn't have been.

Peter (8) and Severine (7) cut their steak while their father pontificates.

FATHER

The real mystery is trying to determine who is more ridiculous, Christians for thinking the messiah came or the Jews for thinking he's still on the way.

MOTHER

Honey...

The Father waves her off.

FATHER

Religions are deception. Never forget this. A way for man to comfort himself, to make himself believe that there is some goal to all this confusion.

Peter and Severine look to their Mother for comfort. The Mother just looks at them with a loving smile, unwilling to dispute or stop the father's dissertation.

FATHER

It is important to remember that illusions, though comforting, are still illusions.

The Mother gets up from the table and goes into the kitchen.

PETER (V.O.)

My father is the black sheep of his family. The middle child, he has a Ph.D. in modern continental philosophy and is the chairman of the epistemology department of a university, sandwiched between his younger brother, director of the city's sanitation department and the eldest, currently serving the tail end of a five-year sentence for racketeering.

INT. FATHER'S STUDY - THE PAST

Peter 8, and Severine 7, are in the midst of a lesson.

FATHER

So, why can't the albatross fly?

SEVERINE

Ses ailes de géant l'empêchent de marcher.

FATHER

Good.

He looks expressionless at Peter.

PETER

A metaphor for how the poet can't fit in with normal society.

FATHER

(eking out a smile)
Well done.

Peter smiles nervously at his father.

FATHER

All French school children, even the less bright ones, can quote Baudelaire on demand.

PETER

But we're not in France.

FATHER

What do kids here know, heavy metal lyrics? Comic books? Video games, television?

PETER (V.O.)

Our childhood was filled with things of which other children had little concept; Symbolist poetry as a lullaby; Verlaine and Rimbaud instead of Burt and Ernie, Baudelaire in lieu of Mother Goose. We had to have our Baudelaire.

EXT. PETER'S BACKYARD - DAY - THE PAST

Peter and Severine, ages 8 and 7 respectively, are outside in front of a little log cabin playhouse, the side of which Peter is spraying with a garden hose. Severine is sitting in the grass a few yards off, squinting up at him with an open book lying face down beside her.

PETER (V.O.)

But, in our own way we did kid things. We had our space where there was no literature, deconstruction or phenomenology, postmodern aesthetics or logical positivism.

He sees her studying him.

PETER

What?

SEVERINE

(smiling)

Nothing. Just that you look ridiculous. But in a good way.

Peter turns the hose on his sister, who shrieks and turns away, covering her head with her arms. Peter drops the hose, rushes over and jumps down onto the wet grass next to her. They embrace.

SEVERINE

Imagine we could stay here forever.

PETER

Yes, but we'd still be in the backyard.

SEVERINE

I just don't want to practice today. I don't want to go back in.

PETER

But we have to.

SEVERINE

But imagine we didn't. We could move in here and nobody would know.

PETER

Dad and Mom would know.

Peter starts to tickle Severine to cheer her up. She giggles.

EXT. OCEAN BEACH - THE PAST

The Father and Mother are seated on chairs on a sun-dappled beach while a 16 year old Peter sits reading on a blanket, his eyes straying from his book to spy on a 15 year old Severine, inching forward into crashing waves.

PETER (V.O.)

Our parents liked our closeness, and remarks abounded from friends and family with respect to how well we got along. Many thought we must have been twins.

Severine comes out of the water and sits on the blanket next to Peter, who lowers his book and stares at her wet footprints in the sand. Severine leans back, droplets of water glistening over her body as she dries in the sun.

PETER (V.O.)

There were sixteen years of a relatively normal brother/sister relationship, a very close one, yes, but with nothing that would stigmatize it as out of the ordinary or abnormal.

The Mother and Father walk to the concession stand.

Severine drapes her legs across his and they both laugh, turning on their sides to face each other.

SEVERINE

Is forever the same as infinity?

PETER

Hmm.

SEVERINE

What I mean is, when you die is it for infinity or forever?

PETER

Why do you want to know that?

SEVERINE

Because I don't want to be dead forever, but I'd like to know what it's like to die.

PETER

(laughing)

Someday you will. Don't worry.

SEVERINE

But when you die you're dead, so you can't really know what it feels like. It's like sleep; you don't really enjoy sleeping because you're not awake to enjoy it.

(she looks up at him)

I think... if you died... I'd feel like I was dead.

They look into each other's eyes for a long moment, then Severine jumps up and runs off towards the ocean, laughing.

Peter quickly gets up and follows her. They jump in the ocean and start splashing each other.

PETER (V.O.)

So what finally does happen feels like it's supposed to, like there cannot be any other way. She is, after all, another version of me.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - THE PAST

A fall night in October, brightly lit by the moon. Peter is 17. Severine, 16, appears in the doorway, hesitating an instant before entering.

She climbs into the bed quietly, like she doesn't want to wake him, though she knows he isn't asleep. She pushes herself next to him. He remains still. She's crying.

PETER

What's wrong?

SEVERINE

I don't know.

Peter turns and puts his arms around her.

PETER

It's okay. Nobody does.

He brushes her hair back. She puts her cold hand on his chest and slides it slowly down, hesitates, then slips it under the elastic waistband of his pajama bottoms.

Now her clothes are off. She is naked, touching him, kissing him, her legs wrapped around him, and then he is inside her.

After, Peter and Severine lie on the bed, keeping even the smallest hints of movements to a minimum. Breaking the trance, Peter puts a timid hand on his sister's moist belly. She remains still for a moment, then lays her hand over his.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - THE PRESENT

Peter comes out of his reverie. He's lying on his bed. He begins to touch himself over his pants, then slips his hand under.

PETER (V.O.)

For years we made love regularly, we both wanted to, she wanted to. We did it everywhere, sometimes several times a day while my father was in the basement making his contribution to Western philosophy and my mother was out on errands. Funny thing, errands. She seemed to always be out on them.

Peter does not finish. He quickly gets up.

INT. HALLWAY/BATHROOM - THE PRESENT

He rushes into the bathroom, dowses his face with cold water, then dips his entire head under the faucet. He stares at his dripping reflection.

PETER (V.O.)

How could no one have noticed? The door was locked, music on. We were discussing things. Brothers and sisters can hang out together, have a good time, enjoy each other's company. This is a good thing, one that parents lose sleep over when lacking. No parent would think to suspect such an abomination, or even imagine it.

Struggling with himself, Peter drops his pants, sits on the toilet, and stares at himself in the mirror opposite him.

PETER (V.O.)

I am going to be twenty-six soon. My father says: What I wouldn't do to be your age again. He tells me that at twenty-five I have the world on a string. This amuses me. I should tell him it feels like a quickly shredding butcher's string.

INT. PETER'S KITCHEN -- EARLY EVENING - THE PAST

Peter (23), sits at his place at the dinner table, his MOTHER across from him and his FATHER to his right.

PETER (V.O.)

A couple of years ago my parents had suspected homosexual tendencies.

FATHER

Are you going out tonight?

PETER

Tonight?

FATHER

That's what I asked.

PETER

I think I'll stay in. Maybe I'll stop by Don's.

FATHER

That's not really out, is it?

The father exchanges a glance with the mother.

MOTHER

No cute girls around?

Peter looks up from his plate, surprised.

PETER

What do you mean?

MOTHER

Attractive. Smart. Those kinds of girls.

PETER

Oh. Those kinds. No.

FATHER

I find that hard to believe. I see a lot of nice-looking young ladies on campus all the time.

PETER

Where?

FATHER

In my classes, for one. In the hallways, the commons. They exist, is my point. I see them.

PETER

We can never be certain of the existence of anything, not even ourselves. You've been telling me that my whole life. Now you're going back on it?

The Mother puts down her utensils and looks across the table at her son with deep concern.

MOTHER

Peter, we want to ask you - and we're completely fine with it if you're - just that - what we're asking is if -

FATHER

You do like girls Pete?

Peter doesn't look up from his plate.

PETER

Hard to say. "Like" is such a subjective word. I don't really like much of anything. But yes, in that sense, I like girls. In the biblical sense. If that's what you mean.

The Father looks at the Mother, relieved.

INT. PETER'S BATHROOM - NIGHT - THE PRESENT

Peter turns off the light and sits there squinting at his darkened reflection.

INT. DON'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT - THE PAST

Don (23) is Peter's age, slim, with dark eyes and hair. The TV is on, and Don packs the bowl of his bong.

PETER (V.O.)

I had no desire to find a girl, or more precisely, no desire to try. My friend Don has always put it best. I've known Don most of my life. I actually can't remember not knowing him. If I had a brother, he'd definitely be like Don, a loquacious suburban sage with just enough knowledge on most subjects to be able to deliver a convincing argument.

PETER

My father asked me if I like girls tonight.

DON

Subjective word, like.

PETER

That's what I said. I was a little surprised at the question. He doesn't usually talk about things like that.

DON

What, philosophers don't like girls? They have penises, don't they?

He hands the packed bowl to Erica, his girlfriend, also in her early twenties, with light brown hair and freckles. She takes it, staring at him expectantly.

DON

What?

ERICA

How am I supposed to light this, ESP?

He takes a Zippo from his pocket and hands it to her. She lights the bowl. They watch her smoke.

PETER

I think he thinks if I had a girlfriend
my whole outlook would change.

DON

It might.

PETER

He thinks it will radically change my
life for the better, like all the
problems of the world would be solved
if I got laid.

Don retakes the bowl, lights it, smokes, then hands it back
to Erica.

PETER

I'm just not a great ladies' man.

Don nods in acknowledgement.

DON

You can't meet girls in your room, man.
They're not just gonna come knocking on
your door.

Peter stares down pensively at the carpet.

Erica climbs onto the bed and lies face down on the pillow.
Don leans over and pats Peter on the shoulder

DON

Doesn't matter, man. If you're talking
about love, love is a myth. Nature's
ruse to get you to reproduce, to trick
you into furthering the species. Now
heroin addicts...

(getting more animated)

... they're the ones that beat the
system, because junk replaces the urge
to fuck. It's the only antidote to the
sex drive.

PETER

So you think I should become a junkie?

DON

Not necessarily.

Don pauses and peaks at Erica. She's tucked away in a pot-
induced slumber.

DON

Look, you can't have love in a post-Darwinian world, or rather, you can't take it seriously. If you fully grasp that you're nothing but nature's pawn, a fucking motherfucking dupe, then you can keep love... as a euphemism.

Peter raises an eyebrow.

DON

If it didn't feel good you wouldn't do it, would you?

Peter stares at him speechless.

DON

I'm asking you. It wasn't a rhetorical question.

PETER

Oh. No. I guess I wouldn't.

DON

Of course you wouldn't. If sex didn't offer such intense pleasure that the lack of it is equivalent to pain, there'd be no babies. The race would end. Nature would lose, and she can't lose. It's a vast, perfectly engineered scheme. We get a few seconds of intense pleasure, she gets more human beings. Once you've made a kid your job is finished, my friend. You're no longer needed.

PETER

But knowing this doesn't change things. You can't just stop wanting to fuck.

DON

True, but it does help put things in perspective.

Erica groans in her sleep. They both turn to look at her.

DON

This weed is shit tonight, just to let you know.

PETER

I'm not the one smoking it.

DON

Understood. But just to let you know.

EXT. PETER'S BATHROOM - NIGHT - THE PRESENT

Peter's shadow fills his bathroom window as he stares out at the street. We crane up to reveal an entire neighborhood of cookie cutter houses along tree lined streets.

PETER (V.O.)

It was in my second year of grad school, Severine's first. We went to the same school because my father is a tenured professor there. Which means it was free.

INT. COLLEGE CLASSROOM -- DAY / EARLY SEMESTER

Peter and Severine are seated next to each other, a few rows from the back of the classroom. Spencer comes in, a tall, slim 24-year-old with slicked-back dark hair, light eyes and clear pale skin. He's wearing small round gold-rimmed glasses, a lightweight black sweater and gray slacks.

PETER (V.O.)

It was a year ago, early October, that he decided to occupy the empty seat next to my sister.

Spencer takes a seat in the row in front of them, turns and glances at Severine before sitting, flashing a smile.

PETER (V.O.)

His success was due in part to his avoidance of the tactic that had brought so many others to ruin: trying to get to my sister through me.

A few seconds later, Spencer turns around again to Severine.

SPENCER

I've been dying to ask you something.

SEVERINE

Ask then. We can't have you die, can we?

SPENCER

You have an Italian last name and a French first name. These things interest me. Which one is it?

SEVERINE
(amused)
Italian by blood. French by books.

SPENCER
I see.

SEVERINE
Disappointed?

SPENCER
Pas du tout.

Severine smiles again. Spencer turns around as the teacher begins to speak.

TEACHER
Today we're going to pick up where we left off in "Being and Time"...

INT. COLLEGE CLASSROOM -- LATER

The students pack their books and prepare to leave. Peter hurriedly puts his belongings into a black leather briefcase, watching Spencer out of the corner of his eye. But Spencer doesn't move. To Peter's horror, it is Severine who engages Spencer.

SEVERINE
Where did you learn French?

SPENCER
I'm Quebecois.

SEVERINE
C'est beau le Quebec.

SPENCER
(smiling)
Yes. Yes it is. Is your father Professor Nilletti?

SEVERINE
Yes. That's Dad.

SPENCER
I took his semiotics course last semester.

SEVERINE
(laughing)
We've been taking that all our lives.

SPENCER

It was a good course. Your father's a demanding teacher but it was worthwhile. I'm not just saying that.

PETER

(sarcastically)

You think? You're not just saying that?

Spencer looks at him but doesn't answer.

SPENCER

I guess it's not bad living with the department chair. At home mentor?

SEVERINE

(jocosely)

You can't imagine.

EXT. COLLEGE PARKING LOT -- DAY - CONTINUOUS

The three walk out of the building and toward the parking lot, Spencer and Severine chatting, laughing, and smiling, Peter tagging along in frustrated silence.

SPENCER

Do you live on campus?

SEVERINE

No, home, with the philosophy professor. And you?

SPENCER

I have a place in Brooklyn. The Heights. Right by the bridge. Great view of the city. You should come by some time, get off the Island.

PETER

Technically, Brooklyn is part of the Island, geographically speaking of course.

There is a brief awkward space in the conversation.

SEVERINE

Sure. Sounds nice, doesn't it, Peter?

PETER

Yes. Nice.

Spencer walks off towards his car.

SPENCER

Well, there's my car. Are you far? I could give you a ride.

PETER

(before Severine can
accept the offer)

No, we're parked right over there.

SEVERINE

But, thanks.

SPENCER

Anytime.

SEVERINE

See you Thursday then.

SPENCER

A jeudi.

(turning to Peter)

Bye - uh - Peter, right?

Peter looks at him without responding.

SEVERINE

Yes, Peter, my brother.

SPENCER

Right. See you in class.

Spencer walks off towards his car, waving.

Peter and Severine walk in silence when a car pulls up slowly next to them. Spencer rolls down the window.

SPENCER

Listen, I paint. I'm a painter. I usually don't tell people this because I've never sold anything, and I'm really kind of embarrassed asking but-- I've actually wanted to ask you since the first time I saw you-- feel free to say no, there's no obligation of course, and I don't want you to feel uncomfortable or anything...

PETER

Painter? Like what? Houses?
Interiors?

They are not amused.

SPENCER

I'd really like it if you'd model for me. For a painting, I mean.

Severine blushes, obviously flattered. Usually so sure and unfaltering in her speech, she now staggers her response.

SEVERINE

Yes, sure, I mean, I've never done it before, I don't know how good a model I'd make. I'm not that good at sitting still and all but -

INT. PETER'S BATHROOM -- NIGHT -- THE PRESENT

Peter looks back from the window to his reflection in the mirror, smoothing his still damp hair.

PETER (V.O.)

Spencer was an artist, on top of everything. A Painter. Classically trained. Art School and everything. She was an artist and I was not an artist. I tried to live up to the expectation, but in the end, I just didn't know what I wanted to be. Certainly not an artist. In retrospect, this did grease the hinge for Spencer.

INT. CAR/BROOKLYN STREETS -- NIGHT - THE PAST

Peter is driving. Severine is sitting in the passenger seat, staring glumly ahead.

SEVERINE

I only told you not to come because I thought you'd be bored.

PETER

"Against boredom, even the Gods fight in vain."

SEVERINE

You're worse than Dad. Throwing around quotes like you're enlightening the world.

PETER

We don't really know this guy outside of a closed classroom environment. I mean, it would be almost reckless for you to go alone.

EXT. BROOKLYN BROWNSTONE - NIGHT - THE PAST

They pull up in front of a picturesque brownstone. Peter checks the address, disappointed that the building is so impressive. They get out and walk up the few steps to the door, seek out Spencer's buzzer and ring it.

A smiling Spencer comes to the door in khaki pants and a crisp white button down shirt. He opens the door.

SPENCER

Hi.

SEVERINE

(shyly)

Hi.

INT. SPENCERS STUDIO APARTMENT -- CONTINUOUS

Spencer's one-room studio has a certain antiseptic quality about it. There are a few of his own paintings and drawings in the corner, a Chagall reproduction and Schiele's portrait of his sister hanging on the clean white walls. Spencer takes off Severine's coat for her, revealing a long black crêpe dress with thin spaghetti straps. Spencer stands there looking at her in polite awe. Peter notices this, takes off his coat and thrusts it at him.

PETER

Would you take this? It's a little hot in here.

SPENCER

(snapping out of it)

Oh. Sure.

Spencer puts both coats on hangers in the closet, then walks to the kitchen.

SPENCER (O.S.)

Make yourselves comfortable. I'll get some drinks. You like red?

PETER

The color?

Severine glares at him. Spencer comes in balancing three wine glasses and an open bottle.

SPENCER

Sorry the place is so small. You know,
New York real estate is crazy.

PETER

You get what you pay for.

SEVERINE

It's very cozy.

Spencer pours the wine and raises his glass in the air.

SPENCER

To new friendships.

Severine raises her glass. Peter takes a sip. There are a few moments of awkwardness.

SPENCER

Okay. Why don't we get started? First
off, what music do you prefer?

SEVERINE

Whatever you usually paint with.

PETER

(draining his first glass)
Got any gangster rap? Death metal?

Spencer ignores him and pulls out a Miles Davis CD, holding it up to Severine. She nods, watching Peter refill his glass and move to a plush black velvet recliner in the corner. Spencer puts on the disc, then leads Severine to a leather cushioned off-white couch against the wall.

SPENCER

Okay. Just be comfortable.

Severine laughs, unsure, trying out different positions.

SEVERINE

Like this?

SPENCER

That's fine.

SEVERINE

I don't look stupid?

SPENCER
You look wonderful.

SEVERINE
Merci, Monsieur.

SPENCER
(bowing affectedly)
Je vous en prie, Mademoiselle.

Peter gulps his wine and looks on with growing agitation.

Spencer walks slowly backwards toward his canvas, which is on a tripod in the center of the room, studying his model.

SPENCER
Help yourself to more wine, Pete.
(as he continues to
examine her)
Or if you're hungry there are some
snacks in the closet.

Peter drains his second glass.

PETER
Since you're offering, maybe I will
have one more glass. Not terrible,
this wine.

He reaches over and pours himself another.

Severine settles into position, Spencer takes in the angles and installs himself behind the canvas. The atmosphere is charged.

PETER
You're sure that's the right shirt to
be wearing, Spence? Some stains don't
come out in the wash.

Spencer ignores Peter and instructs her to move slightly by mimicking his moves. Watching Spencer, Peter fills his glass again, emptying the bottle until his eyes narrow. He hears Spencer's voice pulling him from his drunkenness.

SPENCER (O.S.)
You all right Pete? Not too bored I
hope?

PETER
(trying to disguise his
grogginess)
Fine. Good. No, I'm good.

Spencer and Severine chuckle. Peter's eyes once again droop and he eventually blacks out.

INT. SPENCER'S STUDIO APARTMENT -- LATER

When Peter awakens, Severine is facing sideways with both legs curled up to her chest. She is naked.

Spencer walks toward her, gently lifting her chin off her knee. Peter's eyes widen with rage. The wine glass falls from his hand and shatters as he rushes toward Spencer. And there, about a foot in front of his target, he freezes.

SPENCER

(gesturing toward the
canvas)

So what do you think?

Peter looks at the couch where his sister sits naked, and swings wildly at Spencer, without thinking, without looking, hitting him squarely in the jaw and sending him down.

Before he can continue his assault, Severine, naked, steps in front of him, putting her hand on his chest.

SEVERINE

(softly)

Don't.

SPENCER

(yelling)

I was only changing the angle of her head, that's all!

PETER

She's naked.

SPENCER

You're fucking crazy!

Spencer moves to the couch and sits down. Peter walks over to the chair where his sister's dress is and picks it up, pushing it into her hands.

PETER

For Christ's sake cover yourself.

Severine slips on the dress, then moves to the couch and sits.

PETER

I'll be outside.

EXT. SPENCER'S APARTMENT BUILDING -- NIGHT

Peter sits on the porch steps.

PETER (V.O.)

The truth is I didn't dislike him. I'm fairly certain that I hated him,, but I really didn't dislike him, as much as I would give up everything to go back and circumnavigate his entrance into our lives.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - ANOTHER NIGHT - THE PAST

Peter lies on his bed in the dark. Severine comes into his room, beautifully dressed and made-up. She sits next to him and puts her hand on his head.

PETER

What's that scent?

SEVERINE

Perfume.

PETER

I've never smelled it before.

SEVERINE

I've never worn it before.

PETER

Why start now?

SEVERINE

Stop being ridiculous. You're making too much of this. I'm not going to run away with him.

PETER

Go out with friends, go out with whoever, I don't care, just not him.

SEVERINE

He is whoever.

PETER

Then don't go. We'll tell Dad to say you're sick, that you've got one of your migraines that take days to go away. I'll go down and tell him myself.

SEVERINE

Peter.

PETER

You don't really like him?

SEVERINE

We just met.

(she pauses reflectively)

I don't really like him.

The doorbell is followed by the scuff of the father's slippered feet approaching the front door, the unmistakable timbre of Spencer's voice floating up from the foyer.

Severine looks off through the doorway, listening.

FATHER (O.S.)

Hello, Spencer.

SPENCER (O.S.)

Hello, sir. How are you?

FATHER (O.S.)

Fine. Come in.

SEVERINE

(imploring)

You have to let me do this.

PETER

I have to let you?

She bends slowly, her hair cascading onto his face, and presses her lips to his forehead, then walks out of the room without looking back.

PETER (V.O.)

I suddenly came to realize, in a flash of intuition, that any person could kill another if the right combination of circumstances presents itself. Everybody has the capacity, even if this potential is never realized.

INT. FATHER'S STUDY - ANOTHER NIGHT - THE PAST

Peter (23) approaches the door to his father's study. He knocks lightly, pushing the door open and stepping inside, his bespectacled father at his desk, crouched over a manuscript.

PETER
Grading papers?

FATHER
(without looking up)
No.

PETER
That thing on Derrida?

The father nods affirmatively.

PETER
Severine's still not home.

No response.

PETER
She's been staying out later and later.

His father stops writing only to lay the pencil across his lips and study what he has just written.

PETER
You've noticed this, haven't you?

FATHER
I have.

PETER
And you don't find it strange,
deserving of attention?

His father peers up professorially from over his glasses.

FATHER
Actually, I think it's about time she
found someone nice.

PETER
Ah. Nice. You think he's nice then?
And because you think he's nice it's
all right that she stays out until all
hours?

The father removes his glasses, slipping the stem into his mouth and regarding Peter contemplatively.

PETER
What exactly do you mean by nice?

The father lays his glasses on the desk and leans back.

FATHER

You're right. You must know him better than I do. Why don't you tell me what qualities you've seen in him that would make him not nice?

PETER

You haven't noticed it then?

FATHER

(sarcastically)

We all have our faults. She'll be home soon.

He leans forward and replaces his glasses, directing his eyes back down to his desk.

PETER (V.O.)

I couldn't tell him that it was exactly because I failed to find anything particularly not nice about Spencer that the situation was so serious.

Peter turns abruptly and leaves.

EXT. PORCH - THE SAME NIGHT - THE PAST

Peter is sitting on the porch outside the front door, gazing out at the street. It's a quiet and still November night.

A black SUV pulls into the driveway.

Peter's body stiffens as he watches Spencer get out and gallantly open the passenger side door for Severine. She gets out and Spencer kisses her chastely on the cheek and waits until she reaches the front door before pulling away.

Peter reaches up and grabs her hand.

PETER

Sit.

SEVERINE

I'm tired, Peter.

PETER

(trying to hide his anger)

You look nice.

Severine sits down resignedly on the porch next to him.

PETER

Does Spencer find it strange that your brother waits up for you?

SEVERINE

He never mentioned it.

PETER

Maybe he thinks I enjoy this.

SEVERINE

Maybe he doesn't even notice that you're there, or doesn't even care?

PETER

Your lipstick is smeared.

Severine adjusts the stole around her neck and huffs.

SEVERINE

I'd like it if you didn't wait up for me anymore, or at least that you didn't wait outside.

PETER

Why? Does it bother you?

SEVERINE

Yes. It bothers me to come home and see you sitting outside like an expectant father. Yes.

PETER

Well, at least it does that then.

They sit in silence until Severine gets up slowly and goes inside, letting the screen door swing shut behind her.

INT. PETER'S BATHROOM - NIGHT - THE PRESENT

Peter looks in the medicine cabinet and takes out one of Severine's combs. He examines it closely.

PETER (V.O.)

I think I was not unhappy once.

EXT. THE PORCH - AN AUGUST NIGHT - THE PAST

It's a humid August night. Peter (16) looks down at Severine's head in his lap, her eyes looking up past him. He is running the same comb through her hair.

SEVERINE

The holes in the leaves. You can see the stars through them.

PETER

You can thank the gypsy moths for that.

SEVERINE

My tea's probably getting cold.

PETER

My cognac's probably getting warm.

Severine closes her eyes and smiles as he takes a tiny sip.

SEVERINE

You know you're fooling no one. Even you can't convince yourself that you like drinking that stuff.

PETER

Of course I like it. What makes you think I don't like it?

SEVERINE

Just that every time you drink it that bitter-alcohol frown creeps onto your face.

PETER

Why would I drink something I don't like?

SEVERINE

To look more like Sartre?

PETER

Did he drink Cognac?

SEVERINE

He must have.

PETER

Why?

SEVERINE

Because he was French, if nothing else.

PETER

Ah. Of course. Well, in any case, it's an acquired taste.

SEVERINE
Go ahead, take a sip.

PETER
No.

SEVERINE
I'll do whatever you want if you just
take one sip, one little sip.

She illustrates with her thumb and forefinger. Peter raises an eyebrow, then picks up the tumbler, shakes the ice around a bit and drinks. His features contort slightly as he tries in vain to suppress his distaste.

SEVERINE
(pointing up at his face)
There! There it is, again. You're
frowning. You hate it. Admit it.

PETER
Yes, maybe. But I enjoy hating it.
And besides, I'm only drinking this
because absinthe is prohibited.
Absinthe, of course, would be my first
choice.

SEVERINE
(mocking)
Mais bien sur...

They kiss. A long passionate kiss.

INT. PETER'S BATHROOM - NIGHT - THE PRESENT.

Peter turns the comb over, carefully unwinding a blond strand from its bristles and wrapping it around his finger. He quickly puts the comb away in the cabinet, slamming the door.

EXT. COLLEGE CAMPUS GREAT LAWN - DAY - THE PAST

It's a bright sunny day and the lawn is filled with students sitting in cross-legged circles, throwing a Frisbee or kicking around a hackey sack.

Peter is sitting alone on the grass. Spencer approaches from behind. Peter jumps when Spencer taps him on the shoulder.

SPENCER
Mind if I sit?

He doesn't wait for an answer. Peter is visibly uneasy.

SPENCER
(noticing the book)
Schopenhauer.

PETER
(lying the book face down)
You like Schopenhauer?

SPENCER
Not my favorite.

PETER
Who is?

SPENCER
I don't like picking favorites.

PETER
Everybody has favorites. It shouldn't be hard to choose because favoritism is a naturally occurring phenomenon, nothing embarrassing at all.

SPENCER
I didn't say I was embarrassed. I can't just single out a philosopher like a favorite flavor of ice-cream.

PETER
Well, whom would you pick if you absolutely had to, if everything depended on your picking a favorite?

SPENCER
Look, I know you and Severine are close. I know it must be kind of hard to think about your little sister being with guys.

PETER
That doesn't answer the question.

SPENCER
Not everybody makes that connection. You're lucky.

PETER
Lucky? You have a sister, Spencer?

SPENCER
I'm an only child.

PETER

How would you know, then, that it's hard to see my little sister with a guy? Being sister-less yourself.

SPENCER

I'm just trying to be understanding. It's obvious that you're protective. All this is good, but you have to understand that it's normal for your sister to go out with guys.

PETER

From this I can infer that you would think it abnormal for her not to go out with guys.

SPENCER

Abnormal's a little strong. But yes.

PETER

How about Hegel? You like Hegel?

Now Spencer looks annoyed, which pleases Peter.

PETER

As a philosopher, not as a person.

SPENCER

I don't dislike him.

PETER

Not one of your favorites then?

SPENCER

Look. I came to tell you that I like your sister, Peter. This isn't some courting procedure, I didn't come here to ask your permission, because I'm going to see her either way.

PETER

There's no law against seeing people. I see people all the time, every day. I'm seeing you now.

SPENCER

I think you're a good guy, despite this wise-ass intellectual façade, and because I think you're a good guy I wanted to tell you that I like your sister. That's all.

PETER

(feigning reflection)

Hmm. In describing me as good, do you mean this in the Greek sense of the word? Because then I would take it as a true compliment.

Spencer shakes his head and semi-smiles.

SPENCER

I really hoped you'd be all right with it.

(he rises)

You know what Schopenhauer says about reading, too much is polluting. You lose the ability to think for yourself. You forget how to live.

PETER

Schopenhauer didn't have much respect for life anyway. He saw life as something of a burden, a brief, annoying interlude between the peacefulness of pre-birth and after-death nonexistence.

SPENCER

Too bad. Because nobody reads Schopenhauer much anymore.

Spencer turns to leave, lifting a hand up behind him as he walks.

PETER

But at least he's dead.

Peter watches Spencer walk into the main academic hall, where he is greeted by a smiling Severine. They kiss.

INT. PETER'S ROOM - NIGHT - THE PRESENT

Peter is lying on the bed, staring at the ceiling. A knock on the door. Peter's mother enters the room. She sits on the edge of the bed and puts on a strained smile.

MOTHER

You have to get out of this room. It's like a tomb in here. No fresh air, no sunlight. These things have an effect.

She starts to cry a little, then quickly checks herself.

MOTHER

Get up and do something, anything, but don't just lie there. You can't keep lying here all day.

PETER

I read a little before.

She looks down, rubs her cuticle.

MOTHER

I can't lose you Peter. Not after all that's happened. You have to get out and do something. For me.

PETER

I prefer not doing. In fact, it's the only thing I truly enjoy, doing nothing.

She wants to say something, but can't find the words.

PETER

(placating)

I'm getting out, Mom. I might go to Don's later.

MOTHER

Good. How is Don these days?

PETER

He's... Don.

MOTHER

Good.

She averts her gaze, scans the room and laughs.

MOTHER

This room hasn't changed much since you were a child.

PETER

I didn't go through many phases. Most kids do, I think.

MOTHER

I sometimes wish you would have. Gone through phases, I mean. Both of you. You were such ideal children. Everyone always said how blessed we were to have such well-behaved, smart, healthy...

PETER

Healthy, as in no dreaded childhood
maladies, or healthy as in...

MOTHER

Enough, Peter. You know what I meant.

His mother remains at the foot of the bed, studying the room.

INT. DON'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT - THE PAST

Peter (24) and Don are sitting on the floor of Don's room
playing video hockey on a large screen TV.

PETER (V.O.)

I came close to telling Don. I wanted
to. I did tell him about Spencer,
though, secretly hoping he'd suggest a
quiet way of rubbing the painter out of
the painting.

DON

A painter? Like a housepainter?

PETER

No. Artist painter.

DON

They still exist? What's his name?

PETER

Spencer. She's out with him now, as a
matter of fact.

DON

Spencer. Now that's a painter's name.
So what, does he wear a beret?

PETER

I haven't seen him in one. But he does
speak French. He's not bad. Not
incredibly original, but not bad. He
says he's got to find his own style,
his own painterly voice.

DON

(cringing)

He actually said that? His own
painterly voice?

PETER

Those were his words.

DON

See, you get these guys trying to find their painterly voices and it just... it just fucking kills me. This urge to create.

PETER

He's not bad looking, though. I mean, I guess I can see why she likes him. It's been a while now. They see each other pretty frequently, but I definitely don't see it lasting though.

DON

What I'm saying is, they call themselves rebels, these artists, but the real rebel is the anti-artist, the one who consciously does nothing, except the things you absolutely have to in order to exist: eating, pissing, shitting. The true rebel would, above all, not create.

PETER

I don't really think it'll last, but she's with him all the time.

DON

I think we should go out.

PETER

We never go out.

DON

I go out. You don't go out.
(he holds up both
forefingers as though
they were opposite poles)
It's girls or heroin. Pussy or Junk.

PETER

You seem to have forgotten suicide.

DON

I didn't forget it. But it is Friday night.

PETER

And Friday nights hold the distinction of the highest rate of suicides.

DON

Like I said, girls or junk.

PETER

I don't think I want to go out.

DON

I didn't think you would.

The game ends and Don collects his bong and lights it, customarily extending it to Peter, who hesitates and finally accepts.

INT. LIVING ROOM/HALLWAY - LATER

Peter is waiting on the couch flipping channels as Severine comes home. She smiles as she passes the room.

Peter waits a moment, then turns off the Television.

INT. PETER'S HOUSE/SEVERINE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

He walks upstairs and opens Severine's door. Severine is on her bed, reading. She stops briefly to look at him over the book. He enters and lies in bed next to her.

SEVERINE

You've been smoking

PETER

You know I don't smoke.

Severine lays the book face-up on her stomach and looks at the wall across the room.

SEVERINE

Why did you come in?

PETER

What?

SEVERINE

It's not a trick question.
(businesslike)

Do you want me to take care of you?

Peter's eyes open but he doesn't look at her.

SEVERINE

Is that why you came in?

She reaches over and puts her hands on his sex and begins to stroke it mechanically over his pants.

PETER

Yes. That's why I came in.

She unzips his fly and reaches inside, continuing with her hand for a while before finishing with her mouth.

Severine calmly returns to her reading. Finally, she puts the book on the night table.

SEVERINE

I'm going to sleep.

PETER

This is what it's come to.

SEVERINE

I'm tired. That's what people do when they're tired. They sleep.

Peter huffs deeply.

PETER

So sleep.

Severine switches off the lamp.

SEVERINE

You knew it had to end, didn't you?

Peter winces.

SEVERINE

You'd rather we were weaned off it like addicts, with occasional doses of methadone to make it less painful.

PETER

That's how you see this, as an addiction?

SEVERINE

What did you think? Kids? A house with a two-car garage? Holiday dinners? PTA? Really. Where did you think it would end?

PETER

I think I don't want to think anymore. That's what I think.

Silence.

PETER

So why did you crawl into bed with me then, when we were little? Why start something if you know it has to end?

SEVERINE

Because everything ends. And it's not because of Spencer. I like him, but he's not the reason.

PETER

What is the reason?

SEVERINE

There's no reason. There never is. What else have we learned if not that? What do you want to hear, that I've fallen in love with Spencer? Would that make it easier?

Peter's eyes shut and he lies as still as possible.

PETER

Have you?

SEVERINE

I think you should find a girl.

PETER

Have you?

She puts her hand on his chest.

SEVERINE

No.

SEVERINE

I think you should find a girl.

PETER

I heard you the first time.

He moves her hand away.

INT. PETER'S ROOM - NIGHT - THE PRESENT

The Mother is still sitting on the bed, studying the room. She puts her hand on Peter's leg, regarding him expectantly.

MOTHER

Whatever happened, whoever is responsible, the past is the past.

(MORE)

MOTHER (cont'd)
 Apologies won't change anything. But
 you can have a future, we can. You
 think she'd want you to sit here
 rotting?

PETER
 What? You want me to cry with you? Hug
 you and breakdown and say I miss
 Severine and then we can console each
 other. We could be there for each
 other, like a family should be?

Peter stares at her, then turns away. The Mother gets up and
 goes to the door.

MOTHER
 Do you want it closed?

PETER
 Please.

She leaves and closes the door softly behind her.

PETER (V.O.)
 My mother cries often, which I suppose
 is to be expected. When she sees that
 someone has noticed she turns away and
 wipes her face and smiles as if to say,
 "No, I haven't been crying. I'm fine,
 really, see."

EXT. SUBURBAN HIGHWAY & CITY STREETS -- NIGHT - THE PAST

Peter is driving. An empty suburban highway turns into dark
 city streets.

PETER (V.O.)
 Pat is my eldest cousin, the son of my
 imprisoned uncle. I don't have much
 contact with him, as we have little in
 common aside from the fact that our
 fathers are brothers, which is all they
 have in common themselves. But, since
 Pat had gone into his father's
 profession, there was no doubt that he
 was the one to go to.

EXT. BAY RIDGE -- A LITTLE LATER

Peter parks on a side street and knocks on the ground floor
 door of a brownstone. A dark-haired, middle-aged man opens
 it.

MAN

Yeah?

PETER

I'm here to see Pat.

MAN

(suspiciously)

Who are you?

PETER

His cousin.

MAN

(yelling in)

Some kid here says he's your cousin.

PAT (O.S.)

Yeah. Let him in.

The man steps aside and lets Peter in.

INT. PRIVATE CLUB - CONTINUOUS

Peter enters. The club is a narrow storefront that seems to extend indefinitely. The bar is empty but there are six or seven men sitting around the table with drinks in their hands. Pat comes over to Peter and embraces him, smiling warmly; a stocky man who looks older than his 34 years.

PAT

Hey kid. How are ya?

PETER

Hi Pat.

PAT

Guys, this is my little cousin from Long Island, the professor's kid, the bookworm.

Peter smiles shyly at the room.

PAT

What'd'ya drinking?

(before an answer)

Freddie, get him a glass of wine.

Pat gives Peter the wine and then ushers him through a door revealing a small room with a round table and a single chandelier hanging from the ceiling. They sit down.

PAT

So how's your parents, good?

PETER

Fine. Everybody's fine.

PAT

And Sevie, what's she up to these days?

PETER

Same thing. School. You know, school.

He looks at Peter, nodding like he expects more.

PETER

Classes.

PAT

Right, right.

PETER

And you?

PAT

People still breaking my balls to no end, but that's the business.

PETER

I'm glad I came down, Pat. I've always wanted to see the club.

He takes a sweeping look around the room; besides the table and its four chairs there is nothing.

PAT

Seeing you down here's kind of like seeing a flower in the desert. So, what's on your mind?

PETER

I need a gun.

PAT

A gun?

PETER

I'm going hunting with some friends. I bought a rifle from the sporting goods store, a 12 gauge, real nice, but I need a handgun. I don't know, they're telling me that I need one. Close quarters they say.

PAT
(reclining in the leather
chair)
Hunting?

PETER
Yeah.

PAT
Hunting where?

PETER
Upstate.

PAT
Where upstate? It's a big state.

PETER
I don't know. North. Upstate.

PAT
And he doesn't know about this, your
father?

PETER
I don't think he'd go for the idea.
The other guys just asked their
fathers, but you know mine.

PAT
(snickers)
Yeah. I do. And you figured I would
give you this thing, just like that?

They sit motionless and silent for a few seconds.

PAT
You got girl problems?

PETER
No.

PAT
You seem like you got problems, and at
your age it's usually about some broad.

PETER
I don't have girl problems, Pat.

PAT
A young guy, not-bad-looking. You
should be screwing a different one
every week, like there's no tomorrow.
(MORE)

PAT (cont'd)
Ming, when I was your age...
(he stops abruptly)
You ain't a fag, are you?

PETER
No. I'm going hunting. If you can't
help me it's no big deal.

PAT
I didn't say that. I just don't like
bullshit.

Pat's countenance suddenly changes. He pauses, rises slowly,
and walks toward the front rooms.

PAT
(sternly)
Stay here.

Peter taps the table nervously. Pat comes back quickly and
sits down again.

PAT
Hunting, huh?

PETER
I was invited. It's something to do.

Pat leans forward, puts his hand inside his sports jacket,
withdraws a pistol, and slides it toward Peter.

PAT
It's not easy to whack somebody Pete.
And I don't think it's you.

PETER
I've never even hit anyone.

PAT
Pick it up.

PETER
I'll probably have enough trouble -

PAT
(coldly)
Pick up the gun.

Peter picks it up.

PAT

Now point it at me, and don't ask why.
 (tapping the center of his
 forehead)
 Right here.

Slowly, Peter raises the gun and points it straight at his cousin. Pat just sits there, as if the gun weren't there.

PAT

Good. Put it down.

Trembling, Peter places the gun on the table.

PAT

Nice looking piece, ain't it?

Peter stares at the gun and nods.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM -- THE NEXT NIGHT - THE PAST

Peter is sitting on his bed examining the gun.

There is a knock at the door. Peter quickly gets to his feet and buries the gun under some shirts in a dresser drawer.

PETER

What?

Severine comes in, dressed as though she were coming back from a night out. They both sit on the bed.

SEVERINE

We're going to a play on Friday.

PETER

We?

SEVERINE

Some of Spencer's friends are in an Off-Off-Broadway production. Some of them are girls.

PETER

I have plans Friday.

SEVERINE

Do you?

PETER

I don't like plays. I like to read them, not see them.

SEVERINE

It would make me happy if you came.

PETER

It would? You're telling me it would make you happy if I joined you?

SEVERINE

You're not even trying, Peter.

She moves to leave and he grabs her arm.

PETER

Can you guess what would make me happy, at least for the moment?

SEVERINE

They're still up, Peter.

PETER

You can't expect me to stop just like that. It's unnatural.

SEVERINE

Unnatural?

PETER

You've slept with him.

She doesn't answer.

PETER

I think I deserve to know.

SEVERINE

Yes.

PETER

Have you told him about us?

SEVERINE

He knows you're my brother.

PETER

And that's all?

SEVERINE

That's all there is to know.

Peter gets up and walks to the door.

SEVERINE

What are you doing?

He pulls the door shut and locks it.

PETER

I think I'm starting to hate you.

SEVERINE

Come here.

Severine lifts her feet up onto the bed and lies flat. She stares at the ceiling and closes her eyes. Peter stands frozen, struggling with competing urges. Finally, he walks over and lies next to her. She tentatively raises her hand to his cheek, then slowly rolls on top of him. They take off their clothes and make love.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT - THE PRESENT

Peter gets up from his bed, moves to the desk and takes out a photograph from the drawer. He sits down examining it.

ANGLE ON PHOTOGRAPH: Severine and Spencer laughing together at graduate school on the Great Lawn.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT - THE PAST

Peter is in the dining room, sitting at a fully set table, fiddling nervously with a fork.

PETER (V.O.)

Severine explained that she would fully understand if I didn't want to be at dinner. I told her I wouldn't hear of it.

His father is at the head of the table reading. Peter's mother comes in, looking with concern at the table.

MOTHER

I know I forgot to put something out.

PETER

You're acting like we're having a head of state over.

MOTHER

It's so rare that we have a guest. Feels like an occasion, doesn't it? I want to make sure everything is as close to perfect as possible.

(MORE)

MOTHER (cont'd)
You know how we feel about that mythical beast perfection in this house. Besides, I'm dying to meet him.

PETER
You've met him several times.

MOTHER
(rushing to the kitchen)
In passing. But I'd like to know him.
My daughter's first boyfriend.

Peter tightens his grip on the handle of the fork.

THE DOORBELL RINGS. Peter looks at his watch.

PETER
He's a full five minutes early.

Severine is heard coming down the steps and opening the door for Spencer, then the silence of a kiss before the two of them enter. Spencer is wearing a burgundy shirt and a black sports jacket, clean-shaven. Severine is exquisitely made-up and is wearing a form-fitting dark gray skirt.

FATHER
Ah, Spencer. How are you?

SPENCER
Fine. Good to see you outside of class.

The father rises to greet Spencer, shaking hands and accepting a bottle of red wine. The Mother comes in last, with a big smile.

MOTHER
Hello Spencer.

SPENCER
Hi Mrs. Nilette.

Spencer kisses her once on each cheek and hands her a box of Belgian chocolate and a bouquet of flowers, which she happily accepts, moving her face closer to absorb their scent.

MOTHER
They're lovely. Thank you, Spencer.

Spencer nods graciously. Peter extends his hand.

SPENCER
Hey, Pete. What's happening?

They shake.

PETER

Not too much. What could be happening?

The mother shows him to his seat, next to Severine, across from Peter.

PETER

How about we break open that wine?
Looks like the good stuff.

Severine looks at Peter suspiciously. Peter uncorks the bottle and fills each of their glasses, then raises his.

PETER

Mom, come in here. We're toasting.

MOTHER (O.S.)

Coming. Bad luck to miss a toast.

She comes in carrying a couple of trays of hors d'oeuvres, puts them down on the table and lifts her glass.

PETER

A vôtre santé, Spencer.

SPENCER

A la vôtre.

PETER

And long life.

INT. DINING ROOM - A LITTLE LATER

Dinner has been served, everybody is visibly relaxed, and conversation is flowing freely.

MOTHER

So, Spencer, how long have you lived in Brooklyn?

SPENCER

Three years. I'd prefer the city, but Manhattan rents are out of my league.

MOTHER

Brooklyn's not so bad. I spent the first thirteen years of my life there. I'd take a Junior's Cheesecake and a slice at Grimaldi's over anything they have in the city.

SPENCER

I'm kind of partial to John's on Bleecker, but when it comes to food I try to keep an impartial palate.

PETER

Ahh, the enlightened mind.

MOTHER

(circumventing)
My husband grew up downtown.

FATHER

We were all dying to get out. Some of us literally, dying. Now all you young people are willing to pay exorbitant rents to live in the same tenements we dreamed of escaping. It amazes me.

SPENCER

The romance of city life.

PETER

The romance of rats and roaches.

They all look at Peter. The Father leans in to castigate him, but is stopped by his mother.

MOTHER

So, have your parents been down here?

SPENCER

They love New York. Only to visit, of course. I go back between semesters, when I really miss speaking French.

MOTHER

You could always come here for that.

SPENCER

Nice to know.

INT. DINING ROOM - LATER

Everyone is so sated with food, wine and conversation that they fall into a kind of silent languor.

MOTHER

(coffee pot in hand)
More coffee?

The father shakes his head.

SPENCER
No thank you, I'm fine.

PETER
(to Spencer))
How about the three of us move to the
basement to relax?

SPENCER
Let me at least help you with the
dishes.

MOTHER
No, no. Don't be silly. Go ahead. I
don't often get to play hostess.

FATHER
Very true. Unwind a little before you
head out, Spencer.

SPENCER
Okay. Sounds good.

The Mother and Father begin clearing plates while Peter leads
Spencer and Severine to the basement door.

SPENCER
Everything was delicious.

MOTHER (O.S.)
It's our pleasure.

FATHER (O.S.)
Any time, Spencer.

On the way down, Severine squeezes Peter's arm lightly and
gives him an unexpected peck on the cheek.

SEVERINE
(whispering)
Thank you.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - THE PRESENT

Peter's stare is interrupted by a CAR HORN. He shakes his
head, clearing it, then puts the photo back in the drawer.

PETER (V.O.)
For those past few months she had shown
nothing but increasing indifference.
(MORE)

PETER (V.O.) (cont'd)
But as I considered her smile when she
squeezed my arm, I just wished I were
able to be her brother.

INT. BASEMENT -- NIGHT - THE PAST

Peter, Spencer and Severine sit on a faded orange couch, in front of which is an octagonal glass coffee table with an unopened bottle of wine and three inverted glasses. Severine is surprised by the setup.

PETER
I figured we might end up down here.

Spencer leans over and picks up the bottle.

SPENCER
Why not? One more for the road.

SEVERINE
We never come down here anymore. What
made you think we'd be here tonight?

PETER
Intuition?

Spencer grabs a corkscrew and uncorks the bottle.

SPENCER
It's kind of nice down here.

SEVERINE
Yes. Actually, I'd forgotten how
comfortable it is.

Severine leans back and tilts her head onto Spencer's shoulder. Peter slowly reaches into the couch pillows and pulls out the pistol.

PETER
I picked this up the other day.

Spencer and Severine instinctively shrink backwards.

PETER
Nice looking piece, no?

SPENCER
I never thought of guns as particularly
nice-looking. Where did you get it?

PETER
Interesting choice of questions.

SPENCER

Okay. Why then?

PETER

Forbidden fruits are the sweetest.

Peter reaches over and picks up his wine glass, calmly takes a sip, replaces it on the coaster and leans back.

SPENCER

Guns were never my thing. The same white trash guys who have guns sit around and drink beer and beat their wives and kids and go bowling with other guys like themselves.

PETER

Sounds like you picked that up from an after-school special.

Peter waves the gun in front of him.

SEVERINE

Peter. Stop. This is childish.

PETER

Ah, that gives me a good idea! How about a story about our carefree, idyllic childhood?

SEVERINE

Where'd you get it Peter?

PETER

Spencer already asked me that, not five minutes ago.

SEVERINE

But now I'm asking you.

PETER

Like Bartleby, I'm more a man of preferences than assumptions. Besides, why do you seem so concerned? You can't think I would do anything with this. What would I do, shoot somebody? You, Spencer?

He points the gun at Spencer.

PETER

(continuing to Severine)

You, Sis? Me perhaps?

Peter leans back and rests the gun in his lap.

SPENCER

I guess this would be an uncomfortable silence.

SEVERINE

My brother cultivates uncomfortable and embarrassing situations. I think he must like them. Once, when we were little, he asked during Christmas dinner, where Vachina was. Apparently he thought it was a small country in Asia.

(bitter eyes to Peter)

Ever find Vachina on a map?

Globules of sweat grow out of Peter's forehead.

SPENCER

"Murder is always a mistake. One should never do anything one cannot talk about after dinner." Oscar Wilde.

(pause)

Peter... Pete...

PETER

Yes.

SPENCER

I was talking to you.

Peter opens his eyes and looks straight at Spencer.

PETER

What?

Spencer's mouth opens slowly to reply, and with a smooth upward gesture Peter raises the gun and levels the barrel at Spencer. Peter's left hand rises and palms the barrel, pulling it in toward him - a tremendous bang.

When the echoing wanes, Peter's eyelids flutter up and he sees little gobbets of red dotting the glass table. He looks at Severine, her face sprinkled in red. As he slips into a state of semi-consciousness, Peter looks down at his trembling hand, and sees a glimpse of the orange couch through a small hole in his palm.

PETER'S MOTHER rushes down the stairs, looking frantically at the three of them for an explanation.

MOTHER

My God! What happened? My God!

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR/ROOM -- THE SAME NIGHT

Peter is on a gurney, being wheeled swiftly through hospital corridors and into a room, where a masked doctor examines his hand, surrounded by nurses and assistants.

PETER (V.O.)

I had shot myself in the hand. There were no mitigating factors, no clever excuses to explain it away. I regained nearly full use of it not long after, but humiliation was the real injury.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- LATER

Peter's hand has been stitched and bandaged, and he lies resting in a hospital bed. His father sits against the wall.

FATHER

Where did you get the gun?

PETER

Why didn't you name me Pierre?

FATHER

What?

PETER

That might have made all the difference.

FATHER

The gun?

PETER

(a groggy laugh)

This is the question on everyone's mind.

FATHER

The truth is, you could have been charged for possession and even reckless endangerment, had I not told the doctor it was my gun, and had the obliging doctor decided to push the issue, which, out of professional and parental courtesy, he did not.

PETER

That was nice of him.

FATHER

There was enough alcohol in your blood to classify you as legally inebriated.

PETER

Wine does that.

FATHER

You're not going to tell me where you got it.

Peter looks at him blankly.

PETER

Ask Severine.

FATHER

She says you were acting irrationally. And then you shot yourself.

PETER

Again, I was drinking.

From outside comes the muted laughter of nurses.

FATHER

She says you're clinically depressed and she blames me for not seeing it. What should I have seen?

PETER

Is she here?

FATHER

You realize there are consequences for what you've done.

Peter sits up and looks straight at his father.

PETER

Ask me.

The Father doesn't answer. His eyes narrow a bit.

PETER (V.O.)

I wanted to tell him. I wanted to lash out and scream and unload it all. I wanted to say it and be done with it. But to a father, not a professor.

(MORE)

PETER (V.O.) (cont'd)
So I told him what he wanted to hear,
what he needed to hear.

PETER
I was drunk. I was fooling around.
The gun went off. I never meant to
fire.

The father considers his son's statement.

FATHER
(halfheartedly)
How does it feel?

PETER
It hurts. The anesthesia is still
working, but it's starting to throb.

PETER
Did she even come to the hospital?

FATHER
(staring at him deeply)
I'll send your mother in.

He walks out and closes the door behind him.

PETER (V.O.)
Not surprisingly, things changed after
the shooting incident.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - THE NEXT NIGHT

Peter is lying in his bed, unraveling the bandage from his
hand to expose the raw, stitched-up skin.

PETER (V.O.)
My father regarded me with a mixture of
disappointment and renewed interest, as
if there had suddenly appeared this
strange new aspect of me that was
worthy of being studied. My mother
treaded lightly, and Severine went out
of her way to avoid any kind of
contact.

INT. PETER'S HOUSE - ANOTHER MORNING - THE PAST

Severine runs after her father with books in tow.

EXT. PETER'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Severine looks briefly up at the house, then gets into her father's car and they drive off. Peter comes to the window in his underwear, looking out after them.

PETER (V.O.)

Despite the fact that we had always gone to school together, she now rode with my father a few hours earlier.

INT. CLASSROOM - ANOTHER DAY - THE PAST

Peter and Severine sit at opposite sides of the classroom. He steals occasional glances at her but she never looks at him.

PETER (V.O.)

... and then treat me as nothing more than a fellow student during class.

INT. DINING ROOM - ANOTHER NIGHT - THE PAST

Peter and Severine, Mother and Father eat dinner, conversationless.

PETER (V.O.)

I don't know where she spent the bulk of her time. She couldn't always have been with Spencer, but I never asked.

INT. LIVING ROOM - ANOTHER NIGHT - THE PAST

Peter sits on the living room couch with his parents, in front of a crackling hearth, drinking eggnog.

FATHER

Your mother and I think you should consider therapy.

PETER

Ah. The consequence you spoke of.

MOTHER

Maybe someone on the outside can do something we can't. But, never think you're alone Peter.

PETER
(looking at his father)
Aloneness is the fundamental state of
being, isn't it?

FATHER
(looking at the mother)
He is right about that.

MOTHER
What I meant is, we're all in it
together.

PETER
I think I'm suffering from a case of
seasonal affective disorder.

MOTHER
Maybe you should get away for a while.

FATHER
A change of environment might be good.

MOTHER
Someplace warm. We could go together.
(carefully)
The three of us. People in warm
climates have a much lower rate of
depression.

FATHER
I think it's a good idea. I haven't
been away in a while. Someplace warm.

They all sit back and watch the fire. Peter downs his eggnog
and tosses the plastic cup in, where it slowly melts.

PETER (V.O.)
The holidays came and went, and, we did
not go away. Spencer was in Montreal,
during which Severine was around the
house more, doing her best to keep out
of my way.

INT. PETER'S ROOM - THE PRESENT

He goes to his bookshelf and pulls out a book, fingering
slowly through the pages.

PETER (V.O.)

For Christmas she bought me a nicely-packaged two-volume set of Robert Musil's "The Man Without Qualities." I didn't buy any presents that year. Neither did I return to school the next semester.

EXT. DON'S HOUSE -- NIGHT - THE PAST

Don walks Erica to her car in the driveway. They engage in a long, drawn-out kiss.

INT. DON'S BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Peter is staring from Don's window.

PETER (V.O.)

Don knew that my wound was self-inflicted, and I think he was slowly gleaning the greater truth. I was just hoping that one day he would come out and tell me.

Don comes in and sits on the edge of the bed.

DON

I like this nocturnal existence of mine. If it were practical, I'd stay a grad student forever. I mean, I just can't imagine having to get up in the morning to go to work.

PETER

You still have classes. I have nothing.

DON

Your father has no problems with a leave of absence to do nothing?

PETER

(holding up his hand)

Actually, he hesitantly encouraged it, at the urging of my mom, who said that some time off might be therapeutic.

Peter turns on the TV. He settles on a random News Program. They watch for a while.

DON

You know, I like having a girlfriend. It's not that I'm not attracted to her, because I am. I love her body. It's just that I need sex. A lot of it. And the fact is, Erica's not always around. It's a simple question of availability.

PETER

You should have said something earlier. I would've left you and Erica alone.

DON

No, that's not it. She just doesn't need sex like I do. I don't think she even likes it that much. To be honest, what I've been doing lately is having hookers.

He fixes his eyes on Peter, gauging his reaction.

PETER

Where do you go, the city?

DON

No. I order in.

PETER

What about your parents?

DON

They never stray from their room past 12, and if they did, they wouldn't come in here. I ask her politely not to make too much noise, and that's it. You in?

PETER

I guess.

EXT. DON'S HOUSE - LATER

It is a frigid night and the driveway is checkered with patches of tightly packed snow. Don and Peter wait outside.

DON

The girl I would have preferred was booked til five. But they had a Tibetan. 5'6", 120, 34-28-34, dark eyes, dark hair, per their description. I mean, what are the chances you're ever going to fuck a Tibetan girl?

A MIDNIGHT BLUE LINCOLN with tinted windows rolls to a halt. A feminine form emerges from the car, holding her puffy fur jacket closed tightly as she approaches. She flashes a salacious smile when she sees both of them staring at her.

DON
(whispering)
Not bad from here.

PETER
A little chunky maybe.

DON
Like I said, you can't expect too much.

Though details can't be made out with the coat on, she is fairly pretty, with large dark eyes and long black hair.

JACQUELINE
Hi boys. I'm Jackie.

DON
(grinning back)
Hello, Jackie.

They shake hands like executives at business meeting.

DON
I'm Don. This is Peter.

PETER
Peter.

DON
So, why don't we get out of the cold?

JACQUELINE
Okay. But first we get business out of the way.

DON
Fair enough.
(reaching into his pockets)
Three-hundred dollars for the full servicing of two gentlemen in an hour-long session. One-fifty each.

Don hands her the cash. She counts it.

JACQUELINE
We start the hour from when we go in.

She waves to the car.

INT. DON'S KITCHEN - 20 MINUTES LATER

All the appliances and furniture are stark white. Peter takes uneasy sips from his glass of iced tea and eyes his watch. Don comes down into the kitchen, zippering his fly.

DON

She's not bad. A little thick around the middle and in the ass, but she can suck a good dick boy!

PETER

How good?

DON

So good I shot before I could fuck her. I feel a little gypped, to be honest.

Peter remains motionless in his chair.

DON

Well hurry up, man. Clock's ticking.

INT. DON'S BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Peter opens the door. The room is dim and Jackie is lying in bed, smiling through painted Asian eyes. He stops a few feet in front and focuses on her breasts. She notices where he's looking so she tweaks both nipples with thumb and forefinger.

JACQUELINE

Your friend was a little bit too excited. You have more time now.

She releases her nipples and pats the bed.

JACQUELINE

You should take off your clothes first, no?

She giggles. He blushes.

JACQUELINE

Don't be nervous.

Peter unbuttons his shirt, loosens his belt, and undoes his zipper.

PETER

I'm not.

Peter climbs onto the bed and sits next to her as she pulls the sheets off and crawls towards him. She pushes him slowly backwards and reaches down and pulls off his briefs.

JACQUELINE

Just lay back.

She leans over and runs her tongue down his chest, past his abdomen, and slips a condom into her mouth.

JACQUELINE

You like?

Peter nods, breathless, as she goes back down on him. After a few minutes she stops and peers up at him.

JACQUELINE

Do you want to fuck me now, or should I keep doing this?

PETER

I'm ready.

She smiles approvingly as she slides up and straddles him. She gyrates violently on top of him, placing her hands on his chest as he climaxes.

JACQUELINE

Good?

Peter nods. She dismounts him, reaching down for her clothes.

PETER

That was nice.

Her panties are already on and she is turning her stockings back the right way, humming as she slides her legs into them.

PETER

Do you work every night?

She looks up at him momentarily, then picks up her bra...

JACQUELINE

Depends. Sometimes I'll have a few customers a night and have other nights off.

PETER

I see.

She smiles as she reaches back to hook her bra.

PETER
You're very pretty.

She wiggles into her skirt.

PETER
Are you really from Tibet?

JACQUELINE
What?

PETER
They told us you're from Tibet.

JACQUELINE
I'm Chinese, by way of Queens. I guess
Tibet's a little more exotic.

PETER
Cantonese or Mandarin?

JACQUELINE
Mandarin. Why, you speak Chinese?

PETER
No.

JACQUELINE
That makes two of us.

Fully clothed, she smoothes her hair and looks around to make sure she hasn't forgotten anything. Peter looks at her.

PETER
Do you do anything else besides this?

A cell phone rings from within her purse. She answers it.

JACQUELINE
Yes, I'll be right down.

Her face takes on an expression of superficial regret.

JACQUELINE
Hour's up.

PETER
Le temps s'en va.

JACQUELINE
What?

PETER
I'd like to make another appointment.

JACQUELINE
You'll have to call the agency.

PETER
We couldn't just set something up
privately, like between you and me?

JACQUELINE
I don't do that.

He leads her to the door and stops before opening it.

PETER
Don't blame you. But what about
tomorrow? At my house. I live right
across the street.

JACQUELINE
I should have some open spaces tomorrow
night, unless they booked me up in the
time I was here. Call them.

She moves hastily to the door. Peter slips on his pants and follows.

INT. DON'S GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

Don opens the garage, and when Peter starts to walk out with her he grabs his arm.

DON
What are you doing? You don't walk a
whore to the car. It's not the fucking
prom, man.

They both stay inside and watch her walk out.

INT. DON'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Don takes an aluminum tray from the oven with a mittened hand.

DON
(scooping macaroni and
cheese into a plate)
Fucking makes me hungry, you know.

PETER

I wasn't thrilled with her. Like you said, the best part was the blow-job.

DON

I only wish I could suck my own dick.

Don puts on the TV. A NEWS ANCHOR is talking about the highly publicized case of a local college girl who has been missing for a few weeks. The police have no suspects.

DON

(mouth full of food)

Fucking sicko. But I guess everyone has different turn-ons.

PETER

Chacun son gout.

DON

Exactly. Whatever the fuck you said.

INT. PETER'S HOUSE -- EARLY MORNING

At the top of the stairs Peter stops and leans his head against Severine's door.

INT. SEVERINES' BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

He pushes the door a few inches and peaks in, but it is too dark to see, so he enters. He walks to the bed, reaching out for her form like a blind man. Sitting down, he places his hand lightly on her hips.

PETER

I met a girl. Like you said I should.

Her voice breaks out unexpectedly.

SEVERINE

Where?

PETER

With Don.

He lies down and moves up against her.

SEVERINE

I didn't realize girls moved in Don's circle. What's her name?

PETER
Jacqueline. Jackie.

SEVERINE
French?

He swings his arm around her and pulls the covers down, slides his hand up under the front of her shirt.

SEVERINE
Everybody will be getting up soon.

PETER
Not me. I don't think I'll be getting up at all today.

SEVERINE
When was the last time you saw daylight?

PETER
Daylight's overrated.

She reaches up and stays his probing hand with hers.

SEVERINE
Your hands are cold.

PETER
It's cold out.

He frees his hand to cup her breast.

SEVERINE
Pretty name, Jacqueline.

PETER
Yes, it is. She's a prostitute.

SEVERINE
(in a tired whisper)
Still, it's a pretty name.

PETER
She's a whore.

SEVERINE
I heard you. I understood.

PETER
That's all you have to say?

Pause.

SEVERINE
Was it enjoyable?

PETER
It was sex.

He grabs her arm and turns her toward him, his lips to hers.

PETER
I'm really trying to hate you. But, if
you felt the smallest fraction of what
I feel, what you're doing to me, you
would hate yourself.

He grips her face in both hands forcefully.

SEVERINE
(calmly)
You're hurting me.

PETER
(releasing her)
Just say it. Just say the words and
you can go wherever you want with
whoever you want.

She puts her hand on his cheek.

SEVERINE
You're my brother, Peter. My Brother.

PETER
And him? Can you say them to him?

SEVERINE
No.

He pushes her face from him, rises and exits.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON - THE PAST

Peter awakens the next day around 4:30. An Edith Piaf record
(La vie en rose) is playing somewhere in the house. He sits
up in bed, still in last night's clothes.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Downstairs in the kitchen his parents and Severine are seated
at the table. There are cold cuts and cheese and bread laid
out in an attractive pattern. Peter enters the kitchen.

FATHER
(eyes on his journal)
Good morning.

PETER
(groggily)
I got in late.

His mother rises, kisses him on the cheek and goes to the pantry to get a plate for him.

PETER
I need time to generate an appetite.
She sets a place for him nonetheless.

FATHER
If you keep getting up later and later,
and eventually you might come around
full circle and return to a somewhat
normal schedule.

His mother puts some slices of cold cuts and cheese and a piece of bread in his dish. She brings a wineglass and makes to fill it, but Peter stops her.

PETER
I'd prefer a Coke.

SEVERINE
Do we have any?

MOTHER
Since when do you drink Coke?

FATHER
Have you seen what that stuff does to
the paint on a car?

His mother brings over an ice-filled glass and a can of Coke.

MOTHER
So, who's this girl?

Peter looks at Severine, who returns his gaze.

PETER
Which girl?

FATHER
This girl you met.

PETER

A girl.

FATHER

She has a name, I presume.

PETER

Jacqueline.

MOTHER

Pretty name.

FATHER

French?

PETER

Of course.

MOTHER

Where did you meet her?

PETER

With Don.

FATHER

I knew he'd be good for something one of these days.

Severine smirks.

PETER

She might come over tonight, in fact.

Severine looks at him in quiet shock.

PETER

She works in the evening so she wouldn't come until late. You'll probably be asleep.

MOTHER

What does she do?

PETER

(finishing his coke)
She works in the evening.

SEVERINE

They found that girl. The one from around here that was missing. They said her head was almost completely turned around, facing backwards.

PETER
Probably the boyfriend. It usually is.

SEVERINE
Spencer is coming over tonight also.

Peter shakes the melting ice around in his glass.

PETER
(sarcastically)
Maybe we can all go bowling?

Severine rises and clears her place.

FATHER
You should read this piece on Heidegger
and Arrendt.

He slides it over to Peter, who accepts it disinterestedly.

PETER
I think I'll go back upstairs for a few
hours. I didn't sleep well last night.

MOTHER
(half joking, half
concerned)
I hope you're enjoying your dreams.

PETER
What?

MOTHER
You miss so much of the day, I hope
you're at least getting something out
of your sleep.

PETER
(getting up)
I stopped dreaming a while ago. It
gets in the way.

MOTHER
I'll wake you for dinner.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - THE PRESENT

Peter returns the Musil volume to the shelf, dislodging A
PHOTOGRAPH: A picture of Peter dressed up for Camp, a long
time ago.

EXT. PETER'S HOUSE - DAY - THE PAST

At the curb, Peter (8) ties the laces of his new sneakers and adjusts the shoulder strap of his camp bag. At the open door to their house, Severine (7) looks up at her mother; she is in her white pajamas with little pink hearts and slippers sewn onto the feet. She turns her large round eyes at her mother.

SEVERINE

Where is Peter going?

MOTHER

To play and have fun with the other kids.

Severine holds her mother's hand and looks out at the bus stop where Peter is silently crying as he waits.

THE BUS ARRIVES. Peter steps in.

PETER (V.O.)

On the bus I couldn't stop crying and immediately became the center of ridicule, which climaxed when I threw up in the back seat. The driver came back and saw I was crying so hysterically that she thought something was wrong.

Peter runs out of the bus, drops his backpack on the sidewalk and runs back across the street toward the house, where his sister pulls away from her mother and waits with both palms pressed anxiously to the screen.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - PRESENT

His eyes well with tears. Peter slips the old Photograph back into the bookshelf.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - LATE AFTERNOON - THE PAST

As Peter is about to fall asleep Severine appears in the doorway.

SEVERINE

You can't be sleeping again already.

PETER

You underestimate me.

SEVERINE

She's not really coming here, is she?

PETER

She is. Tonight. It's all arranged.

SEVERINE

You're bringing a prostitute here, to our house, with our parents home. Are you sick?

PETER

Am I sick, she asks.

She is silent.

PETER

Does it bother you because she's a whore or because I'm with her in our house?

SEVERINE

It doesn't bother me.

PETER

Either come in or go out. I can't sleep with you standing there.

Peter turns around to face the wall.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM -- LATER

At 11:00 p.m. Peter's eyes open to the sound of ice pellets tickling the roof and window.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM -- EVEN LATER

At twelve he gets out of bed, weary, drugged with sleep. The house is silent and winter dark.

INT. BATHROOM -- CONTINUOUS

He washes his face and wets down his hair.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Then puts on clean clothes.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- A LITTLE LATER

Peter sits staring blankly at a TV NEWS as he hears the turning of a key and hushed voices. Peter turns off the television. The kitchen light comes on.

SPENCER (O.S.)
Maybe he went out.

SEVERINE (O.S.)
He said it was all set up. I don't think he'd take her to his room. I mean, he wouldn't go that far.

SPENCER (O.S.)
If he's willing to go with a prostitute in the first place, why not have her in the convenience of his own room?

They laugh quietly, then kiss audibly.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Peter enters the kitchen. As always, Spencer looks perfectly put together, his hair windblown, scarf draped carefully around his neck.

PETER
She should be here shortly.
(smiling affably)
Hello, sister.

SEVERINE
What are you doing in the dark?

PETER
Hello Spencer, how are things?

SPENCER
Not bad. You're looking well.

PETER
Am I?

Severine takes their coats and hangs them in the hall closet.

PETER (V.O.)
His persistent cordiality was galling.
I was not looking well. I knew it. He knew it. We all knew it.
(MORE)

PETER (V.O.) (cont'd)
I had just seen myself in the mirror
and I was looking particularly unwell.

SPENCER
Haven't seen you on campus lately.

PETER
A bit of convalescent leave.
(raising his palm)
Remember?

Severine returns and Peter looks from one to the other.

PETER
She told you who I'm waiting for, I
guess.

SPENCER
It didn't seem like a secret.

PETER
Nothing secret about it. No
brother/sister confidentiality.

SPENCER
You shouldn't be embarrassed, Peter.

PETER
I'm not. The reason prostitution is
stigmatized is because America is so
damn puritanical, and it's illegal only
because the government is not making
money off it. Speaking of finance,
it's cheaper for two, and you're here
anyway... I mean, she's very
accommodating. It's one of her best
qualities.

Nobody responds.

SEVERINE
Will it bother you if we watch TV in
the living room?

PETER
You never watch TV. You used to say it
numbs the brain.

SEVERINE
We rented a film.

PETER
Foreign?

SEVERINE

No.

PETER

Then it's a movie, not a film. In America we make movies. What movie?

SPENCER

Rosemary's Baby.

PETER

Interesting.

SEVERINE

Where will you be?

PETER

In the basement.

SEVERINE

Is she really coming?

PETER

Why wouldn't she be?

They stare at each other deeply, in a way that completely excludes Spencer.

PETER

Mind if I sit inside and watch with you while I wait?

SPENCER

Of course not.

Spencer walks over to Severine and places his arm gently around her shoulder. Peter looks at the oven clock: 3:03.

PETER

Looks like I won't be sitting with you after all. I should go outside.

SPENCER

Can't keep a lady waiting.

INT/EXT. GARAGE/DRIVEWAY -- CONTINUOUS

Peter waits until the dark Lincoln pulls up to the sidewalk. He walks halfway down the driveway, stops and waves. The door opens and Jacqueline gets out.

JACQUELINE

You should do something about this driveway. Someone slips and gets hurt...

PETER

I'll keep it in mind. Do you remember me?

JACQUELINE

It was only last night. Don, right?

PETER

(with distaste)

No. Don was my friend. I'm Peter.

JACQUELINE

Oh yeah, Peter.

As before, he pays her on the spot, then ushers her in.

INT. FOYER/KITCHEN -- CONTINUOUS

Her heels echo through the foyer, leaving slushy marks on the white kitchen tile. They stop in front of the living room.

PETER

This is Jacqueline.

Spencer and Severine turn around. Spencer rises.

SPENCER

Spencer, nice to meet you.

Jacqueline pulls together the front of her fur jacket.

JACQUELINE

Jackie.

Severine is staring from her place on the couch.

PETER

Don't just sit there looking stupid, Severine. Say hello to the lady.

SEVERINE

Hello.

PETER

This is my sister, Severine.

Jackie nods at them. Spencer is still on his feet, smiling awkwardly until all attention is brought to canned laughter blasting out from the television as Severine turns it on.

PETER
(commanding)
Lower that. People are sleeping.

JACQUELINE
Who's sleeping?

PETER
My parents. Right down the hall.

Peter smiles and points in the direction of their room.

PETER
Don't worry, they're sound sleepers.

SEVERINE
I don't think she's worried.
(silencing the sitcom
laughter)
Are you worried, Jackie?

JACQUELINE
(to Peter)
Not if you're not?

PETER
Well, I'll let you watch your movie.
I'll be downstairs if you need me.

SPENCER
Good night.

Jackie nods with a weary smile.

PETER
It sure will be.

INT. BASEMENT -- CONTINUOUS

Peter turns on the lights, spreads a large yellow comforter on the floor, and watches as she removes her clothes, stripping down to bra and panties.

JACQUELINE
(in a professional tone)
You're gonna have to undress too if
we're gonna do this the right way.

Peter undresses, lies down on the blanket, and lets her suck his penis for a while before entering her. She doesn't bother to moan or show any signs of enjoyment this time. It is done very quickly, after which Jacqueline takes a cigarette from her bag and lights it.

JACQUELINE

All right if I smoke in here?

PETER

Not really. But don't bother putting it out now.

She offers him one, which he refuses.

PETER

Would I be offending you if I asked your age?

JACQUELINE

Thirty-one.

PETER

You look younger. I mean, thirty-one is by no means old, but you look twenty-five, twenty-six.

JACQUELINE

Asians always look younger. It's our skin I think.

Peter gets up and heads for the bathroom.

INT. BASEMENT BATHROOM -- CONTINUOUS

JACQUELINE (O.S.)

Might as well take off the condom while you're in there. Leave it on too long and your penis can suffocate.

Peter stands over the toilet, staring at himself in the mirror as he pulls the condom off.

PETER (V.O.)

The absurdity of the situation struck me as I saw myself standing there naked, holding a used rubber. I imagined what it would be like to hack it off, testicles and all, to slice the offensive thing from my body and throw the bloody refuse in the garbage.

He opens the medicine cabinet and withdraws a small pair of grooming scissors, spreads the blades wide and slides them gently around his penis. His hands tremble, then he suddenly drops the scissors, leaving the bathroom with the Dixie cup.

INT. BASEMENT -- CONTINUOUS

He goes back to the comforter and stands there looking down at her with a desperate, maniacal expression, cup in hand.

PETER

I was thinking that I'd like to see you... outside of these circumstances.

JACQUELINE

You mean, you want to go out on a date?

PETER

That's what I mean.

JACQUELINE

(laughing)

But we already fucked. And besides, I never mix business with pleasure.

PETER

Wise.

JACQUELINE

(checking her watch)

But if you want we can fuck again.
There's still ten minutes left.

PETER

No. I don't think I'm ready.

Jacqueline collects her clothes, humming as she separates the pieces. Peter sits on the couch in his underwear, watching her snap on her bra and slip into her stockings. He puts on his pants and then walks up close to her.

PETER

I'd like you to leave now.

JACQUELINE

I'm getting dressed.

He stares at her, quietly fuming.

JACQUELINE

What, you have another girl coming that you're gonna ask out?

She pulls a tight, elastic-like shirt over her head.

PETER
Please leave.

JACQUELINE
Christ. I come here on business when I didn't even want to because you were so fucking weird last night...

PETER
Weird? Weird how?

JACQUELINE
Just the way you are.
(wiggling into her skirt)
Everything about you is creepy.

PETER
What exactly do you mean?

She rolls her eyes, sucking in her stomach as she pulls the leather belt through the loops.

JACQUELINE
(shaking her head)
Forget it, all right. You're not weird.
You're normal, just like everyone else.

Peter lets her finish buckling her belt, waits until she turns up toward him, pulls back and smashes his right palm hard against her left cheek. Her head turns sideways with the blow and remains there for a moment in disbelief.

She takes a few steps backwards.

JACQUELINE
You're fucking crazy.

She nervously takes her cell phone from her pocketbook and dials a programmed number.

JACQUELINE
Jose, I'm coming out.

She hangs up, quickly putting the phone back in her purse.

JACQUELINE
(in a quivering voice)
I could have you busted up for this.

PETER
I could have you arrested.

JACQUELINE

Don't take a fucking step near me.

He lets her walk up the steps before following.

INT. FOYER/LIVING ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Once upstairs, she hurries through the foyer and past the living room. She reaches the door and fumbles with the locks.

JACQUELINE

(frightened)

Open the fucking thing!

She backs off as Peter moves in to unlock the door and open it, then brushes quickly past him and hurries off down the driveway.

JACQUELINE

Fucking bastard.

She loses her footing momentarily on the ice, then recovers.

JACQUELINE

Fuck.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Peter opens the refrigerator and takes out a plate of leftovers. He puts the food on the table and walks out.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Peter stands there watching them; Spencer is sitting up and Severine is asleep, her head resting on his shoulder. Spencer turns and looks at him without saying anything.

PETER

Long movie.

SPENCER

Relatively.

PETER

I'm going upstairs.

SPENCER

See you.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM/HALLWAY -- LATER

Peter pulls the covers off, slides his legs out one by one and walks toward her room, halting at every creak of the floorboards.

INT. SEVERINE'S BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

As usual, her door is left open a crack. He pushes it just enough to slide in, reaches her bed and sits.

SEVERINE

You stink. Your body actually smells.
Do you realize that? And you look
horrible. I can't believe you've let
yourself fall so far.

He puts his hand on her shoulder. She withdraws harshly.

SEVERINE

Don't touch me.

PETER

Because of her? The whore?

SEVERINE

Because I don't want you near me. You
are truly sick. It's not just
something to say. You're sick, Peter.

PETER

Then help me.

SEVERINE

It's too late for me to help you. But
you do need help.

Peter gets up off the bed.

PETER

You don't have to worry. I won't come
near you again.

He leaves the room without looking back.

INT. THE FATHER'S STUDY -- NIGHT - THE PRESENT

Peter enters his father's study. He stares at the books
lining the shelves.

His fingers glide across a row of books, stopping at random to flick several off, watching as they drop to the floor. Sartre's "Being and Nothingness" falls face-up.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT - THE PAST

Peter's Father is reading a journal at the head of the table.

FATHER

De trop. All of it, de trop.

He peers over his magazine at a younger Peter (8), who is eating a sandwich and gazing curiously at his father.

FATHER

We're all de trop. Superfluous, nonessential, a drop in the bucket, a dime a dozen, worthless. Painfully contingent.

PETER

Contingent on what, Dad?

FATHER

Contingent on nothing, and this is what's so great about it all.

PETER

Why bother then?

FATHER

That's just my point, don't.

INT. THE FATHER'S STUDY -- NIGHT - THE PRESENT

Peter picks up the book and slips it softly back in place.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM -- DUSK - THE PAST

There is nothing left of daylight when Peter wakes. His bedside clock flashes 88:88. He reaches over and picks up the phone.

PETER

Don. It's me. I have to get out tonight.

(pause)

I don't care where. As long as there are women. Lots of them.

INT. DON'S CAR - LATER

Don is driving. Peter stares languidly at the road ahead.

DON

I'm glad you called. Erica's at an office party, and I felt like getting out too. This place is not bad. A pretty favorable female to male ratio.

Peter nods approval, still looking forward.

DON

I can't believe you asked out that same hooker. But everybody could use a nice smack once in a while. Maybe that's why things have gotten so out of control, girls are not getting the slaps they need

PETER

It's hard to get away with it these days. A little smack in the face is abuse. A little slap on the ass is harassment.

DON

(smiles approvingly)

You did good. She deserved it, but you're lucky her pimp didn't come in and beat the shit out of you.

PETER

That's what she said.

DON

I've never hit Erica. To be honest, she hasn't asked for it yet, but if the situation called for it I don't think I would hesitate.

He gazes thoughtfully through the windshield.

DON

You ever hit your sister?

PETER

(taken unaware)

What?

DON

Have you ever hit Severine?

PETER

No, I've never hit her. Why would you ask that?

DON

Being an only child I never had to worry about fighting with siblings, but I've heard that these things can get pretty violent.

PETER

No. We never fought like that.

DON

I didn't think so. Severine doesn't seem like a pain in the ass. Lately, it seems like you're the one who would benefit from the occasional slap.

Peter look at him suspiciously.

EXT. STRIP MALL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

They pull in. Squeezed between a kosher deli and a stationary store is a nightclub, whose name, WAXE, is sprawled across the top of the storefront in garish blue neon lettering. They pay and get their hands stamped. The bouncer unhooks the velvet rope and lets Don and Peter in.

DON

Loosen up. You have to at least make it seem like you have confidence.

INT. WAXE CLUB - NIGHT

They squeeze through the sea of people and establish a place at the bar. Don orders a couple of drinks as Peter surveys the mass of bodies writhing to the beat on the dance floor.

Peter eyes a brunette, wearing a skimpy halter top and tight short-shorts. She is gyrating wildly with a few other girlfriends. Finally, she stops dancing and heads over to the bar alone, not far from Peter.

DON

Now's the time, man. She's separated from the herd.

(nudging him)

Go!

PETER

I can't.

DON

(jabbing him in the ribs)

Go. Don't think. Just go.

Peter begins to sway in her direction, a kind of awkward dance/walk as his drink splashes onto him. He leans against the bar next to her and looks straight ahead, as if he hadn't made the journey over there just for her. She gives him a cursory, head-to-toe scan, then turns away. Peter flags the bartender.

PETER

Gin and tonic please.

He taps the bar nervously, glancing next to him. The girl's bare arms and shoulders are glossy with sweat. The bartender puts the glass in front of him.

PETER

(leaving a dollar)

Thank you.

The bartender takes the bill without looking at him. Peter turns around and leans over to the girl.

PETER

Hello.

VICKI

(turning slightly as
though she hadn't heard)

What?

PETER

Hi.

VICKI

Oh. Hi.

PETER

Would you like a drink?

VICKI

Already have one.

She displays her half-filled glass.

PETER

I see. I'm Peter, by the way.

VICKI
What?

PETER
(shouting)
My name is Peter.

VICKI
Vicki.

He puts out his hand and she shakes it reluctantly, her fingers limp in his grasp.

PETER
Is that short for Victoria?

VICKI
No.

PETER
No?

VICKI
No.

PETER
It's just Vicki then?

VICKI
Just Vicki.

PETER
I see.

They both look forward for a few seconds.

PETER
I like your perfume.

VICKI
(not looking at him)
Thanks.

PETER
Something citrusy.

She doesn't respond.

PETER
It's nice.

A new song comes on, and though it's hardly different from the last one, it elicits a deafening roar of approval from the crowd, which begins to move more emphatically. Vicki also starts rocking her shoulders to the music.

PETER

Would you like to dance?

She shoots him a brief look of ridicule and annoyance.

VICKI

Um, not really, no.

PETER

Sure you don't want a drink?

VICKI

(derisively)

I still already have one.

Peter drains his glass and holds it up to the bartender to signal another round, then turns to Vicki again to say something, but she preempts him with a look of complete disgust. Peter sweats profusely. He watches a droplet splash onto the back of his hand.

PETER

(abandoning all dignity)

How about the next song?

She rolls her eyes, pushing herself off the bar. Two of her friends rush over, flanking her enthusiastically.

FRIEND ONE

We just met these awesome guys.

FRIEND TWO

Yeah. They're traders. Come on, they're buying drinks.

Vicki puts her glass on the bar, adjusts her top and takes off, friends in tow. Peter feels a hand on his shoulder.

DON

Fuck her, man. I fucking hate cunts like that.

Peter finishes his gin tonic.

DON

You all right?

Peter looks at him, mouth open, eyes hazed, drunk.

PETER

Yeah. Yeah.

(holding up his empty
glass to the bartender)

Just need another one.

DON

I'm going in. I see something I like.

Don disappears into the crowd.

INT. WAXE HALLWAY - NIGHT

On his way to the bathroom Peter sees Vicki making out with a guy in a dark corner. He stops and stares for a moment, then goes on to the bathroom.

INT. WAXE HALLWAY / BAR - NIGHT

When he comes out Vicki and her man are gone. Don is back at the bar, and his drink is waiting for him.

PETER

What happened?

DON

I just got shot down by a girl with bad teeth and no breasts.

PETER

I just pissed all over myself.

Don looks down at Peter's pants.

DON

Good thing you're wearing dark colors.

Peter looks up and sees Vicki leaving the club with the guy she had been kissing. The crowd is starting to thin out.

PETER

I hate them Don.

The lights flicker bright, signaling closing time.

DON

It's the young ones who deserve most of the hate. Young, attractive, from about eighteen to, say, thirty-five.

(MORE)

DON (cont'd)

The ones at the height of their power,
when they can browse and sample for
however long they choose and then
discard the specimen if it turns out to
be unsatisfactory.

He points to a petite blonde wiggling her lithe body in the
middle of the floor, commanding attention from a group of
guys surrounding her like predators.

PETER

She's totally aware that she's
frustrating the hell out of those guys,
and she loves every minute of it.

DON

It won't last. She'll have a few more
years of youthful beauty, a few more of
early middle age elegance, if she's
lucky, and then it'll be over, so let
her bask in her glory while she can.

The lights come on fully and the blonde bartender in the
black bustier walks over.

BARTENDER

Bar's closed boys. Time to go home and
spank it.

Peter turns slightly in her direction.

PETER

(mumbling)

Bitch.

She makes a face, drops a wet rag onto the bar and proceeds
to wipe it down with hard, masculine strokes.

A large bouncer with a shiny bald head in a black T-shirt and
black leather vest comes over.

BALD BOUNCER

Do we have a problem here?

Don grabs Peter by the arm and pulls him from the bar.

DON

No problem. He's just a little drunk.
We're going.

INT. DON'S CAR - NIGHT

The drive home is a blurred, nauseous montage of highway roadside, deserted residential streets and commercial thoroughfares. Peter watches as things breeze past the passenger window. His expression cracks, as though he's going to break into tears but lacks the initiative.

DON

More snow tomorrow.

Peter lifts his head from the window.

PETER

The snows of yesteryear. Where are they?

EXT. PETER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Don pulls up to the foot of the driveway, nearly hitting the mailbox as the car slides on a patch of ice. Don unlocks the doors after seeing how much trouble Peter is having manually.

DON

You all right?

Peter opens the door and is half in, half out of the car. He turns to Don.

PETER

I love you Don. You're my only true friend. But, it's all crap. Scorning women, denying love... Hurting and hating... Because even if it doesn't exist, even if the concept is illusory, even if we spend lifetimes in vain searching for it, love is all we can hope for, and once that hope is gone there is nothing else. Then the emptiness is truly unbearable. You're wrong Don... We all want to be loved.

DON

The question is, by whom?

Peter stares at him long and hard, then with some effort, manages to push himself out of the car and shuts the door.

Don drives off. Peter hunches over and vomits in the bushes. He sits shivering on the ground and looks around at the neatly rowed houses, then rolls onto his back and lies flat. The sky is very clear. There is no wind, just cold.

INT. PETER'S LIVING ROOM - THE PRESENT

Peter stands over the piano. He lifts the cover and runs his fingers lightly over the keys, then looks out the window and sees a car moving slowly down the block, stopping in front of each house and tossing newspapers.

PETER (V.O.)

Suburban quietude is a unique phenomenon. As far removed from urban ruckus as it is from rural tranquility. On that frozen winter night the neighborhood felt frozen in time, a reminder of all that could have been. In suburbia, lives are passed trying to forget not what was lost in youth, but what was never found.

The piano is horribly out of tune. He walks out.

EXT. PETER'S HOUSE -- DAWN - THE PAST

He looks at his watch: 4:38. His fingers and ears are seared, bright red with cold.

He pushes himself up onto his knees and then stands, walking slowly and carefully up the ice-coated driveway. He arrives at the garage without falling, fishes his keys from his jacket pocket and works them into the hole.

The garage door screeches like a flayed animal.

INT. SEVERINE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

When Peter enters she awakens.

SEVERINE

Don't come in.

He stops, a shadow in the doorway, then stumbles to the bed. She pulls her legs away from him and sits up.

SEVERINE

You smell like vomit. Get out.

PETER
(pleading)
But it's so cold.

SEVERINE
Get out.

PETER
Why?

A tear comes down his cheek. She thaws for an instant and touches him softly, without disdain, wiping his face.

SEVERINE
(whispering)
Because it's gone and what's gone
doesn't come back.
(she removes her hand)
It's time to move on Peter, time for
both of us to move on. Please!

Peter bends and kisses her cheek. She pulls away. He remains still for a second, and bends again toward her.

SEVERINE
(lightly)
No.

He slips his hand behind her neck and under her hair and pulls her to him, determined but not forceful.

SEVERINE
No.

He takes her face in his hands and his lips meet hers. He kisses her hard on the mouth. She pulls away, pushing at his shoulders.

PETER
It's only me, Sevie.

He grips her shoulders and pushes slowly against increasing resistance and crawls on top of her, pins her arms flat to the mattress. She squirms, gasps, but he hardly notices, tightening his grip to combat spasms of struggling.

SEVERINE
(breathless)
Don't Peter. Don't do this.

PETER
Shhh. Shhh.

Now she is lunging her body upward, thrashing back and forth, but the more she struggles the more he counters. He tries to find her mouth with his, but she turns her head from side to side, avoiding him. So he lies on top to keep her in place, his chest fixed to hers, belly to belly, and reaches and pulls pajama bottoms and panties down to her knees, his hand probing.

SEVERINE

Please.

She is sobbing. The struggling slows and then stops entirely.

PETER

But I love you.

INT. SEVERINE'S BEDROOM - A LITTLE LATER

FOOTSTEPS echo through the downstairs hallway. Severine's eyes are closed but she's not sleeping. Peter runs his finger lightly over her face. Her eyes open briefly, then close. THE FOOTSTEPS come up the stairs.

Their Father is at the door in his dark blue terrycloth robe, peering through the crack. Peter holds his breath. The door opens a little further in slow, measured increments. The Father's eyes meet Peter's. He stands there looking, his expression neutral.

The Father slowly pulls the door to where it was and moves away.

PETER

That was Dad.

Severine doesn't answer.

PETER

I miss hearing the piano. You haven't played in a long time. It's a shame -

SEVERINE

I'm not with him anymore.

Peter opens his mouth but checks himself.

SEVERINE

Spencer and I are not together. Did you know?

PETER
What happened?

SEVERINE
Does it matter?

PETER
Is it definitive?

SEVERINE
You're so selfish. You always have an excuse. You're never to blame. You're the victim all the time. Even now.

PETER
Dad always said: Existence is contingent, it's flimsy and worm eaten and could fly off at any second. But we all have our contingencies. And you're mine.

His hand searches her face, wet with a fresh tear.

PETER
I love you.

SEVERINE
No, you don't. You don't love anyone. Not even yourself.

The clock reads 7:58 when she pulls her hand out of his, nudges him softly, slides from under him, pulls up her pajama bottoms, rises and walks out of the room.

INT. DINING ROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

Peter, Severine and their parents are sitting around the table eating in silence.

PETER (V.O.)
Severine had changed completely. My mother attributed this to the break-up - anyone would. A broken heart takes time to heal, especially the first one. My father knew that things were not so simple, but why complicate them even more? The four of us were together like in the old days, which was what mattered.

The Father keeps his head down as he eats a cupcake.

INT. LIVING ROOM - ANOTHER DAY - THE PAST

Severine is at the piano, her head leaning down close to the keys as she taps out the notes. Peter sits on the landing of the hallway staircase, listening.

PETER (V.O.)

Spencer was erased from the page so fast and finally that it soon seemed he was never there, his whole presence not even vaguely remembered.

Severine stops suddenly.

PETER

Don't stop for me.

She turns around, holds him a moment in her stony gaze before turning back to the piano.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - DUSK - THE PAST

Peter is reading on his bed.

PETER (V.O.)

Winter dragged on into early spring.
It was a Friday in April.

He looks up over his book and Severine is there in a long white nightgown, though it is not bedtime.

SEVERINE

What are you reading?

Peter lifts the book, the 'Musil' she gave him for Christmas.

PETER

Is something wrong?

SEVERINE

(a short, bitter laugh)
Wrong?

She continues to stand motionless, her hair still damp from her shower and clumping like fine gold thread.

SEVERINE

I'm pregnant.

He waits for the sound waves to settle.

PETER

Are you sure?

She nods, blinks, keeping her lids down for an extra fraction of a second before lifting.

SEVERINE

Yes. Of some things.

PETER

I'll take care of you.

SEVERINE

How do you mean?

PETER

You and the baby. I'll be there.

SEVERINE

That's not the issue. I thought you should know... I don't want the baby. I definitely don't want it. About that there's no question.

PETER

Sev, just --

SEVERINE

It's good not to want. It's liberating. I don't want you to worry. I'm not worried.

She makes to leave.

PETER

Wait.

She stops, not turning around.

SEVERINE

You say you want to live, but you don't know how. Neither do I. You've seen to that.

She remains still for a moment, then leaves.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - THE PRESENT

Peter turns on his back and stares at the ceiling.

PETER (V.O.)
It didn't matter what she said or
didn't say.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT - THE PAST

A couple of hours pass, and he gets up and goes to her room.

INT. SEVERINE'S BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

The bed is made, unruffled.

PETER (V.O.)
She wasn't there, nor was the car,
which was unusual but explainable.
Maybe she went out to clear her mind.
Or maybe she went to Spencer's. This
however, would have been tragic...

INT. PETER'S/SEVERINE'S BEDROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

Peter gets up and goes immediately to Severine's room. No
change from last night. He goes downstairs.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

His mother is washing a chicken for dinner, holding the dead
thing up by its legs and rinsing out its bowels with cheap
whiskey.

MOTHER
(turning to him with a
smile)
You're up early. What's the occasion?

PETER
Where's Severine?

MOTHER
I haven't seen her. Maybe she had to
go to school early.

PETER
It's Saturday.

Peter grabs a bowl, a box of cereal and a container of milk,
and sits down at the table. The phone rings. His mother
rinses her hands, dries them and answers on the fourth ring.

She drops the receiver on the floor and stands frozen, then suddenly falls to her knees and tries to cry, to scream, to force something out of her paralyzed throat.

Peter's father rushes out from his study and sees his wife on the floor bleating convulsively like a sheered lamb.

MOTHER

She's dead. She's drowned. Dead.
She's dead. Oh God. Oh God. Oh God!

Peter sits frozen at the table, watching as his father holds his Mother, not bothering to try to calm her as she moans between uncontrollable spasms of tears.

EXT. OCEAN BEACH - TWO DAYS LATER - THE PAST

Peter sits on the seashore, holding two blank sheets of letter paper. He gets up, walks to the edge of the water and drops them in, watching them disappear into the blackness.

PETER (V.O.)

Then next day I received an unmarked envelope in the mail. Inside were two sheets of white letter paper that were blank except for one word in the upper left hand corner of one page. "Peter," as if she had started to write something, then thought better of it. Peter. I hate that name.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT - THE PRESENT

Peter is sitting alone at the kitchen table drinking coffee. His mother comes out of the darkened hall in a nightgown. He double-takes, momentarily mistaking her for Severine.

MOTHER

Smells good.

PETER

There's still some in the pot.

She sits next to him, shakes her head.

MOTHER

It'll only keep me up. Which is how it's been going anyway. What about you? Why are you drinking coffee now?

Peter stares into the black liquid.

PETER
Something to do.

He drinks. She looks at him, nods.

MOTHER
You were such perfect children.
Tears form in her eyes.

PETER
Were we?

MOTHER
Well behaved, intelligent, courteous.
Everything a parent could want.

PETER
(interrupting)
Then what?

Peter again stares into his coffee, not wanting to hear the answer.

MOTHER
Then... Nothing. Just two perfect,
healthy children.

Still staring into his mug, a tear falls from Peter's eye.

PETER
What are you trying to say, Mom?

MOTHER
I wish you'd get out more.

She breaks down crying, reaches out and puts her hands over his. She rises slowly and softly kisses his head, then walks back into the darkness of the hallway.

Peter sits there, numb.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - LATER

The clock on his night table changes from 3:15 to 3:16. Peter slowly gets up, and walks out of the room.

EXT. PETER'S CAR/EXPRESSWAY SERVICE ROAD -- NIGHT

PETER drives along a deserted service road as a Chopin Nocturne plays.

The area is poorly lit, yet in the distance he makes out a figure walking along the side of the road. Peter decelerates to a crawl and flashes his high beams. The figure, a TEENAGER, turns and squints into the lights, then turns back around and hastens his pace. He is a lanky kid with stringy shoulder-length hair, wearing a hooded black shirt, on the back of which there is a face, and underneath is written: KURT COBAIN 1967-1994.

Peter slows to a halt and sits in the car, stopped on the side, looking at the kid walking away from him.

Peter finally floors it, the tires screech, and when he brakes the car swerves so that it is perpendicular to the dotted yellow line that divides the service road. The Teenager turns toward the car, ashen and terrified.

Peter stays there a few seconds, then continues on his way.

INT. PETER'S KITCHEN -- A LITTLE LATER

Peter sits at the kitchen table, an Entenmann's Devil's Food Cupcake and glass of milk in front of him.

Peter stares at the cupcake, and the darkened bay window beyond the table transforms into the big black empty ocean.

EXT. OCEAN BEACH -- NIGHT - THE PAST

Severine, in a white summer dress, covered by a red overcoat, sits at the edge of the water in the dark and the cold.

PETER (V.O.)

My sister's body was found just before noon by a jogger. According to the report, her body was face down.

Her dress rustles as she rises and brushes the sand off her bottom and takes a step forward to test the water.

PETER (V.O.)

Her eyes were open, hair tangled and full of sand, stuck with seaweed and smelling like the sea. Suicide was the conclusion. Death by drowning.

She walks farther in, the hem of her dress floating up until it becomes saturated and blends with the black. Her arms are out at her sides, fingers skirting the surface of the water.

PETER (V.O.)

Strangely, the coroner's report mentioned nothing of her pregnancy. I don't know if they failed to detect it or if she in fact wasn't pregnant, if she lied to me. I only know what she told me.

Water up to her breasts, her clothes heavy with wet, swaying with the waves, a slight pull from under. She hesitates, acclimating to the water. Shivering.

PETER (V.O.)

At the funeral, everyone said how beautiful she looked. She did not look beautiful, but dead, very dead.

The ocean tickles her chin now. Her hair floats carefree behind. She stands on her toes, closes her lips and transfers all respiratory responsibility to her nose, the water pushing gently at the edges of her mouth. She slips under and holds her breath, closes her eyes, everything around her silent.

PETER (V.O.)

So I try. I try not to bother. I tell myself that I don't miss anything, that I don't still hear the sound of her breathing as she slept, the disgusted sighs and bang of the keyboard cover when she was having a bad day at the piano, and the way her hair would fall in front of her eyes when she played.

Then it comes, the salty influx. It comes in subtle bursts, breaking the seal of her lips to let her sip it, to test its flavor, and then she opens her mouth and it charges in. A peaceful smile comes over her face before her eyes close.

PETER (V.O.)

I try to convince myself that it doesn't matter that I'll never see her again because we're all de trop anyway.

Severine's shoes lie neatly side by side in the sand, out of reach of the tide.

INT. PETER'S KITCHEN - NIGHT - THE PRESENT

He picks up the cupcake, stares at it.

PETER (V.O.)

I tell myself that it's really not a loss, because life is a succession of losses that in the end even loses itself, and this is nothing to get upset about, it's just another morsel of nothing in the greater nothingness.

He puts the cupcake back down next to the glass of milk.

PETER (V.O.)

So this is what I do. I live alone in a room with the sound of waves pounding the walls and the scent of a sister haunting the air, surrounded by the empty, hateful tomes of the Western canon, mocking me constantly.

He closes his eyes, then shuts the light and leaves.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM -- DAWN

Peter lies on top of the sheets.

PETER (V.O.)

There were times growing up when I thought we would always be children. Imagining adulthood was as impossible as the realization that one must die.

INT./EXT. BACKYARD PLAYHOUSE - DAY - THE PAST

Peter (8) is chasing Severine (7), her wet hair whipping back in forth as she runs inside.

Peter rushes in after her, stopping at the doorway, winded. Severine is standing in the corner, laughing.

SEVERINE

When you die is it for infinity?

PETER

Why do you want to know that?

SEVERINE

Because I don't want to be dead forever, but I'd like to know what it's like to die.

PETER
(laughing)
Someday you will. Don't worry.

EXT. BACKYARD PLAYHOUSE - EARLY MORNING - THE PRESENT

Now, AN OLDER PLAYHOUSE sits in the backyard, it's walls wobbly, it's roof unsure and decaying.

PETER (V.O.)
Imagining a world without her is
inconceivable, like non-being, negative
space.

BLACK