

FADE IN:

EXT. WALLACE HOUSE - NIGHT

1

Wallace House, Smith College, dead of winter. We can barely make out a girl standing in the night shadows of the covered porch. She smokes in silence.

SUPER LEGEND:

SMITH COLLEGE
1959

A taxi glides up in front of the house. The girl (her name is LIZ) races down the steps, her polo coat flying open to reveal Bermuda shorts and a man's shirt.

LIZ
(into cab)
Wait out there, okay? Two
minutes. And turn off your
lights. Do you mind?

The taxi pulls forward. Liz races back up the steps.

CUT TO:

INT. FOYER - WALLACE HOUSE - NIGHT

2

Liz bursts through the door, then slows to a deliberate walk as she passes a parlor. In this light we can see she's lovely, a girl accustomed to being bright.

FOUR GIRLS sit on the parlor floor playing bridge. A FIFTH is slumped in a chair, improving her mind while breaking her back. Once past them, Liz races up stairs.

CUT TO:

INT. LIZ AND MERRY'S ROOM - NIGHT

3

Liz lets herself in quickly but quietly. The room has twin beds. A large stuffed bear, very old, resting on one. Suitcases are opened on either bed.

Light spills from an open closet; commotion within. Liz snaps one of the suitcases closed. Merry's voice, coming from the closet, reveals a soft Southern accent.

MERRY (o.s.)
Don't close that!

LIZ
Aren't you ready?

MERRY (o.s.)
One minute.

LIZ
The cab's only waiting two
minutes.

MERRY appears in the door. She has skin like magnolia and
is dressed like Grace Kelly.

MERRY
Can I wear this?

LIZ
Step into the light.

Liz flops down, gives Merry an appraising look.

MERRY
I want it to be mature. You know,
traveling suit, standing on a
platform, lots of trunks around
you, going places. Huh?

LIZ
(a considered judgment)
Fabulous.

MERRY
Really!

LIZ
You're lousy with maturity.

Merry rushes to her, stoops down, hugs her.

MERRY
Oh, Liz, next time we meet, I'm
going to be a married lady. What
do you think?

LIZ
I'll be an unmarried lady.

MERRY
Will you come to visit us, you've
never been out to California.

LIZ

Please. I've got to see half
of Europe before I go in that
direction.

Merry crosses to throw last-minute items in the suitcase.

MERRY

I couldn't bear it if you never
came out. I want to have lunch
with you, like grown-ups. Doug
will be this invaluable scientist
for Cal Tech by then, and what
will you be? Rich and famous.
Yeah, you'll write the great
American novel. You already have.

LIZ

That was one long short story for
one college magazine.

MERRY

(musing)

Rich and famous ladies.

Liz watches with increasing sadness as Merry snaps things
closed. Merry looks up, notes her friend's long face.

MERRY

Oh, Liz, you're going to miss
me.

LIZ

Like the plague.

Liz jumps to her feet, grabs a suitcase. Merry grabs the
other, scooping up the bear with her free arm.

LIZ

You taking him?

MERRY

I couldn't leave Hamburger.
He's been my family for -- well,
since I was very little.

(Liz opens door,
peers out)

You think it's silly?

LIZ

(loud whisper)

You may not care about graduating,

LIZ (contd)
but he's been here three and a
half years. Maybe he wants to.

MERRY
(whisper)
I suppose he could stay and
be some sort of company.

LIZ
(normal voice, with a
shrug)
I'll get by.

She goes out. Merry's eyes form a little tent of concern.

CUT TO:

INT. TAXI - MOVING - NIGHT

4

The girls are wedged into the back of the taxi with the
suitcases and the bear. Liz is pensive, watching the
winter streets passing. Merry watches her.

MERRY
You're jealous.

LIZ
You're crazy.

MERRY
In a way, Doug's far more your
type than mine. Likes all the
same old boring books. Such a
brain. Did I tell you he started
smoking a pipe?

LIZ
I swear on everything you
consider holy, I do not envy
you Doug.

MERRY
He was your date.

LIZ
Blind date. Once.

MERRY
He seemed to like you.

LIZ
I appreciated that, but I had
to go study for mid-terms.

MERRY

He looked so forlorn in the parlor. I thought he needed a drink.

LIZ

You did right.

Liz looks out the window. Merry muses to herself.

MERRY

I hope so. Every time I go down home, my aunts are always saying, "Who are you going with now, honey?" Down there, if you're not married by twenty-one, they look at you awful strange.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM - NIGHT

The girls stand on the dark platform as the train rumbles into the station. Merry looks anxiously at the flashing windows. Liz watches with her.

MERRY

There he is! You see him?

LIZ

Where?

Merry takes off down the platform, clutching her bear. Liz follows, carrying both suitcases.

The train stops. The doors open. As Merry waits anxiously, DOUG steps off the train. He is wearing chino pants, has on a duffle coat, wears glasses. He kisses her.

Liz stops, sets down the suitcases, watches them. Merry pushes Doug back from the kiss, indicates Liz. Doug hurries up, grabs a suitcase in either hand.

DOUG

Hi.

LIZ

Hello, Doug.

DOUG

You been good?

LIZ

Flawless.

4

CONT'
(2)

5

Doug smiles. As always, he's amused and a little intimidated 5
 by her. Merry fishes in his duffle coat pocket, pulls out a CONT'
 pipe, sticks it in his mouth. With his hands occupied with (2)
 the suitcases, he's powerless to resist.

MERRY

See what I mean?

Liz smiles, nods. Doug is embarrassed.

DOUG

Well, we got to --

(gestures at train)

I'm stealing your roommate.

LIZ

Yeah, you rats. Have a wonderful
 trip... Life... everything.

Merry leans across, gives Liz a quick hug. She and Doug head
 back towards the train door. A CONDUCTOR waves them on.
 They pick up their step. Liz is rooted, watching them go.

At the train door, Doug waves goodbye. Liz waves back. Doug
 enters the train. Merry looks back.

Liz's face has clouded.

Merry breaks from the train door, runs down the platform,
 shoves Hamburger in Liz's arms, kisses Liz on the cheek.

MERRY

You owe me one.

Liz is surprised and tries to resist, but Merry is racing
 back down the platform. Liz smiles.

The train is crawling forward. The Conductor is closing
 the door. Merry jumps onto the train, looks back.

MERRY'S POV: In the distance, Liz has let Hamburger drop
 to one side, holding its hand as one would a child's. As
 the train moves, she and the bear are slowly receding
 figures.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. UCLA - CAMPUS STEPS - DAY

SHOOTING DOWN a massive flight of steps on the UCLA campus,
 we see the distant figure of Merry standing at the bottom.
 She holds the hand of her eight-year-old daughter, DEBBY.

Merry is in mini-skirt, hair up in a beehive, white zip-up boots. The child is in jeans and Mexican blouse. For the moment, Merry is motionless, uncertain where she's going.

6
CONT'
(2)

SUPER LEGEND: .

UCLA
1969

With sudden resolve, Merry heads up the steps. The students she passes are an appropriate mix of shabby hip.

CUT TO:

INT. ROYCE HALL - DAY

7

On stage at Royce Hall. A WOMAN PROFESSOR is speaking at a lectern. Liz is behind her, flanked by FEMINIST STUDENTS. The audience, when we see it, is mostly female.

PROFESSOR

To talk of debuts being auspicious, is to talk of the career of Liz Hamilton. She came early to our attention with her first novel, Night Song, which won the highly coveted American Book Award, a remarkable achievement for a woman early in her twenties. Her essays have continued to appear in reviews and journals and her second novel is promised for later this year or early in 1970.

During this, the door at the back of the hall opens and Merry hurries in, Debby in tow. She spots Liz, gives her a guilty wave.

Liz smiles, makes a small gesture in response. Some of the audience turns to see what she's gesturing at. During the following, Merry makes her way down to a good seat in front, climbing over people to reach it.

PROFESSOR

Although she does not identify herself specifically with feminist politics, her works are of themselves an evocation of the life feminine, a plea for the feminine ethic, a demand for a space to be just that, female. Please help me greet Liz Hamilton.

Applause. Liz walks up to the lectern, smiles shyly, shakes hands with the Woman Professor.

7
CONT'D
(2)

INTERCUT - Merry applauding politely, looking around at the students, impressed by their enthusiasm.

LIZ

My sincere thanks to Professor Fields. My thanks, also definitely sincere, to the UCLA Women's Caucus, for sending me a ticket to come to this warm climate and receive such a warm reception. I'm not sure it's an exclusively feminine instinct, but I need a lot of warmth.

(Laughter)

Perhaps it is true, as Professor Fields has said, that I do not involve myself specifically in feminist politics --

A VOICE

Why not?

Liz looks around, doesn't know where the voice has come from, decides to go on.

LIZ

Perhaps I'm too exclusively involved in work, that is, in writing and the paralysis that seems to come with it. I don't know why it is but writers, many writers, must face some daily barrier of fear. But then, a dear old man, James M. Cain, said that if your writing doesn't keep you up nights, it won't keep anyone else up either.

Laughter. A FEMINIST STUDENT stands up in the audience. To Liz's surprise, she speaks up.

STUDENT

Ms. Hamilton, do you know why you avoid political commitment in your work?

LIZ

I'm sorry, what's your name?

STUDENT

I'm just another woman, Ms. Hamilton, looking for someone high falutin' like you to own up to being a downtrodden bitch in this bitch of a world.

Some applause, some shouts of "Sit down!" The Professor gets to her feet.

STUDENT

Like you write about men. Are you ashamed of being a woman?
(starts to sit)
My name is Sheilah.

She sits all the way. Liz leans over the lectern.

LIZ

Sheilah, I have a confession to make. All my life I've had a love for old men. My father was old when I was born, older still when he died. My first novel was a memory of him, and I damn sure am not apologizing for that. You could say I've been obsessed with old men, like -- well, old Picasso, and old Brahms, old Yeats. To me they were like walnuts, dark and delicious. Myself, I've always felt green and inelegant. Now I'm thirty and forced to think of myself as a real grown-up, I look more to Colette. She wasn't strictly speaking, an activist either, but she brought a clarity to that inexact science of emotions. In my new novel, I'm looking for that same clarity. So bear with me. If I grow too mellow; too dark, then you, Sheilah, all of you, keep your greenness and shout me down, high falutin' bitch that I may become.

A big laugh, followed by applause. Liz fights a smile, gives in to it.

WE INTERCUT a shot of Merry. She looks around, takes in the response. She looks back at Liz, proud and more than a little envious.

CUT TO:

EXT. MALIBU COLONY - DAY

Liz and Merry and the child make their way up a narrow walk between beach houses in Malibu Colony.

MERRY

You never can tell about little tiny houses out here on the beach, they cost just as much as a mansion down home.

As they come into a patio area, we see the Pacific beyond. Doug is on a chaise, buried in a book, drink in hand.

MERRY

In case you've forgotten, that handsome man is my husband.

Doug rushes to kiss Liz. She smiles, happy to see him.

LIZ

You're looking real fine.

DOUG

You're the one, you're beautiful.

MERRY

Is she? Let me look. My God, you don't look bad. And a celebrity too. Debby, take your hands out of your pants. You should have seen the admiration of all those young girls. Debby, honey, we all have interesting little things under our clothes, but we don't stand around and pick at them.

Doug picks up Debby, kisses her. Merry crowds in to get a smacker of her own. She smiles at Liz, pleased with the picture of domesticity she presents. Liz is touched.

DOUG

So you were big box office.

LIZ

At UCLA? They wouldn't know from box office.

DOUG

Sorry, that's show biz talk.

MERRY

Now, don't start, Douglas.

DOUG

Here in Malibu Colony, we all talk show biz.

MERRY

Liz is not interested in any Hollywood silliness.

(she plucks Debby from Doug, sets her down)

She's a New York authoress. Right, hon? She takes her coffee every day at the Plaza Hotel, Palm Court, and eats her steaks at the Four Seasons on Park Avenue.

DOUG

I'm impressed.

LIZ

I take my coffee-to-go at a deli on Sixth Avenue.

DOUG

I'm even more impressed.

Liz laughs. Merry has had enough of this tête-a-tête. She pulls Liz towards the house.

MERRY

He just resents we don't still live near the lab. You remember that little house. I could not take it, I tell you, Pasadena was just like Atlanta, except they lie even more.

LIZ

(turning back)

When do I get to see more of your handsome husband?

MERRY

Later. We're having a party for you and...

(pointedly, back at Doug)

... he's agreed not to work for just a minute or two.

LIZ
A party?

8
CONT'
(3)

MERRY
This afternoon. You're my only
friend who's a celebrity.

LIZ
A very minor celebrity.

MERRY
It'll do these folks good.
They're all such major ones.

Liz smiles at Doug as Merry drags her into the house.

INT. BEACH HOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

9

Carrying her makeup kit, Liz walks down the hallway and
opens the bathroom door. She stops short. She sees Debby
and Merry in the bath together, bubbles forever. The two
look up in surprise at Liz.

LIZ
I'm sorry.

MERRY
We're just going to be a minute,
honey.

LIZ
I'm not used to people in my
bathroom. I should have knocked.

Ignoring her friend's embarrassment, Merry digs at Debby's
ear with a cloth.

MERRY
This is the only way I can get
in close on the really serious
dirt.

DEBBY
Ow!

Liz steps back, closing the door slowly, watching them,
touched by the sight of mother and daughter sharing a
bubble bath. Merry looks up as she's about to be closed
from sight.

MERRY
Liz?

The door reopens.

LIZ
Huh?

MERRY
You do go to all the places, don't you sometimes?

LIZ
What kind of places?

MERRY
Well, Four Seasons, and, you know, where they dance and the boys and the girls all look alike. Places you read about in Vogue.

LIZ
Not too much, no.

MERRY
What do you do?

LIZ
I, ah, have dinner with friends a lot. But they don't seem to read Vogue. We never know where to eat.

MERRY
(wrinkles her nose)
That's the problem with living there.

LIZ
What?

MERRY
You don't get to stay in a nice hotel.

Merry closes in on her daughter's other ear. Liz nods, agreeing, closing the door.

CUT TO:

INT. BEACH HOUSE - DAY

10

The interior of the house is crowded with SHOW BIZ TYPES, a la 1969. Love beads, bell-bottoms. Liz is standing to one side, the place filled with noise, Merry being the hostess, Doug pouring drinks at a bar.

Merry comes speeding up to Liz with KENT in tow, a tall, toothsome young man in a patterned Nehru.

MERRY

This is Kent, but don't fall all over yourself, because it embarrasses him.

KENT

Hi.

He gives her the benefit of his smile.

LIZ

Don't worry. I only know how to embarrass myself.

KENT

I'm sorry I haven't read any of your books.

LIZ

There's only been one.

MERRY

It's marvelous, even the parts I don't understand.

KENT

(with a leer)
What parts?

LIZ

Parts unknown.

Merry drags Kent along. He's reluctant, wanting to share more of his winning smile with Liz.

MERRY

I told you she was special.

(calling)

Doug! Karen is about to die of thirst.

Liz wanders over to Doug, watches him busying with drinks.

LIZ

How're you doing?

DOUG

(big smile)
I'm drunk.

LIZ
I'm sorry.

DOUG
I'm not.

LIZ
(offering her glass)
Let me catch up.

DOUG
(taking glass)
You shouldn't be talking to
the help. Half of Hollywood
is here.

LIZ
Yeah, well one-fourth is so
involved in the other fourth,
they're ignoring me.

DOUG
You want to go for a walk?

LIZ
Merry won't mind?

Doug shrugs: Don't be silly. He puts down his barbecue
apron, steers Liz towards the door, calling to Merry across
the party.

DOUG
Your turn.

MERRY
(turning from guests)
I'm right in the middle of a
story!

Out they go. Merry gives them a dirty look.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEACH - DAY

11

Doug walks up on a rock formation, sits to look out at the
surf. Liz pulls up next to him.

DOUG
How's the book coming?

LIZ
The first hundred pages? Terrific.

LIZ (contd)
I've written them over, five
times in five years.

DOUG
'Is that how you normally write?

LIZ
I don't write normally. I'm
what you call blocked. Isn't
that humorless?

DOUG
What about the Frenchman? You
still into him?

LIZ
Hey, you talk hippie talk.

DOUG
That's California talk. I think.
(Looks at her)
Are you?

She is uncomfortable.

LIZ
I used to be very young...
(half mocking)
and Paris was very old.
(he waits for her, she
grows more serious)
He was intense. I was shy. He
did all the work.

DOUG
And now?

She shrugs, looks out at the sun to avoid his gaze.

LIZ
They ought to warn you before
they let you fall in love. I
mean for the first time. You
can pick the godawfullest one.
And you don't recover. Not
from the first. Never.

DOUG
What comes after the Frenchman?

LIZ
Nothing for the moment. I got

LIZ (contd)
no lover, but I got a therapist.

11
CONT'
(3)

DOUG
Now that's humorless.

LIZ
He says when I start writing
again, I'll start loving -- what
he said was, fucking again.
Excuse me, Doug, the man's a
Freudian.

DOUG
Maybe it's the other way around.
When you start -- loving --
again, you'll start writing.

LIZ
I suggested that.

DOUG
What'd he say?

LIZ
He said not writing is my problem.

They laugh. Doug puts his hand on hers. She notices it.

EXT. BEACH - SUNSET

12

The sun is setting. Liz and Doug amble up the beach towards
the house. Debby comes running out of the patio to join
them. She takes both their hands.

Marry comes out of the patio, spots the interlocked three-
some, and walks with effort through the sand towards them.
She is not happy.

DOUG
We missing the party?

MERRY
The party's over.

LIZ
I'm sorry.

MERRY
It is the habit of this community
to be suspicious. When a married
man goes off with a married woman's

MERRY (contd)
best friend, that is the occasion
for suspicion.

12
CONT'
(2)

DOUG
We better move. 'Cause I'm not
changing my habits.

He drops Debby's hand, stalks off. Liz looks miserable.
Merry, furious, grabs Debby's free hand.

CUT TO:

INT. BEACH HOUSE - NIGHT

13

Heavy silence. Doug is buried in a book, drink in hand.
The Johnny Carson Show drones just in front of him. Be-
hind him and across the room, Merry and Liz sit at a fornica
table. A bottle of scotch on the table.

Liz sips a diluted drink, glances occasionally over at the
TV. Merry is embroidering, wearing her harlequin glasses.

Doug stands, turns off TV and heads out. He passes the table.
Without looking up, Merry speaks.

MERRY

Kiss.

Doug stops, leans down, gives her a kiss on the cheek.

MERRY

I'm not mad at you anymore.

DOUG

Good.

He gives her another kiss, a better one. She smiles.

LIZ

Thank you, Doug.

DOUG

Thank you.

He gives her a smile, goes out. Merry spreads her embroidery,
an elaborate sampler, on the table. Liz admires it, is awe-
struck, really, by the complex work. She looks up at her
friend, smiles.

LIZ

Thank you, Merry.

MERRY

For what?

LIZ

Being there. One year I come running from Paris, you're there. Another time I want to crawl into a hole until the reviews come out, you open the door. And that party!

MERRY

That Little party? Forget it.

LIZ

I always thought if my books were a big success, I'd buy you a mink coat.

MERRY

Sable.

LIZ

All right, sable.

MERRY

It was a big success. You were in Newsweek, honey.

LIZ

There's lots of broke people in Newsweek.

MERRY

Some of these movie folks knew your name. They're all rich and famous, but you're only famous. That's harder to do.

Liz pours herself some scotch.

LIZ

All the good things happen to you. A handsome husband. A beautiful little girl. And you know how to sew.

Liz adds a splash more. Merry watches this.

MERRY

You gonna drink?

LIZ
(surprised)
Just a... something wrong?

MERRY
I wanted to talk.

LIZ
I can drink and talk. Go.

MERRY
Liz, honey, I'm so proud of the way you've turned yourself out.

LIZ
I sound like a table leg.

MERRY
I mean, what do I do? Sit here and sew like my grandmother and kiss my husband goodbye on the way to work.

LIZ
And have Rock Hudson to tea.

MERRY
Come on, they're just folks here. They all got problems, same as you and me.

LIZ
We could debate that.

MERRY
Now take that nice fellow, my little neighbor next door.

LIZ
That nice fellow may be just a neighbor to you, but he shows up in a lot of ladies' dreams.

MERRY
That's just the point. Just because he's a star actor, that doesn't mean he's happy. Really. He's always moping around the beach, coming in here for tuna fish.
(she stands)
He's got lots of time to sit home and worry.

LIZ

About what?

13
CONT'
(4)

Merry opens a closet door, goes in. We hear her rummaging.

MERRY

(inside closet)

He has had three wives, not one of them worth spit... he has become far too familiar with drugs, some of which... he puts in his nose...

She emerges from the closet, carrying a large Bonwit box.

MERRY

Here, let me show you.

She dumps the box on the table. Liz grabs the bottle and glass to keep them from being knocked over. Merry lifts open the box, rummages through handwritten pages. Liz watches in surprise. Merry puts on her harlequin glasses.

MERRY

Here's the part about Kent.

Let me see -- ~~hmm~~ ~~hmm~~ ~~hmm~~ --

She's reading rapidly, stops, looks up over her glasses at Liz.

MERRY

Maybe I should start from the beginning.

LIZ

Start what? What is this?

Merry sits, sounding sudden plaintive.

MERRY

Oh, Liz, I know it sounds silly, but this is a novel, this whole box.

LIZ

(disbelieving)

How wonderful.

MERRY

Oh no, it doesn't have all the commas in place like yours, but it's something I feel real serious

MERRY
about. These folks around here,
they come down here and sit on
this beach and it's no different
from down home. They got problems,
honey. They tell them to me,
'cause I like to listen.

LIZ
And then you write about them?

MERRY
I changed all the names.

LIZ
Good.

MERRY
You don't want to hear this.

LIZ
It's easier if I read it.

MERRY
Oh no, it's all a mess. I
better read it.

LIZ
The whole thing?

MERRY
Oh Liz, would you mind? Let's
just start and see how far we
get. Okay? You're going to
hate this, but...

She picks up some sheets. Liz pours herself a little scotch.
Merry notes this, ignores it, sort of.

MERRY
Okay?

LIZ
Sure.

MERRY
It's got a title. It's called
A House By the Sea. You know,
to make you think of Malibu.
(Liz nods solemnly,
Merry starts)
'This was a first for Lynette

MERRY (contd)

Jordan. Her first trip to New York. Her first visit to the Plaza Hotel. Being a girl from Dallas, she marched into that hotel drinking room with all the arrogance of Texas money --

(notices Liz pouring more scotch)

You're not getting drunk, are you?

LIZ

I'm listening, I'm listening.

Liz narrows her eyes, concentrating on what Merry is reading. There is an element of disbelief in her expression.

MERRY

'As she sat there fingering the olive in her crystal clear drink, she was wearing a hat in the shape of a Statson. But this was no cowboy hat. It was made of mink. The little animals who gave up their lives to make her hat had all come off age in Siberia...'

Merry reads earnestly. Liz watches her with slow concentration as would, say, a snake its charmer.

DISSOLVE TO:

THE SAME - DAWN

The sea and beach out the window have turned grey with dawn. Liz is in a butterfly chair, facing the beach, an empty glass propped on her belly. Indefatigable at the formica table, is Merry, turning the last page.

MERRY

'... there was the sand at her feet, and as many as the grains of that sand, were the memories of her years... Brad... Elliot... Gerald, in and out of her life as the tide that came now to wash at her feet... gone seemed to say the lapping tide, all gone but her memories and this, her simple house by the sea...'

Merry lets the sheet come to rest on the table. She's moved by her story. She takes off her harlequin glasses, looks over at Liz. Liz does not break her gaze out the window.

Merry gets up, walks over to Liz, sits down on an ottoman next to her. She's anxious.

MERRY

Was it okay?

Liz looks at her, drunk, verging on the maudlin.

LIZ

Why do they always end up alone?

MERRY

Who?

LIZ

Those women, in those stories
... They always end up alone.

Liz starts to sniffle, then cry, then reach for something to wipe her nose. She's making a mess of this. Merry is astonished, trying to figure out whether to be pleased.

MERRY

You liked it?

LIZ

It knocked me out.

MERRY

That's good?

LIZ

The Mona Lisa never knocked
me out.

Liz finishes mopping her nose. Merry is still uncertain of the reaction she's getting.

MERRY

You want some coffee?

LIZ

(getting to her feet,
unsteady)
You got any more scotch?

MERRY

Haven't you had enough?

LIZ
A night cap.
(looking out window)
A morning cap.

Liz crosses to the kitchen area. In one cabinet, she finds a bottle with a little gin left. Merry's eyes narrow.

MERRY
Liz, I don't want you to call me any lies.

LIZ
Don't worry. I have to have sleep to tell a believable lie.

MERRY
You liked my book?

Liz turns to look dead on at Merry.

LIZ
How long did it take you to write it?

MERRY
Oh... almost a year. Wait a minute, I started just before Debby went to... eight months in the afternoons.

LIZ
Eight months in the afternoons.

This sounds like an accusation. Liz comes back, bottle and glass in hand, to flop down in the butterfly chair.

LIZ
What're you going to do with it? Get it published?

MERRY
I was going to ask you.

LIZ
Go ahead. Ask.

MERRY
I don't like your tone, Liz.

LIZ
What's wrong with my tone?

LIZ (contd)
The New York Review of Books said
I was a master of irony.

I 3
CONT'I
(9)

MERRY
Drink your gin and go to sleep.

LIZ
You want me to show the book
to Jules Levi.

MERRY
I want you to do anything you
think is right.

LIZ
Jules Levi is the wrong guy
for you, Merry.

MERRY
Why?

LIZ
All that important tailoring,
he looks like an apple the
butler polishes every day.

MERRY
He's the most impressive publisher
in the business.

LIZ
Let's say he's impressed.

MERRY
Oh, Liz, would you, would you
show it to Jules Levi and tell
him it may not be like some
translation from the Russian
and I haven't just escaped from
the Iron Curtain or something,
but I do know about what it
feels to... to --

LIZ
Have feelings. You know what
it feels like to have feelings.

MERRY
I suppose.

LIZ
It's not a supposition. It's

LIZ (contd)
fact from the master of irony.
Merry Noel Blake knows what it
feels like to have feelings.
That's worth money in the pocket.
But not Jules Levi's pocket. He
has no pockets. Too much expensive
tailoring.

MERRY
Why not Jules Levi?

LIZ
He's interested in something
called serious art. Serious
art. Ask him, he'll tell you
there are only two markets for
serious art in this country --
homosexuals and Jews.

MERRY
That's an ugly thing to say.

LIZ
What? Homosexual or Jew?

Merry gets up, stalks over to the kitchen area.

MERRY
I could smack your face and not
even feel it.

LIZ
Another gin and I wouldn't
either.

Merry grabs a bag of marshmallow cookies out of the
cabinet. She bites into one.

MERRY
What's wrong with me writing
a book, it makes you so jealous,
huh?

LIZ
Nothing. What's wrong with
eight months in the afternoon
learning to balance balls on
your nose? Nothing. Maybe I
should learn to balance balls.
Balls, I should. I'm too busy
writing and rewriting my first

LIZ (contd)
hundred pages for that famous
apple-polished Jules Levi, my
impressed and impressive publisher.
He's been waiting years for my
-- what do they call it -- second
effort.

(she rises unsteadily
to her feet)

Don't you know what it is to be
blocked? Can't you develop a few
hangups? Don't you want to write
major art and knock them out at
the local gay hadassah?

Doug stumbles in, short tarrycloth robe.

DOUG

Did I leave my glasses in here?
Why are you all shouting?

MERRY

Liz is just being a simple bitch,
is what we call it down home.

LIZ

You're not down home, you're
way out west and quit quoting
Atlanta as though it were
gospel. Atlanta has fallen,
haven't you heard? Sherman has
spared us any further wisdom
from that quotable capital of
the South.

MERRY

Give us a quote from Paris in
France, then, Miss Smarty.

LIZ

In Paris in France they had a
guy who was, for the record,
both homosexual and a Jew, who
wrote a seven volume book they
continue to refer to as a
masterpiece, who was such
nitro-glycerin in the head, he
had to hide out in a cork-lined
room or he'da gone up in shrapnel.
Proust, Marcel Proust, from Paris
in France. He had the good grace
to suffer for his art and he didn't

LIZ (contd)
push aside the tuna fish on his
formica kitchen table to write it.

DOUG
Has anybody slept around here?

MERRY
Liz Hamilton, it is my duty to
remind you of a promise you
extracted from me early in our
careers in college. I promised
to call you if you ever went too
far and were in danger of hurting
me. You are too far. Right now.
Apologize.

Liz gets up, heads for the bedroom, grim.

LIZ
I apologize.
(as she passes
Doug)
Tell her I apologize...
(opens a door)
... for a basic lack of honesty.

MERRY
You have been lying.

Turning at door, Liz drunkenly struggles to unravel her
thought.

LIZ
Not yet. I would only be lying
-- if I let you believe -- it
is merely scotch and gin -- that
are making me do -- what I'm
about to do.

MERRY
(deadly)
What are you about to do?

LIZ
Vomit.

She goes out. Doug finds his glasses, pulls them on, looks
at Merry. Merry nods to herself in a knowing way, looks at
Doug.

MERRY
She Liked my book.

She believes this.

CUT TO:

13
CONT'
(13)

INT. L.A. AIRPORT - DAY

14

Doug and Liz are on the moving pedestrian belt. Liz wears dark glasses. They are surrounded by HIPPIES in fringed leather and spacey looks. Doug peers at Liz with concern. She notes this.

LIZ

Don't worry. I'll get sleep
on the plane.

INT. L.A. AIRPORT - WAITING AREA - DAY

15

People are standing up from the waiting area to enter the ramp to the plane. Liz and Doug stand. She takes off her dark glasses, hands them to Doug.

LIZ

Here. Give these back to Merry.
Thank her.

DOUG

I wish I understood you two.

LIZ

Why should you know the secret?
We don't.

Liz shoulders her tote bag. Doug watches her, admiring her, wanting to say something.

DOUG

I'm just sorry.

LIZ

Why? You've been behaving like
a normal human being.

DOUG

I'm sorry you don't live around
here.

Liz tries to read this.

LIZ

You are?

DOUG

It'd be nice for Merry. Having
a friend.

LIZ
Some friend.

15
CONT'D
(2)

DOUG
You're okay.

Liz smiles, gives him a little hug. He puts his arms up, bringing her into him to give her a little more of a hug. Without thought, she puts her head against his chest.

WE go in on her face. She is aware of him: chest, arms, his warmth.

WE note his face. He seems blank yet serious. He lets his chin touch the top of her head.

Liz pulls back, ruffled by the embrace. She adjusts her tote bag, gives him a quick sisterly peck.

LIZ
'Bye.

She joins the passengers heading into the plane. He watches, blank yet serious.

CUT TO:

INT. AIRPLANE - DAY

16

A STEWARDESS makes her way down the aisle of the plane in flight. She is pushing a cart covered with champagne cocktails. She stops at Liz's seat. She is next to the window, a book opened before her.

Beside Liz is MAX, roughly thirty and roughly handsome. A businessman probably, with a close-cropped mustache.

STEWARDESS
Champagne cocktails?

Liz looks up, politely shakes her head.

STEWARDESS
And you, sir?

MAX
Thank you.

He takes a glass, smiles over at Liz.

MAX
You're not drinking?

LIZ
(small smile)
Not this trip.

16
CONT'
(2)

He nods, she looks back at her book. He settles back, sips, closes his eyes. Liz glances up from her book. Yes, he's handsome all right.

THE SAME - LATER

17

Max and Liz are addressing their pre-fab meals. The Stewardess is pouring wine for Max. She moves towards Liz's glass.

MAX
I don't think she's drinking.

LIZ
A little wine, that doesn't count.

MAX
(a smile)
Don't blame me.

LIZ
(another smile)
No, you're blameless.

The Stewardess, a veteran of many miles, takes in this little exchange.

THE SAME - LATER

18

WE ARE IN CLOSE on two wine glasses, close together, as they are being filled. We PULL BACK to discover the pair waiting for the Stewardess to depart so they can resume their conversation. They are serious, almost intimate.

MAX
It's hard at first, sure, it's an adjustment.

LIZ
I can't imagine. Must be really horrible in its way.

MAX
For instance, I've never been able to take this off.

He holds up his left hand, indicating his wedding ring. Liz notes it somberly.

LIZ

How old was she, if you don't
mind saying?

MAX

Twenty-nine. I'm just two years
older.

LIZ

You had kids?

MAX

No, thank God for that.

Liz nods. Max sips, reflects on past years.

THE SAME - LATER

19

It's late in the flight, they have gotten mellow. Scrunched
down, their heads tilted towards each other, they face forward.
The impression is that they are looking at the stars.

MAX

Have you ever known a guy --

The Stewardess leans into frame to pour more wine. The two
seem offended at the interruption. They wait patiently.
The Stewardess moves on.

MAX

You ever known a guy who loved
you so much he'd run up the
stairs, 'cause he couldn't wait
for the elevator?

LIZ

You ran up stairs for your wife?

MAX

Sometimes.

LIZ

(going off)
I've never lived in an elevator
building.

MAX

(a purr)
It can be nice.

LIZ

What?

This is barely a whisper. They are in close, as are we.

19
CONT'
(2)

STEWARDESS (o.s.)
Would you like one last drink
before our approach to Kennedy?

Liz comes out of her daze with a start. Looks up at the
Stewardess, whom we now include.

LIZ
Kennedy?

CUT TO:

INT. LAVATORY - AIRPLANE - DAY

20

Liz is attacking her hair with a brush. She shakes her head.
Puts her lips towards the mirror, smooths them with a finger.
Pulls back. Puts her hands down her shirt front, pulling in
her waist. Frowns, turns from the mirror to open the door.

The door, as it opens, hits Max who is approaching the lavatory
area. Liz is startled.

LIZ
I'm sorry.

MAX
My fault.

There's an Alphonse-Gaston routine as she tries to draw back
into the toilet to let him pass and he tries to back away for
her to come out. The compromise is that he wedges around the
door and the bulkhead, as she pulls back.

Once past the door, he stops as Liz comes out. The pair is
partially blocked from the cabin's view by the door. They
are almost nose-to-nose. They stop an instant, only an in-
stant, aware of their intimate proximity.

STEWARDESS
(on the intercom)
The captain has turned on the
no smoking sign in preparation
for our landing at Kennedy.
We ask at this time that you
return to your seats and
extinguish all smoking materials.

Liz and Max do not move. He leans down, puts his lips on
hers. She makes a move to go, but then accepts his lips.

He takes her in his arms. She is almost crushed by this large man, but she seems not to mind.

The plane tilts gradually, causing them to glide into the lavatory, still kissing. Liz pulls away. Max takes a breath.

20
CONT'
(2)

MAX

I'm sorry.

LIZ

No.

She doesn't want him to be sorry. Thus encouraged, he takes her chin, puts his lips on her lips again. As he does, she gives into it with conviction. With his free hand, he pulls the lavatory door closed behind him.

STEWARDESS (v.o.)

At this time we would like to request that you put your seatbacks in full upright position and make sure that all carry-on luggage is securely under your seats.

Max is now eating his way down Liz's neck. The force of his passion has edged her up on the basin ledge. She puts her hands under his jacket, feeling his body.

STEWARDESS (v.o.)

The sound you hear is the landing gear locking into place and is a normal part of our flight.

INTERCUT - under the plane, the landing gear lowers, locks into place.

Passion is mounting. Liz has her head tilted back against the bulkhead. Max has her shirt front open, muzzling towards her breast. Below frame, he is unbuttoning.

INTERCUT - on the plane's wing, the flaps pop up.

Max's mouth is covering Liz's, her head grinding back into the bulkhead. Much movement below frame.

INTERCUT - the ground comes near the wheels.

Max is thrusting himself against Liz. We see them from shoulder up.

INTERCUT - the plane's wing: two flaps pop up.

Liz gasps for breath. Max's eyes are clenched shut. Movement 20
 heated, from the pair. CONT'
 (3)

INTERCUT - the plane's wheels almost touch down.

Liz starts a low moan, it builds.

INTERCUT - the plane's wheels touch down, bounce up.

Liz's moan goes higher.

INTERCUT - smoke from the plane's wheels as they touch earth for a second time.

Liz's moan reaches its peak. We hear a roar of engines.

STEWARDESS (v.o.)

The sound you hear is the captain reversing engines to retard our forward motion and is a normal part of our flight.

Liz whimpers as Max's engines reach their destination. Gasping and more so.

They remain transfixed against each other, coming down, spent, heavy breathing and a few last whimpers. They both keep their eyes closed.

STEWARDESS (v.o.)

On behalf of Captain Price and the entire flight crew, we want to welcome you to the New York area and to thank you for flying United. We hope your trip has been pleasurable.

CUT TO:

INT. LUGGAGE AREA - JFK - DAY

21

Max is looking down at the suitcases going by. Liz is a few feet away, purposely not looking at him. She's super cool.

She spots her bag, reaches for it. Into frame comes Max, lifting it off the belt.

MAX

I work in the city. Maybe we can -- I don't know your last name.

Liz gives him what she hopes is an intelligent smile.

LIZ

Max, some things are perfect
just as they are.

MAX

What if I give you my number?

LIZ

(tempted)

Well --

Off screen, there's a scream, a child.

CHILD

Daddy! Daddy!

A SMALL BOY rushes up and throws himself against Max's knees.
Max is flabbergasted. Liz is merely surprised.

WOMAN

Max, darling, Max.

A WOMAN hurries up, dragging a SMALL GIRL by one hand. She
gives Max a kiss on the cheek.

WOMAN

Thank God, I thought we were
going to miss you, honey. The
kids fought all the way down the
Sawmill River Parkway, I wanted
to surprise you, but it wouldn't
have been...

She trails off as she notes Liz, right next to her, staring
in fixed astonishment. Max is squinting.

WOMAN

Can I help you?

LIZ

No, no thanks. I've been helped
enough for one day.

She gives Max, the woman, a telling glance and heads off.

CUT TO:

EXT. LUCHOW'S RESTAURANT - DAY

22

The entrance to Luchow's is faded but grand. Union Square,
just beyond is simply faded. Liz makes her way up the walk,
a heavy tote bag over one shoulder.

A blue Mercedes limo is at curbside, a DRIVER lounging against it, smoking. He recognizes Liz, salutes her. She gestures, as if to say, "He's in there?" The Driver nods. Liz hurries into Luchow's.

22
CONT.
(2)

INT. LUCHOW'S RESTAURANT - DAY

23

The dark cavernous interior would be perfect to stage a putsch. A German brass band is comphing among the tables, its rotund members in laderhosen. Liz passes among them, spotting JULES LEVI at a table.

Jules is the Leonard Bernstein of publishing. An impressive mane of salt and pepper hair, Brooks tailoring. As Liz approaches, he rises abruptly, ignoring the hovering WAITER who must jump back out of the way.

JULES

(a perfected smile)

Welcome home, dove. That is a tan.

(he hugs her)

Most New Yorkers never get out of the Polo Lounge out there.

LIZ

I passed out on the beach a lot.

The waiter helps Liz with her tote. Jules grabs it, hefts it to feel its weight.

JULES

For five years I've always had to call you. I've felt like a rejected suitor. At last you call me. With your manuscript. Unbelievable.

LIZ

(guilty)

Not quite.

He plops the bag on the table, not paying attention to what she's said. They sit.

JULES

What're you drinking?

LIZ

Vodka gibbon.

WAITER

Another cassis for you, Mr. Levi?

He dismisses the waiter with a nod.

JULES

When a writer calls her publisher,
it's usually love or money. They've
run out of one or the other.

LIZ

I'm sorry. It's neither.

JULES

You have some money left?

She shrugs, as if to say, A little.

JULES

You're not in love?

LIZ

I've lost my resilience in that
department.

JULES

What do you mean?

LIZ

My trust which, at best, has
always been minimal, is now
totally gone.

JULES

Tsk, tsk. Nothing ventured.

LIZ

I've never found anyone to
compare with you, Jules.

JULES

What's wrong with the original?
You ought to try. I'm terrific.

LIZ

Sarah says so.

JULES

Sarah who?

LIZ

Your wife Sarah.

JULES

I don't know why so many attractive
ladies are more concerned about my
wife's feelings than mine.

The waiter puts down the drinks. He toasts her.

JULES
Your novel.

23
CONT'1
(3)

LIZ
Jules, this isn't mine.

His face falls.

JULES
Oh? I thought you said you
were closing in on it, on the
finish.

LIZ
I am, since I came back from
the Coast I've been possessed
by work. I mean, a couple hours
a day I'm possessed.

JULES
Then what is this?

LIZ
It's by a friend, my oldest
friend. Truly a friend. I
think it has potential.

He's not really interested. He downs his cassis.

JULES
We'll give it to Alan for a
read.

LIZ
I want you to read it, as a
favor.

JULES
(not pleased)
What's it about?

LIZ
(fishing)
Feelings.

JULES
What kind of feelings?

LIZ
The kind of feelings they
have in Malibu.

The word is his mouth is like a spoiled clam.

JULES

Malibu?

23
CONT'
(4)

CUT TO:

INT. BEVERLY HILLS HOUSE - TELEVISION SCREEN - DAY

24

We are in close on a television screen. A head shot of Merry, speaking into camera.

MERRY

Just because I'm from the South, every time I open my mouth some Yankee thinks I sound stupid. Because of the accent? Well, I don't care. I'm not gonna curl up like a salted slug. I'm proud to be from Atlanta. I read Gone With The Wind twice a year.

We CUT to a shot of MIKE WALLACE in his 60 MINUTES background.

WALLACE

Twice a year when Merry Noel Blake pulls out Margaret Mitchell's phenomenal best-seller to read, it is not just to be reminded of home. She may be comparing royalties. Ever since her first book, A HOUSE BY THE SEA, went like a cannon shot through Hollywood, mowing down half of the film capital with its deadly expose, Merry Blake has been establishing more than a writing career. The prolific lady with five torrid best-sellers in as many years, has become a publishing institution. But at what a cost.

During this, we have PULLED BACK SLOWLY to reveal Merry in lounging pants, her knees drawn up, in a lavishly furnished Beverly Hills house. Doug has nodded off to sleep on a couch, an empty glass on the table next to him.

Merry removes a shoe, throws it at him. He wakes with a start, notes her sour face, looks over at the TV.

We CUT to a shot of Kent, the star, on his beach patio.

24

CONT.
(2)

KENT

No, I ah -- I always loved
Marry.. She's a good kid.

WALLACE (v.o.)

Then you didn't feel there is
a slightly altered portrait of
you in her book.

KENT

(half smile)

Do I look like a guy that ah --
teenage girls, I mean, some
poor schmook could get carried
away once in his life, but with
all the daughters of all his
friends, including the daughter
of the studio head? You'd have
to be fruitcake.

WALLACE (v.o.)

Then it is not true your lawyer
was bringing suit against her?

Camera goes in close to watch his eyes narrow down to slits.

KENT

Nah. I was sorry to see her
move out of the Colony.

WALLACE (v.o.)

The Malibu Colony, we will note,
is the setting for her first
novel. Why did she move out?

KENT

I don't know. Some guy set fire
to her car.

WE HOLD on Kent a beat. The edges of his mouth have a twitch.

Doug stands, takes his empty glass, heads off.

MERRY

You're going to miss this.

DOUG

It's rerun. You've seen it
once.

MERRY

Make me one, too.

DOUG

What do you want?

MERRY

Half of whatever you're
drinking.

He doesn't miss the accusation. WE GO with him through an archway into a little alcove with bar. WE CAN SEE part of the living room and the TV.

MERRY

(on TV)

I was a Christmas surprise to my mother, so she named me Merry Noel, you know, M-E-R-R-Y. All the folks down home call me Merry Noel to this day --

Doug pours a drink, downs it straight. He looks up, is startled to see Merry standing in the archway, watching him. Irritated, he pours her a drink.

DOUG

There's your half.

MERRY

You want to go to New York?

DOUG

No.

MERRY

I'm booked onto The Merv Griffin Show.

DOUG

What would I do?

MERRY

What do you do here?

(he reacts)

I'm sorry.

DOUG

I know how you like to affix blame, but I did not close down the project. The lab did. They lost the contract.

MERRY

I said I'm sorry.

DOUG

I've got some interviews coming up. I'll find another slot.

MERRY

Sometimes words just slide out of my mouth.

DOUG

Like a snake out of its hole.

Liz appears on the distant TV. Drawn by her familiar voice, they turn their heads to watch.

LIZ

I guess you could say we have been thrilled by each other, both of us.

WALLACE

Then there's no sense of competition between old friends?

LIZ

(with a smile)

When she first went with my publishing house, we made an agreement to divide the language in half. I got all the adjectives.

WALLACE

Why?

LIZ

She said the verbs were too hot for me to handle.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

25

There's enough light spilling in through the window to silhouette Doug and Merry in bed. Doug is facing up. Merry is facing him.

MERRY

Home cookin'... you like it?

DOUG

Hmmm?

MERRY

Home Cookin'. That's the title.
It's going to be about mama.

DOUG

Yeah.

MERRY

I'm trying to remember why it
was -- she kept seeing papa over
the years, I mean, she'd been
married three more times and
was living with her last husband,
and she snuck off to a motel to
see papa. She was sixty. My
God. She was driven.

DOUG

(barely responding)
Um-hum.

MERRY

I wonder.

DOUG

What?

MERRY

She must have loved papa.

DOUG

You never recover from the first
person you fall in love with.

MERRY

Why, Doug... you know that?

DOUG

No.

MERRY

You said it.

DOUG

Liz told me.

MERRY

You and Liz talk about love?

DOUG

We did.

MERRY
When?

25
CONT'E
(3)

DOUG
Some years ago.

Stillness. If possible, we can sense Merry thinking. She moves her hand over her husband's chest. He is unresponsive. She strokes his face. Slowly, he raises his hand to cover hers. She lifts up, kisses his forehead. He tilts his chin up. They kiss.

They pull together, making love. They both seem anxious, as though this were a remembered act.

Suddenly Merry sits up, leaving Doug's arm awkwardly in the air, in a broken embrace. She puts her feet on the floor.

MERRY
I'm sorry... don't go away.

She gives him a brief kiss and hurries out of the room, into the bathroom, turns on the light which spills into the bedroom. Doug's arm drops, a gesture of defeat.

INT. BATHROOM

26

Merry closes the door behind her. She flushes the toilet. (She's wearing a nightgown, by the way.)

She opens a door on the opposite side of the bathroom, entering her workroom.

INT. WORKROOM

27

She turns on a light in her workroom. Books, papers, a large blackboard. Across the top of the blackboard: HOME COOKIN'. Below it, much scribbling about plot.

Merry hurries over, picks up a piece of chalk and writes in a free space: Mama at motel: first love!!!

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

28

Merry crawls back into bed. Doug is on his side, facing away from her. Merry scoots up next to him, puts her arm over him.

MERRY
(solicitous)
Doug?

DOUG

Mmm.

MERRY

I'm sorry.

DOUG

(almost asleep)

Mmm.

MERRY

I thought you wanted...

She trails off.

DOUG

I finished.

MERRY

(her eyes bug open)

Without me?!

No response from Doug. She gives him an angry shove with two hands, and flops over on her side, putting them butt to butt. She lets out a long breath.

CUT TO:

INT. MERV GRIFFIN SHOW - NEW YORK - DAY

29

Doug, wearing a raincoat, stands in the wings of the Merv Griffin Show. He watches a small monitor at knee level, even though, were he to lift his eyes, he could see MERV and Merry out on stage.

MERV

You have a daughter yourself.

MERRY

Yes, she's fourteen.

MERV

What advice do you give her about -- well, about boys?

MERRY

I tell her what my mama told me. If you get to thinkin' too much about boys, go out and get on the back of a horse.

Merv gives her a look of mock astonishment. The audience laughs, the laugh builds. Merv milks it. The audience bursts into applause.

Doug looks up from the monitor, at the stage, at the audience. 29
He doesn't feel like laughing. He turns away. CONT'

(2)

CUT TO:

EXT. THE LITTLE THEATRE - DAY

30

Doug comes out of the Merv Griffin studio onto a crowded side street in the theatre district. He heads up towards Times Square.

CUT TO:

EXT. MINETTA LANE - GREENWICH VILLAGE - DAY

31

Doug gets out of a cab on a curving sidestreet of Greenwich Village that looks like a corner of Utrillo's Paris. He enters an iron gate into a small courtyard.

CUT TO:

INT. LIZ'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

32

All burners are occupied with bubbling pots in Liz's closet-size kitchen. She scoops instant coffee into a mug. She pours water off boiling potatoes to make her coffee. Gulps it, makes a face.

From the other room is heard an old blues record, Bessie Smith. Liz leans down, opens the oven, checking a roasting bird. She stands, does a little grind as she sings along with Bessie, something gravelly and raucous.

The door buzzer sounds. She looks startled.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

33

Coffee in hand, Liz hurries to the door. We note her living room is Greenwich Village eclectic. A few good pieces, a few brave plants. A battered upright piano against one wall, a book with BRAHMS prominent on it.

She opens the door. Doug is there, looking heavy, possibly drunk. She registers surprise, kisses him.

LIZ

You're early.

He pulls her back to him, gives her a little better kiss. What does that mean? She's not sure. He wanders in. Liz spots her bike in the middle of the room, a sweatshirt draped over it. She goes for it.

LIZ
You're not at the Merv Griffin
Show?

DOUG
I stepped out for a drink.

Liz's expression tells us this is not news to her.

LIZ
I was about to have one myself.

DOUG
Me, too.

Doug crosses to a cabinet to get scotch. Liz takes this opportunity to polish off her coffee, stick the mug in the bike's saddle bag and wheel the whole business into the adjoining bedroom. She quickly closes the door.

LIZ
I thought you were sticking
with Merv. She never remembers
how to get down here.

He hands her a drink. He slumps down his own.

DOUG
She can figure out how to find
a local book store in Satsuma,
Florida. I'm not worried.

LIZ
I never figured out whether I
like you better drunk or sober.

He shrugs. The sound of a boiling pot sends Liz for the kitchen. Doug goes for more scotch. We hear banging in the kitchen.

LIZ (c.s.)
Please God, don't let me burn
this bird!

DOUG
All the times we've been back
here, I never see you in the
kitchen.

Doug sprawls in a chair as Liz returns to the room. She sits in an over-stuffed chair next to him.

LIZ
I don't go in the kitchen. The

LIZ (contd)
roaches talk about me.

DOUG
I'm thinking about moving back here. I'm not afraid of cockroaches.

LIZ
You're kidding.

DOUG
They always run when I turn on the light. They're afraid of me.

LIZ
I mean about moving back here.

DOUG
There's an opening at the Rockefeller Institute. I'm going in to see them.

LIZ
Marry wants to live in New York?

DOUG
I don't know. I never asked her.

LIZ
Don't you think you should?

He chooses not to hear this. He scoots his chair around so it is more in line with hers. She feels slightly crowded.

DOUG
I have this fantasy, if I work back here, I can come by, you can incinerate a bird --

LIZ
Where's Marry going to be?

DOUG
She can fly in between books.

LIZ
Oh yeah?

DOUG
That's what she does anyway, flies in between books.

LIZ

Naughty.

DOUG

Or I can cook. Did I tell you,
I used to read Gourmet magazine?

LIZ

Let me ask you something.

DOUG

I'm thinking if I can get a place
here, I can cook duck or, or
cherries jubilee --

LIZ

Sounds gay.

DOUG

And invite you.

LIZ

You have this idea you can move
away from Merry, between books,
that is, and invite her oldest
friend over for duck --

DOUG

And cherries jubilee!

LIZ

Right. And then what? Where
does your fantasy go then?

He fingers his glass.

DOUG

I told you, way back in college,
when I started going with Merry,
if ever you --

She quickly puts her fingers on his lips to stop him.

LIZ

And then you promised you
would never tell me again.

He takes hold of her hand, not letting her fingers move
from his lips.

DOUG

I Lied.

They look at each other for a space which Bessie Smith fills with low, grinding blues. His lips move minimally, an almost imperceptible kissing of her fingers. It's hard to say whether their expressions read misery or desire. CONT (5)

There is a serious knock on the door, followed by the buzzer. They freeze, fingers still in place.

LIZ

Merry.

Liz gets up, hurries to the door. Doug grabs his drink and flops back on the couch, throwing his feet up on the arm. He looks straight up.

Merry rushes in, trailing a floor-length mink. She strides past Liz to the couch. She doesn't disguise her fury.

MERRY

The limousine driver had no idea where Minetta Lane was, he had to stop and ask a cab. I got so damned angry I took the cab and then that damn fool couldn't even find the Village --

(looks down at Doug)

I see you found your way down here.

DOUG

Liz has some wonderful scotch.

LIZ

You want a drink, Mar?

MERRY

No, and he doesn't either.

Why did you give him liquor?

Liz decides, with effort, not to reply.

DOUG

She also sacrificed a chicken.

MERRY

You're drunk.

DOUG

After careful examination of the chicken's innards, she predicted clear days for us all. A patch of perfect weather.

Merry whips off her mink in a fury. She strides towards the bedroom.

LIZ
I'll take it.

33
CONT
(6)

Too late. Merry slams open the bedroom door. Liz follows.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

34

Merry clicks on the light. A mayhem: odd pieces of furniture and boxes shoved in. The bike in the foreground. Merry strides around the clutter, throws her mink on the bed. Liz enters.

LIZ
I took a dexamil and cleaned house today.

MERRY
You did all this in one day?

LIZ
The dexi did it. I just watched.

Merry's eye falls on Hamburger, the old bear, sitting at the head of the bed among the debris. She softens, is about to comment on it, when she notes Doug at the door. He is pulling on his coat.

DOUG
Good night.

As quickly as he appeared, he disappears. Merry rushes out through the obstacle course, her fury returned. Liz knows what's coming.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

35

Doug is at the door. Merry's look is a demand for explanation.

DOUG
I'm going back to the hotel.

MERRY
Why?

DOUG
I've got an interview tomorrow.
I want to go and drink myself
to sleep. Alone.

MERRY
Do you have any idea how far
away you are from sleeping on
park benches?

LIZ

Oh, Merry, come on.

MERRY

(turning her fury
on Liz)

I wish you weren't always quite
so ready with a scotch and a
backscratch for 'poor Doug.'

DOUG

Poor Doug likes his back
scratched.

MERRY

It is, I am told, the spirit of
affection and not the spirits
of the distillery that comfort
the soul.

LIZ

Brother.

MERRY

(to Liz)
Could you please help in that?

LIZ

The decor may have thrown you
off, but this is not Bellevue
and I don't claim responsibility
for the toxic level of my guests.

MERRY

You can't imagine what it's
been since he drank himself
out of his job at the lab.

DOUG

Bullshit! I never drank to
do my job at the lab.

MERRY

Ha!

DOUG

I only drink to perform my
job as husband.

MERRY

Then you better bring a bottle
to bed next time.

Liz whistles.

LIZ

What say we eat?

MERRY

Blame me! It's clear to everyone he blames me for what turns out to be, to my everlasting surprise, something missing in his character.

DOUG

What's missing are a few intimate parts of my anatomy.

MERRY

Disgusting.

DOUG

And for that, I do blame myself. If I hadn't offered 'em up, you never could have sliced them off.

MERRY

(a rage)

You're lucky I don't have something here to slice you up.

Doug goes into a fury. He stalks into the kitchen as Liz watches in fright. Merry stands firm. WE HEAR him slamming drawers. He comes out with a butcher knife. He turns the handle to Merry. She ignores it.

He forces it into her hand. She drops the knife to the floor, a sudden example of calm rationality.

MERRY

How very stupid.

DOUG

It's a scene from one of your books, Merry Noel. And it ain't stupid, it's just trash.

MERRY

Trash!

DOUG

Trash!

MERRY

You said trash!

DOUG
Trash!

MERRY
Successful trash!

DOUG
Goddamn right! Put together
enough trash, you get some
major garbage.

Merry goes bananas now. She picks up the knife, runs at him. He stands his ground. She pokes at his coat with the knife. He merely looks at it. She makes an ugly noise in her throat.

This is what he wanted, apparently, for now he smiles and walks out, leaving Merry knife in hand.

Liz goes over, takes the knife out of Merry's hand. She tries to embrace her friend, but Merry remains rigid, doing a reprise of the throat noises. Liz embraces her anyway, patting her back.

Suddenly, Liz breaks away, runs into the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN

36

Liz pulls the bird out of the oven. It is black and smouldering. She plops the whole thing on the stove top.

She is startled to hear music being pounded out on the spinet. Curious, she picks up her drink, goes back into the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM

37

Liz approaches Merry who is pounding madly away on the spinet, playing something insane like NOLA. Liz sits next to her, watching her pound. Liz sips her drink.

MERRY
Trash!

Liz shrugs, as if to say, "Forget it." Merry pounds on.

MERRY
Trash, my ass!

Liz drinks. The music is deafening.

CUT TO:

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - THE FOUNTAIN - DAY

38

The large fountain in mid-park. Boaters on the pond beyond.

Doug is sitting on a bench. Liz approaches slowly up the walk. Doug spots her, stands, hurries towards her.

38
CONT:
(2)

They stop on the walk as Doug takes her hands, looks at her. He leans to kiss her. She gives him her cheek. They are awkward. He continues to hold her hands.

DOUG

I had the interview.

LIZ

Oh, yes?

DOUG

It wasn't right.

LIZ

I'm sorry. Really sorry.

DOUG

It's probably best. I'm going down to Houston. There's a NASA position that sounds like it might be right.

A silence comes over the conversation. Liz is not sure why she's here, what to say. Doug goes on.

DOUG

That means I'll live in Texas. Assuming...

Another silence, then:

LIZ

You're really serious about this, with Merry?

DOUG

Yes.

Liz clouds up, takes her hands back.

DOUG

We gave it fifteen years. You can't say that wasn't serious.

LIZ

You're not going to tell her?

DOUG

We talked it out -- shouted it out. Last night.

LIZ
I mean about NASA.

DOUG
Will you tell her?

LIZ
That's why you asked me here?

DOUG
No.

He looks at her, telling her by his look why he asked her.
She avoids his look, stares down.

LIZ
No, Doug, please don't start
any more of that fantasy business.

DOUG
Why don't you let me be your
friend?

She smiles, trying to lighten this up.

LIZ
You are my friend.

DOUG
Close friend. You need a close
friend.

LIZ
You and Merry are both my close
friends.

DOUG
You know what the end of my
fantasy is?

LIZ
Doug --

DOUG
Merry divorces me --

She puts her hand against his cheek.

LIZ
Please stop.

DOUG
And you forget about being
Merry's friend and you marry me.

He puts his hand against her cheek. She turns her head slightly, putting her lips against his hand.

38
CONT.
(4)

LIZ

Doug, oh sweet, you're scaring
the shit out of me.

A hundred yards behind Liz, the blue limo pulls up to a stop on one of those side roads that cross the park. Our jumps Merry. She spots them, shouts something, hurries towards them.

Noting the surprise/anger on Doug's face, Liz wheels around. She spots Merry advancing.

DOUG

You told her you were meeting
me?

LIZ

I had to.

DOUG

Why?

LIZ

Fifteen years.

(he turns to go)

Shouldn't I tell her something?

DOUG

Goodbye.

He gives her a last sad look, hurriedly goes off down the walk. Liz stands her ground as Merry comes up, breathless.

MERRY

Doug! Wait!

Liz puts out a hand to stop her.

LIZ

He's gone, Merry.

MERRY

Did you tell him I'll forgive
him?

LIZ

He's on his way to Texas.

MERRY

Texas!

LIZ

He's got a job interview. In Texas.

MERRY

Did you tell him I'll forgive everything he said?

LIZ

He doesn't want to talk. He's leaving. Left. He's left.

We can still see him making his way across the park.

MERRY

Left what?

LIZ

Oh sweet, he said he's left the marriage. You all talked it out.

MERRY

Stupid man, he said stupid things, I'm willing to --

LIZ

Go. Go get him.

Liz gives her a little shove. Merry hesitates.

MERRY

Did he say anything more?

LIZ

Goodbye.

Liz turns from Merry, goes across a patch of grass to sit on a boulder. Merry stares in the direction Doug is going.

MERRY

Goodbye? That's it?

LIZ

Goodbye.

With her hands on her hips, tucking back her billowing mink, she glowers at the retreating Doug. She turns, stomps across the grass to face Liz.

MERRY

What am I going to do?

LIZ

You're going to miss him
terribly.

MERRY

I don't want to! I hate to
be unhappy!

(wheels, shouts)

You are making me unhappy and
I'm gonna hate you for it!

(louder)

I'm gonna hate you, Doug! I
hate you!

She flops to the grass, mink and all, shouts at the ground.

MERRY

I hate Texas!

She rocks in her misery, staring down at the ground. Liz
watches in distress.

MERRY

Oh, Liz, we were a good
marriage. Everyone said so.
I don't mean just the magazines.
Our friends. Everyone. Didn't
you think we were happy? Now
what are they going to say?
What can they say? Something
more than was happy gone to
waste. It's the times. Oh
God, what ugly times we live
in. Another broken home. I
never wanted to be a statistic.

She looks up at Liz, some of her old fight returning.

MERRY

Make a new life. Isn't that
what abandoned ladies always
do? To hell with that. I'll
keep the same life with just
a piece missing. Break off a
piece.

(gestures)

I got my career. My daughter.
I got you, my friend. Oh Liz,
you'll be a friend, won't you?
Of course you will. What a
stupid question. Old friends.
Like always. Huh?

LIZ
Of course. Old friends.

38
CONT'
(7)

As Merry looks up from the desolate ground at Liz, Liz looks off in the distance over Merry's head.

WE SEE what Liz is watching: the distant sight of Doug as he disappears around a bend in the walk.

WE SEE Liz. She is in silent tears.

CUT TO:

EXT. HARVEST HOUSE - NEW YORK - DAY

39

WE HOLD on what looks like a townhouse/embassy. East Side, Manhattan. High iron gates, a drive curving to the entrance. Bold letters on the facade: HARVEST HOUSE.

SUPER LEGEND:

NEW YORK
1980

Liz hurries up the walk through scattered patches of snow and through the gate. A BLACK KID passes, disco blaring from his shoulder-strap radio.

CUT TO:

INT. PARLOR/BOARDROOM - DAY

40

The boardroom is a converted parlor. As Liz enters, she is greeted by three figures seated by the fire.

SHEILAH ANTILLES, a functionary of a certain age; MARTIN FORNAM, an old-time activist and present day best-seller, rumpled; JUDY KRAMER, a hard young woman writer who smokes without cease and knows what's going on.

LIZ
Hello. Sorry.

MARTIN
Liz is late.
(to Sheilah Antilles)
Take a little off her vote, huh?

LIZ
Sorry, Sheilah. I've forgotten how long it takes to get around in this city.

JUDY
How are the ducks and the pigs?

LIZ

(removing coat, sitting)
I have a mill pond, it's for
mills, not for ducks.

JUDY

I'd be damned if I'd live in
Connecticut without something
that said moo.

MARTIN

Ducks and pigs don't go moo.

JUDY

See what I know?

SHEILAH

If I can get down to what is
called serious business --

MARTIN

(to Liz)
Where'd they put you up?

SHEILAH

-- the rules of the American
Book Award --

LIZ

The Algonquin.

SHEILAH

-- which I must read.

JUDY

Sheilah, you have every good
intention, we know, but you're
not going to read the rules.
We know the rules.

SHEILAH

It is not my intention to bore
you --

JUDY

Then don't.
(sharp looks from Liz
and Martin)
Sorry.

SHEILAH

We have until December 31 to
announce the best work of American

SHEILAH (contd)
fiction for the year. All of
you, as previous winners --
(picks up papers)
-- are expected to --

JUDY
She's going to do it.

LIZ
I have a question. Some books
won't be in publication until
the last week of December --

SHEILAH
We have advance copies.

LIZ
One of those is Merry Blake's
HOME COOKIN'. It's already
started to get remarkable press --

MARTIN
Can you believe that woman has
ground out sausage for ten years
and suddenly a book comes out --

LIZ
That woman is a friend of mine.

JUDY
It's not your fault she wrote
something good.

MARTIN
Good? My God, it's the first
time in a decade that Mailer
and Vidal agreed on something.
Did you hear the Vidal quote?

JUDY
What?

LIZ
Enough. Please.

MARTIN
He said at last she has written
from her heart and decided to
bypass the obstruction of her
brain.

JUDY
(dryly)
Funny.

LIZ

I just wanted to register with you if you feel I should disqualify myself --

MARTIN

If anyone should disqualify himself, it should be me.

SHEILAH

What do you mean, Martin?

MARTIN

You know about me and Anita Turner.

SHEILAH

No.

Martin is incredulous, disappointed really.

JUDY

Who gives a flying finger about you and Anita? It only made the slicks when she turned up under Vonnegut.

MARTIN

That's patently absurd. She went directly from Styron to me.

JUDY

Martin, be a big boy.

MARTIN

You be a big boy.

He wishes he hadn't said that. Judy narrows her eyes.

LIZ

I just wanted you all to be warned. My old friend Merry has taken a suite at the Pierre and intends to lobby the entire city for this award. She's got Jules Levi lined up to throw a series of what she calls opinion forming parties.

JUDY

Well, we're the only three who can be impressed by such tactics.

Liz settles back, pulls out a cigarette.

LIZ

That's a cold statement of truth.

Sheillah takes up the sheaf again.

SHEILAH

When the American Book Award was first formed, it was the intention of the charter --

The three jurors give up, settle back, look at Sheillah with impatience.

CUT TO:

INT. ALGONQUIN HOTEL - LOBBY - DAY

41

The lobby of the Algonquin is crowded with leather chairs and low tables, the area serviced by WAITERS from the restaurant beyond. It's a tweedy, conservative crowd.

Liz strides up to the desk. The CLERK hands her a pile of message slips. He ducks below counter as she riffles through slips.

LIZ

Merry, Merry, Merry... and Merry. Right.

The Clerk comes up with a large bundle.

CLERK

A messenger brought this for you.

Liz looks at the return address.

LIZ

The American Book Award.

CLERK

And this.

He hoists another bundle, smaller. Liz shakes her head.

LIZ

Books.

CLERK

And there's a man waiting to see you.

Who? LIZ

CLERK
(checking)
Ah, Mr. Adams.

LIZ
I'm sorry, who?

CLERK
(reading)
Christopher Adams.

LIZ
Who is that?

CLERK
He's right over there. Next
to the column.

Liz turns. SHE SEES: A well-dressed BUSINESSMAN standing next to a post, a briefcase held by two hands in front of him. Next to him a YOUNG GUY is scrunched down in a massive leather wing back.

Leaving her bundles behind, Liz crosses to the Businessman.

LIZ
Mr. Adams?

BUSINESSMAN
No, I'm sorry.

LIZ
Aren't you Christopher Adams?

BUSINESSMAN
No.

CHRIS
I am.

The Young Man slowly unfolds from the depths of the leather chair.

Liz watches with surprise as CHRIS ADAMS stands to his modest height. He's goofy looking, perhaps attractive to his high school sweetheart. He's wearing windbreaker, levis and Adidas. He has short hair.

He puts out his hand. Liz shakes with him.

CHRIS

Chris Adams.

LIZ

Liz Hamilton.

That's it. He turns, picks up a cassette recorder off the chair, slings the strap over one shoulder. Liz watches, her curiosity mounting.

CHRIS

You want to do it down here
or go up to your room?

The Businessman tries not to react to this question. Liz notes his admirable restraint.

LIZ

Do what?

CHRIS

You don't remember our
appointment?

LIZ

No, I don't remember our
appointment.

CHRIS

That's all right.

LIZ

It's better than all right. It's
terrific. Nice meeting you.

She turns away, goes up to desk.

CLERK

Do you want a bellboy for these,
Miss Hamilton?

CHRIS

(coming up)
I got 'em.

LIZ

(tasty)
You the messenger from the ABA?

CHRIS

I'm from the Stone.

LIZ

The what?

CHRIS

The Rolling Stone. We have an
interview.

Liz puts her hand to her head, stares at the carpet.

LIZ

Chris. Chris Adams. Rolling
Stone. The Rolling Stone. God
yes, I'm sorry.

(looking up)

I'm also sorry, I can't do it.
Not now. I've got -- look.

(indicating bundles)

I have to read all these.

CHRIS

I'll carry 'em up for you.

Liz shrugs, goes towards elevators. Chris takes the heavy
bundles.INT. ELEVATOR - DAYA few OTHERS in the elevator. They ride in silence. Liz
looks over at the goofy kid, smiles a half smile. He nods
solemnly. That's it. Liz looks away. What a strange one
he is.INT. LIZ'S ALGONQUIN SUITE - DAYLiz is on the house phone. Hamburger, the old worn bear,
is sitting on the couch among some of Liz's things. It
travels with her, obviously.Chris lifts the bear to make room for himself to settle on
the couch. He places the tape recorder in front of him.

LIZ

Hello, give me room service,
please.

(to Chris)

Don't turn that on yet.

(he shakes his head)

What do you want to drink?

CHRIS

I don't drink.

LIZ

(incredulous)

Ah. Maybe a soft drink?

CHRIS

(blank)
No.

43
CONT'
(2)

LIZ

Yes, this is Room 418. I'd like a scotch and ah, give me a water to back it. No, give me a double, do you mind? Thank you.

(hangs up, approaches
Chris)

Somebody left some grass around here, if you'd prefer that.

CHRIS

No.

LIZ

I don't know, when they said somebody from the Rolling Stone was coming up, I expected a satin jump suit and two coke spoons coming out of your nose.

CHRIS

(indicating recorder)
I don't have to use this at all, if you don't want.

LIZ

No, I -- how long is this going to take?

CHRIS

Whatever you want. If you don't want to talk now, you can call me later. I'm at the Chaises.

LIZ

What do you mean what I want, I mean you guys -- how old are you, may I ask?

CHRIS

Twenty-two.

LIZ

You look fifteen.

CHRIS

I know.

A silence falls while Liz studies this self-possessed youngster. He returns her gaze.

LIZ
I don't understand why the
interview.

CHRIS
Why?

LIZ
Yeah, why. Why the Stone?
Why me for the Stone?

CHRIS
It was my idea.

LIZ
Yeah?

CHRIS
Uh-huh.

Another silence while Liz gets exasperated.

LIZ
Perhaps you can break through
the language barrier and tell
me what it's all about.

CHRIS
There's a language barrier?

LIZ
I always thought it was a joke,
you know, about your publication
-- the utterances of those who
can't speak written by those
who can't write for those who
can't read.

Chris smiles for the first time.

CHRIS
I wrote that.

LIZ
That's yours?

CHRIS
In one of my interviews.

LIZ
Well, you see?

Meaning, there's a connection between us. As if by some conscious decision we can almost observe, Chris speaks. He speaks without inflection.

43
CONT'
(4)

CHRIS

After your second novel, it was my idea to do a piece on you. There's no one that fits in right where you do. They wanted a woman in the arts, and there were others with more visibility, but I wanted you. You have political anger, yeah, but reason keeps it cool. Especially your small magazine pieces. Your fiction, there's passion right there, but within the parameters of taste again. Or maybe it's art, not taste. You'll tell me. More than any other woman with a public profile, I respect you.

That's it. Liz is stunned. Her brows knit with concentration as though trying to think of an answer to a question.

LIZ

Hummm. If you'll turn that on, maybe we'll get started.
(doorbell rings)
Nope, just a minute. Here comes the scotch.

Liz hurries over to answer the door. There is Debby, Merry's daughter, at eighteen. She gives Liz a kiss.

DEBBY

Aunt Liz.

LIZ

Oh, Debby, come in.

She strides in. She walks and talks like a young Hepburn. We should get the idea that she models herself after her Aunt Liz. She spots Chris, gives him a nonchalant greeting.

DEBBY

Hi.

CHRIS

Hi.

LIZ

This is my favorite niece.

LIZ (contd)

More or less my niece. Daughter
of my friend. Her name's Debby.
This is Chris. From the Rolling
Stone.

DEBBY

Hi.

(to Liz)

Mom didn't call here, did she?

LIZ

Four times.

DEBBY

What'd she say?

LIZ

I don't know. I just got the
messages.

DEBBY

I can tell you right now she's
totally, but totally opposed to
Ginger.

LIZ

Who's she?

DEBBY

Ginger Trinidad. He's this
terrific Puerto Rican playwright.

(to Chris)

You know who he is.

(Chris nods)

He won the Obie Award last year.
He was in the Tombs, you know,
the New York jail --

LIZ

I know.

DEBBY

And he wrote this play about
it.

LIZ

Outside of a few minor details,
what could your mother have
against him?

DEBBY

We're making it, that's what.

DEBBY (contd)
She's got some weird idea I
should save myself for an
astronaut or something.

The doorbell rings again. Liz turns to it as to salvation.

LIZ

Scotch!

She opens the door. In strides Merry, chicer than chic in
whatever Halston is doing these days.

MERRY

Don't you ever answer your
phone?

LIZ

I've been too busy answering the
door.

(indicating the
impassive Chris)
This is Chris Adams.

MERRY

(barely noticing)
How do you do?
(to Debby)
I see you're here.

LIZ

He's from the press.

Merry stops, gives Chris a big smile.

MERRY

How interesting. Which
publication do you write
for?

LIZ

The Rolling Stone.

MERRY

Oh.
(drops her smile,
turns on Liz)
I've been trying to find out
one little piece of information
about what went on today.

LIZ

I guess you mean at the ABA
meeting.

MERRY
(appealing to room)
- She guesses I mean...

LIZ
Merry, you know I can't talk
about it.

MERRY
What did they say?

LIZ
They all like your book, that
much I can say.

MERRY
How much?

LIZ
Oy Jesus.

The doorbell rings again.

LIZ
Please, God.

She hops to the door, opens it. There, in baseball cap and
Army fatigues and what must have been General Grant's great-
coat, stands a skinny Puerto Rican kid. GINGER, we assume.
Liz is beyond surprise.

GINGER
(heavy accent)
Is Debby here?

LIZ
You must be Ginger.

GINGER
You da mudder?

LIZ
No, that's da mudder. I'm
the aunt. Come in.

Ginger takes off his cap, enters. Merry narrows her eyes:
she's not pleased. Debby jumps up, runs to kiss Ginger.

GINGER
Hi, baby. You ready to go?

DEBBY
Please.

MERRY
Just. One. Moment. Please.
Young Lady.

Merry advances glacially.

GINGER
Hey, na'am, I know you don'
like me, but --

MERRY
Not like you? I have no reason
to dislike you. It's just a
question of my liking my daughter
more, perhaps too much, but she
is my daughter.

GINGER
I know you maybe don' dig
Puerto Ricans --

MERRY
It has nothing to do with
Puerto Ricans, my dear, you
could be whiter than apple
blossoms --

LIZ
(to Chris, indicating
recorder)
You're not recording this?

He shakes his head "no."

MERRY
-- but as long as there is even
some lingering respect from my
daughter that she will even
consider my opinion, I would
prefer that she not race
about the streets of this
dangerous city with the
criminal element.

GINGER
Wow!

DEBBY
Let's go.

Debby grabs his arm, steers him to the door.

MERRY

Debby!

Debby, her anger totally up, marches Ginger out the door.
He tips his baseball cap at the room as he disappears.

GINGER

Nice meetin' you all.

Merry turns on Liz.

MERRY

You, darling Aunt Liz, after
whom my child chooses to model
her most formative years --

LIZ

Merry, I've ordered a double.
You can have half. Save your
speech until then.

MERRY

You, undoubtedly, consider it
adventuresome, her little
affair with a car thief --

LIZ

He stole a car?

MERRY

He's addicted to the practice.

LIZ

Maybe he could get me a Mercedes.

MERRY

I'm sure Debby would roar over
that cynical humor.

LIZ

Merry, get off it, please, I've
kept this fellow waiting --

CHRIS

I don't mind.

LIZ

I mind.

MERRY

I'll go. Just give me a
simple word.

LIZ
Okay, what simple word?

MERRY
Am I wasting my time and considerable amount of money back here, or am I going to win the ABA?

LIZ
Well, there's two simple words. Yes and no.

MERRY
That's all for now?

LIZ
All for now.

Merry heads for the door, resigned, but not happy.

MERRY
Don't forget, dinner at Jules Levi's on Friday.

LIZ
Oh God, I can't. I'm taking at least the weekend up in Connecticut with two hundred books.

MERRY
Okay. There's another Tuesday night. At Jules'.

LIZ
I'll try.

MERRY
Please. And find someone... nice... to bring.

Meaning Chris, whoever he is, is not what she means by nice. Out she goes. Liz flops down in a chair opposite Chris, stares at him, looks down at machine.

LIZ
Do you think we can do this later?

CHRIS
You know what you need?

LIZ
Do you know what I need?

CHRIS
You need to relax.

LIZ
What do you mean?

CHRIS
Relax? Relax means relax.

LIZ
You mean I need someone to relax me.

Chris looks away, not wanting to go where the conversation is going.

LIZ
You think I need someone to come relax me.

CHRIS
I didn't mention someone.

LIZ
Oh, you were going to do it?

CHRIS
Do what?

LIZ
There's an arrogance about men sometimes, maybe you don't notice, being not yet a man yourself.

CHRIS
You okay?

LIZ
Do I sound okay?

CHRIS
All I meant was you should get some rest. If you want to get some rest with someone, that's up to you.

LIZ
Listen, sonny, if I want some movement in bed I'll check

LIZ (contd)
into a motel and drop a quarter
in the vibrating mattress.

43
CONT'
(12)

Chris picks up his recorder, stands.

CHRIS
I'm at the Chelsea when
you want to do this.

LIZ
I'm wrong. It's young men
who are the most arrogant.
When it comes to sexual
arrogance they assume
everyone is falling down
over them.

CHRIS
Right.

LIZ
Turn that on, I have a quote.
I find this mid-century
obsession with young flesh
obscene.
(he nods, goes
towards door)
- It's like eating green cantaloupes.

He goes out. Liz watches. Her anger vanishes. If we can,
we should see self-loathing take over. She gets up quickly
and grabs her coat.

CUT TO:

INT. ALGONQUIN HALLWAY - DAY

44

In a long shot, we SEE Liz approach the elevator, push the
button, rather testily put on her coat. As she waits, she
sees the room service WAITER come up the hall.

She stops him. From the distance, we can't quite hear
what she says to him. She signs the check on the tray.
As he stands there, surprised, she downs the two scotches,
puts the glasses back on the tray.

The elevator door opens. She enters.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIFTH AVENUE - DAY

45

Liz is among the moving crowd in front of St. Patrick's Cathedral.

She stops at a light. A BOY, about eighteen, comes to a stop beside her. He is blond, with a pretty pre-Raphaelite face. He's wearing an aviator jacket, artfully torn levis.

45
CONT'
(2)

Liz glances over at him. He smiles. She looks away. This is certainly no one she would ever find interesting. He looks one way, then another. He glances down at the small bag he's carrying. A Cartier's bag. He turns to go in the direction he came. He hesitates. Liz looks at him again. Thus encouraged, he steps up to her.

BOY

Can you tell me where Cartier's is?

LIZ

Sure, it's just down --
(pointing)

On this side, about two blocks --

BOY

Near those flags?

He gives her a Cartier smile. She softens just a little. They walk on into pedestrian traffic.

ON LIZ AND BOY - WALKING

BOY

This thing doesn't fit. It's supposed to be a bracelet. It'd be fine if I wanted a necklace.

He makes a funny face to indicate the ridiculousness of that suggestion. Liz gives him an appraising glance.

LIZ

A gift from your mother?

BOY

(he laughs)
My mother lives in Redlands, California.

This amuses him. He walks on. Liz smiles to herself.

EXT. CARTIER'S - DAY

46

At the entrance, they stop. The Boy smiles again.

BOY

Thanks a lot.

LIZ

The jewelry section is on the second floor.

46
CONT'
(2)

BOY

Yeah, okay.

He seems uncertain. Liz studies him for a beat. He smiles yet another time.

CUT TO:

INT. CARTIER'S JEWELRY COUNTER - DAY

47

The WOMAN CLERK, in the inevitable black crepe dress, has the silver I.D. bracelet out on the glass counter. She is filling out a form. The Boy and Liz watch.

The Clerk reaches into the bag, pulls out the crumpled sales slip, reads it. She looks up at Liz.

CLERK

Are you Mrs. Collins?

LIZ

No.

CLERK

East 74th?

LIZ

No.

The Clerk goes back to writing. The Boy looks over at Liz, smiles, shrugs. Liz is beginning to enjoy this.

CUT TO:

INT. ALGONQUIN HOTEL - DAY

48

Liz and the Boy walk through the lobby of her hotel, making slow progress as she chatters nervously.

LIZ

At one time we had almost every important literary figure in New York here. Over there, where you see the restaurant area, they had a weekly lunch they called the Round Table, with Robert Benchley and George Kaufman ... Edna Ferber...

She can see this is Greek to him, but he's smiling pleasantly. She stops at the elevator, turns to him. 48
CONT'
(2)

LIZ

Thank you, Jim, for walking
me all the way down here.

This is a sign-off. But he doesn't accept it. He stands his ground, smiles openly at her. She is aware that he is not saying goodbye. She studies him.

LIZ

You do a lot of smiling.

The elevator door opens. After the briefest hesitation, Liz turns, enters the elevator. She turns and looks back at the Boy. He smiles... A small smile sneaks onto her face... An even bigger smile from him as he runs through the closing doors of the elevator.

INT. LIZ'S SUITE - DAY

49

Liz is sitting on the end of the bed, sipping a drink. She is looking at...

The Boy. He has removed his jacket. He is sitting deep in an easy chair facing her. He's also sipping a drink.

As she watches he leans forward in his chair, unbuttons the cuffs on his shirt. He turns each cuff a couple of times. She starts to react as the first button comes unbuttoned, but then settles down.

She reacts again as he stands, coming close to her. Her eyes are about at his belt level. Slowly he unbuttons his shirt. Slowly, she watches. He takes his time. He tugs the shirt tail out. Slowly, he drops the shirt to the floor. Slowly, she watches.

He tilts her head up, looks down at her. An accomplished narcissist, he waits for her to look at him. She does.

LIZ

(a whisper)
How old are you?

BOY

Eighteen.

She closes her eyes: Oh God. He reaches down, slowly unbuttons her blouse. She lets him. He slips it down her arms.

LIZ

I have another question.
 (he drops her blouse
 to the floor)
 Who is Mrs. Collins?

49

 CONT'
 (2)

The child responds by unbuttoning his levis. He lets them drop to his ankles. The whole body is pre-Raphaelite. Liz forgets the question she asked.

He leans down, kisses her. WE GO with their heads in frame as she settles back on the bed. He, like some sensuous snake, pulls himself up her body. They kiss.

WE CUT to another angle, shooting from the foot of the bed up. WE see him on top of her, helping her off with her skirt while continuing to kiss her.

WE GO right up over his mounds, past their kiss, up to the wall above the bed. WE STOP on a nineteenth century botanical print, tinted, a Latin description beneath it. WE HEAR the sounds of passion mounting below frame.

A foot, Liz's foot, flies through the frame, knocking the print from its moorings. It falls out of frame. WE are left with a frame full of empty wall and the sounds, below, of passion.

CUT TO:

INT. AUTOMAT - NIGHT

50

For the moment, it is difficult to tell we are at a table at the Automat. WE INCLUDE just Liz, some dishes and a tape recorder in front of her. She's in a silly mood as she punches the machine and addresses it.

LIZ

I am not ready to concede that the young aren't more sexually arrogant, though, and this is important, I have been recently made to believe that they may have something to be arrogant about.

WE NOW include Chris across the table. He idly scoops at some jello, watching Liz with a mellow eye.

LIZ

Namely, endurance and bodies.

LIZ (contd)

My old mate, Bessie Smith,
whose records shared many an
afternoon with me in Paris,
said she liked it when her
daddy took her on a buggy ride --

(in Bessie's voice)

what I like about you, you
never stall --

(leans forward)

What about you, kid?

CHRIS

I've never preferred it with
girls my age.

LIZ

Oh, really? I was about to
make you, Christopher Adams,
the lead character in my new
book, Young Flesh. I'd like
to know why? Why not girls
your own age?

CHRIS

They're always watching for
their own orgasms.

LIZ

What should they be looking
for? Your orgasm?

CHRIS

Our orgasm.

Liz leans back, goes "Emph" to herself, watches him scoop jelly.

CUT TO:

INT. ELEVATOR - ALGONQUIN - NIGHT

51

Again, the elevator. Liz chatters nervously. Chris listens.

LIZ

I don't know... Every time
Merry publishes another book,
I go through this complicated
set of emotions. Anger, jealousy,
pleasure, pride.

(looks at him)

Sounds normal. Huh?

He smiles slightly in way of an answer.

CUT TO:

INT. LIZ'S SUITE - NIGHT

52

Liz sits on the couch, next to the old bear, smoking a joint. The recorder is on the coffee table. Chris is sprawled in a chair, his stockinged feet dangling.

LIZ

My problem is I'm truly an old fashioned girl. I like men who talk. I love to talk. There's a whole generation crowding up behind me who want to talk with their bodies. Christ, everyone is so muscular, and chic, their titties spilling out of everything, soft fashions. We got a generation of beauties, they're more beautiful than the Greeks. Where's the articulate guy? No one wants to talk anymore.

CHRIS

Oh?

LIZ

(as if that proves it)
For example.

Liz gets up, walks over to the dresser next to where Chris is sprawled. She pours wine into a hotel water glass.

CHRIS

You don't have to be hard on me. I'm just listening.

LIZ

Just listening is an obscenely intimate act.

Chris laughs.

LIZ

Ah, it laughs!

He lifts his stockinged foot, resting it up against her knee. She's aware of it, glances down.

CHRIS

You said something funny.

He stands, smiles. She doesn't move back. They're close. He walks past her, flops on the bed, face up.

CHRIS

I don't have to talk to everyone. I don't make love to every woman I meet, either.

LIZ

Better catch up with your peers.

CHRIS

I agree with your point. A way to approach a woman is through the ears. Ears, you know. They're little emblems of sexuality.

LIZ

I'm listening through little emblems of sexuality?

CHRIS

Sure. I talk to it. If I talk softly, it responds. If I talk close to it, it responds more. I breathe against it. I caress it. Kiss it. My tongue goes in your ear.

(she listens intently
responding, indeed)

Isn't that sexual?

She shrugs, sips her wine. He flops over on his stomach, looking down at the floor over the top of the bed. He is that way, in silence, for a few beats. She watches, her ears having been aroused.

CHRIS

Hey, there's a picture down here.

LIZ

(embarrassed)

Christ, I asked them to put it back up.

CHRIS

You want me to?

LIZ

There's no nail. It fell off.

CHRIS

Maybe I can find it.

LIZ

No, don't bother.

CHRIS

Huh?

LIZ

It might just... fall down again.

She walks towards the bed. He turns to watch her advance.
They are neither smiling now.

52
CONT'
(3)

CUT TO:

INT. CONNECTICUT HOUSE - DAY

53

Liz sits in front of a window that shows us the quaint Connecticut surroundings: bare winter trees, the mill pond, a shingled house beyond.

She is reading a book with forced concentration. On the table next to her, many other books.

She turns a page. Into frame steps Chris. He puts a teapot and cup on the table. Liz does not look up. He silently pours the tea.

LIZ
(not looking up)
Thanks.

He does not respond. He moves out of frame. A beat, and Liz looks up slowly in his direction. Her face softens.

WE HOLD on it.

CUT TO:

INT. CONNECTICUT HOUSE - BEDROOM - LATE DAY

54

Chris and Liz are in a quaint four poster. They are making love. A dim, late light comes through the branches of the bare winter trees outside the window.

CUT TO:

INT. CONNECTICUT HOUSE - BATHROOM - NIGHT

55

Liz is sitting in the tub, reading. WE HEAR the door open and someone enter, Chris obviously, though we don't see him.

CHRIS (v.o.)
You staying in here a long
time?

Without looking up, she makes a sound that says, Yes.

CHRIS
Sorry.

She reads on. With sudden understanding, she looks up. Alarm. WE HEAR him urinating.

LIZ

Hey! Go out in the bushes.

55
(CONT.)
(2)

She swings her book in his direction. He lunges into frame, kissing her. She drops the book into the water. They kiss. The book sinks.

CUT TO:

INT. JULES LEVI'S TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT

56

An ungodly din in Jules Levi's townhouse, parlor floor. A publishing party: AGENTS, REPRINTERS, REVIEWERS and an eccentric collection of AUTHORS. WE spot Debby in high fashion; Ginger in a metallic green tuxedo.

Merry sails through this on the ample arm of Jules. A CHIC LADY leans forward to buss her.

CHIC LADY

Merry, you're a beauty.

MERRY

I won't be for long if Jules doesn't give me some rest. It's party, party, party with this man.

CHIC LADY

Shame on you, Jules.

JULES

(beaming)
Can't get enough.

Liz and Chris appear in the foyer beyond. Liz is self-conscious. Chris is cool, in cowboy shirt and string tie, unaware of Liz's discomfort. He helps her off with her coat.

Merry rushes up, kisses Liz, gives Chris a curious glance.

MERRY

You're late, but I barely forgive you. And your young friend.

Jules barrels in, putting an arm around either woman and steering them around to face a PHOTOGRAPHER. He beams.

JULES

My girls!

The movement has turned them away from Chris who stands to

one side, holding Liz's coat. Liz tries to get Jules's attention as the camera flashes.

56
CONT'D
(2)

LIZ

Jules, this is Chris Adams.

JULES

(barely noticing)
How do you do?

More flashes. Liz reaches behind her, takes Chris's arm, pulls him forward, making it four for the camera. Jules notes this. Liz hopes he does.

CUT TO:

INT. JULES'S BATHROOM - LATER

57

Merry is fixing up at the mirror. She glances up at the reflection of Liz entering, then goes back to her makeup. Liz stops behind her, grinning from ear to ear.

Merry glances up again, briefly. Slowly, she looks back at Liz's reflected image. Comprehension dawns. Merry turns slowly. Liz grins, shrugs, a short giggle.

MERRY

I do not believe it.

LIZ

It's true.

MERRY

(builds in loudness)
I - do - not - believe it!

Merry jumps up, embraces Liz.

MERRY

You are in love.
(Liz hums assent,
accepts the hug)
You sly old land turtle.

LIZ

(blinking away tears)
He's so young. God, I'm sick.

INT. PARTY - LATER

58

Composed now, the two ladies emerge from the bathroom. In their path is a TOM WOLFE TYPE in white.

MERRY

(to Wolfe type)
You see, I'll invite just
anyone.

58
CONT'D
(2)

WOLFE TYPE

(looking around)
Is just anyone here?

During this, Liz reacts to something off: ACROSS THE PARTY, Chris and Debby are chatting nonchalantly. Debby is in some Calvin Klein loose tailoring, the front of her exposed, a large area of breast and flat tummy.

Liz tries to blink away the sensation of jealousy and to concentrate on Merry's conversation. WE HOLD on Liz.

MERRY (v.o.)

I could not believe your
review. I thought Southern
boys were taught nicer manners
than that. I'll bet your
mama won't let you say at
home what you say in print.

WOLFE TYPE (v.o.)

Merry Noel, are you trying to
charm me?

MERRY (v.o.)

(honey-suckle sweet)
I would imagine that's beyond
the realm of possibility.

Liz's glance steals over again across the room.

CUT TO:

INT. ALGONQUIN - LIZ'S SUITE - NIGHT

59

Liz is lying back on the bed, fully clothed, smoking and looking up at the ceiling. Chris is sitting in a semi-lotus on the bed next to her, facing her. The tape machine is between them, turning.

LIZ

Yeats was an absolute madman,
he and his wife used to sit
around listening for voices,
spirit voices that would tell
him what to write. But what
he wrote -- God, the Irish.

LIZ (contd)
(she drifts off)
'... but one man loved the pilgrim
soul in you... and loved the
sorrows of your changing face...'

Chris puts a hand to her cheek. She kisses it.

LIZ
I've had this great revelation
that it's all right.
(looks at him)
You know?

CHRIS
No.

LIZ
It. It's all right.
(he waits)
Us.
(she reads him for
reaction: he's
coasting)
No, I mean I'm saying it's
all right. For me.

CHRIS
It's all right to be in love?

LIZ
I'm the writer. Let me say it.
(he waits)
Yeah. That's what I mean. In
love.

It may be all right, but it's difficult for her to say.

LIZ
To be in love.
(she reaches down
turns off machine)
Does sex confuse you?

CHRIS
No.

LIZ
I don't mean how to do it,
though that can be enormously
confusing at times too, but I
mean, just the question of sex.

LIZ (contd)

(pulls up to a
sitting position)

I went to a therapist one summer.
He had this insane notion that
is probably true that I had to
wait to be emotionally mauled
by some guy before I could write.
Ha!!

(puts her hand on
his knee)

He also said that I find
surrogate lovers. To wit, I
am aroused by object A, I go
out and go to bed with object
B.

(looks at Chris)

With you, I feel like I'm making
love to object A.

He takes her in his arms.

CHRIS

You ever think that what makes
sex so exciting is that it's
so frightening?

LIZ

Is that what you think? I
frighten you?

CHRIS

T.S. Eliot make this crack
about D.H. Lawrence -- how you
like those guys with all the
initials? He said Lawrence
was looking for an intimacy that
was impossible between a man
and a woman. Bullshit, T.S.
It means Eliot was scared and
Lawrence was standing at the
ready, hoping.

She scoots down from her sitting position. He scoots down
with her, lying over her. He punctuates the following with
kisses.

CHRIS

What is everyone afraid of?
Chances? Risk? Form?
Commitment? Those are the
popular words. They don't

CHRIS (contd)

measure up to the old words,
lovesick, heartfelt, with this
hand, sickness and health,
death do us part. Those're
sensational. You can't hear
them without ladies weeping.

LIZ

What about men, they don't weep?

CHRIS

Different style. They got little
hairs that stand up in a lot of
places.

LIZ

Your little hairs are standing up?

CHRIS

All those words. Love, honor,
those words. God, I'd love to
be able to use them, you know?
I'd love to believe in someone,
some one woman so much I could
believe them and they'd come
jumping out of my mouth.

LIZ

What about some one girl?
Isn't a woman too old for
you?

CHRIS

You're hard.

LIZ

I'm like T.S. Scared.

CHRIS

I mean I'd like to say to you
I want to get married, but you
bitch you'd laugh.

LIZ

No, I wouldn't. Who you want
to marry?

He is suddenly furious. She knows she's hurt him, but can't
take it back. He gets up, flops down in an easy chair. He
stares at her. He's dark. She looks straight ahead, not
caring to look over at him. She sneaks one glance, wishes
she hadn't. She continues to stare ahead.

He glowers from the chair.

59
CONT'D
(5)

CHRIS

You know how many times I've asked someone to marry me in my life?

(she shakes her head)

Think about it!

He gets up, goes out. Misery. Liz doesn't move.

CUT TO:

INT. PIERRE SUITE - DAY

60

A spacious suite at the Pierre. A fireplace is crackling. Merry is laboring through a piece on a baby grand. Her gold bracelets clatter on the keys.

The door buzzer. She hurries to answer it. Liz is there, looking bleak. Merry is disappointed, gives her a perfunctory hug.

MERRY

It's you.

LIZ

That fact doesn't thrill me either.

Liz spots coffee service, heads for it. Merry goes for the piano.

MERRY

Debby doesn't come in. She doesn't call. I'm giving up on her. She's eighteen and in this state that's old enough for a martini.

(squints at score)

This Brahms you recommended is crippling my fingers.

(starts to play)

Didn't he write that lullaby too? The Brahms Lullaby? He must have. It's got his name on it.

She plays the lullaby easily. She smiles over at Liz.

MERRY

What do you think?

LIZ
(sitting)
Perfect.

MERRY
I mean the whole picture? The self-sufficient woman, a woman of proven talents, in front of the fire, playing her piano.

LIZ
Is a reporter coming?

MERRY
No. Hardly. A man.

LIZ
A man who likes lullabies?

Merry turns to grab Liz's hand, jostling her coffee.

MERRY
Doug called. He's in New York.

LIZ
Doug Blake?

MERRY
He's tan and successful, that's what he says, up from Houston. He would've come right over, but it's business, business, business.

LIZ
When is he coming?

MERRY
Tomorrow.

LIZ
Give him my love. He's a wonderful man.

Merry ignores Liz's retreat into private feelings.

MERRY
He's got something very obvious in mind, I know it. I'm willing to stake my life on it.
(stands)
He wants the marriage back.

MERRY (contd)

(paces)

It's only been four years.
That's not long. They say it
takes five years for your
mattress to lose its imprint.
We're still imprinted on each
other.

Merry hovers over Liz, at long last reading her face.

MERRY

Let me look at you.
(takes Liz's face;
Liz wrenches away)
I've lost!

LIZ

What?

MERRY

That's why you look like you're
standing on your own udder.

LIZ

Please.

- MERRY

They took a vote. I lost and
you can't tell me.

LIZ

Merry, what is today's date?

MERRY

I'm not a child.

LIZ

Today is December 30. The
final vote is tomorrow,
December 31, as promised.

MERRY

(back to pacing)

Oh Liz, I've been dreaming
about my party, right at the
stroke of midnight, New Year's,
I announce the victory of my
book and the rejoining of my
marriage.

LIZ

How can you be sure?

MERRY

Of what?

LIZ

Either.

With effort, Merry decides to ignore her. She gestures with a sweeping motion at one wall.

MERRY

I'm having tables all along here, just spilling over with whatever grows this time of year.

(ponders)

Trouble with December, there's no strawberries. How am I gonna create a big red area in the middle of the table?

LIZ

Stab one of the guests.

MERRY

(furious)

Liz, if all you want is to be unhappy, I wish you would just let me be. I'm sorry, that's my thoughts.

LIZ

I'm sorry too, truly. I didn't mean to bring you down. Give Doug my love.

(stands, takes coat)

I meant it. He's a wonderful man.

She looks near to tears. She hurries out the door. Merry is alarmed. She follows.

INT. HALLWAY - PIERRE - DAY

61

Liz is waiting for the elevator. Merry comes up, studying her. Liz turns, having trouble with those tears.

LIZ

You two had the only thing I ever admired. A marriage, a real child, and you loved each other.

The elevator door opens before Merry can respond. Liz jumps in.

Merry holds the door, follows. She's concerned about her friend.

61
CONT'
(2)

INT. LOBBY - PIERRE - DAY

Liz is walking through the lobby, heading for the doors. Merry is in step with her.

62

LIZ

No, I'm fine, really.

MERRY

I want to know what's going on with you.

LIZ

Tomorrow. Okay, baby?

Liz gives her a pat on the arm, heads into the revolving door. Merry follows.

EXT. PIERRE HOTEL - 61st STREET ENTRANCE - DAY

63

Liz strides out. Merry is behind. There's a bitter wind. Merry's silk blouse is no protection against it.

LIZ

Merry, go back in. You'll die out here.

Merry spots the UNIFORMED DOORMAN.

MERRY

Will you lend me your coat, honey? Just for a minute.

Liz does not believe it, but the Doorman puts his coat around Merry. It engulfs her. He steps back inside.

DOORMAN

I'll be in here.

Liz leans, giving up, back against the stone facade of the hotel. Merry comes up to her. WE GO IN CLOSE on the two.

LIZ

You are so determined.

MERRY

If you're going through all this worry because of me and the prize.

LIZ
No.

MERRY
Your writing?

LIZ
Please. No.

MERRY
The Rolling Stone! Huh?

LIZ
His name is Chris Adams.

MERRY
That's what it is.

Liz looks down, up, down, up again.

LIZ
He wants to marry me.

MERRY
That boy!

LIZ
That's what I said.

MERRY
He proposed?

LIZ
To this -- mature woman.

MERRY
(happy)
I do not believe that.

LIZ
That's my problem, too.

MERRY
You think he's serious?

LIZ
He says he's serious.

MERRY
What do you think?

LIZ
I said 'no.'

MERRY

What do you feel?

LIZ

I don't want somebody around
watching my thighs grow old.

MERRY

(shakes her head)

You're such a big bad bear at
times, you only scare yourself.

LIZ

How long could such a thing
last? It's insane.

MERRY

Oh, a year.

LIZ

You see!

MERRY

Maybe two years. What about
three? From there, there
might be a fourth.

LIZ

What're you saying?

MERRY

There's no guarantees. If
that young man says he wants
you, let him stick around
until your thighs turn to
stone, what the shit difference
does it make?

Liz is hit by this. She bites her lip. She looks down,
looks at the traffic going by, finally looks back at Merry.

LIZ

Why didn't you say that
to begin with?

MERRY

Honey, we're not talking about
a new dress. This takes a
moment.

Liz gives a little reluctant smile to Merry, kisses her cheek.

She wanders out of frame. Merry watches her go, tucking the Doorman's collar up about her ears.

63
CONT'
(4)

CUT TO:

INT. ALGONQUIN HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

64

Liz strides up to the desk, anxious. She asks something of the CLERK. He checks a pigeon hole, shakes his head. She strides on to the elevator.

INT. ALGONQUIN SUITE - DAY

65

Liz is on the phone.

LIZ

Courthouse? Which courthouse?
Is he on a story? Yes, please,
tell him I'm at the hotel. I'm
eating in. Thank you.

Liz puts down the phone, disappointed.

INT. ALGONQUIN SUITE - DUSK

66

The windows are dark gray with dusk. The leavings of a room service meal are seen on table with wheels. Liz is on the couch, smoking, looking up at nothing.

The phone rings. She goes for it. She is disappointed not to hear Chris's voice.

LIZ

Oh, hello Debby. Your mother's
looking for you. And I'm
trying to stay off this line.
I'm expecting a call. Huh?
He's with you. Where? What
is this about courthouses?

CUT TO:

INT. COURTHOUSE HALL - NIGHT

67

Debby is talking on a wallphone in the busy hall of a courthouse. WE SEE BAILIFFS, LAWYERS, OTHERS pass in the b.g.

DEBBY

Yeah, Chris is here, he's been
terrific. He's talking to the
judge now --

(voice from other end)

No, not him. It's Ginger. They

67
COMM'
(2)

DEBBY (contd)
arrested Ginger. For parole violation, carrying a weapon. It wasn't for real, I mean it's a real gun, but he was just using it to see how people respond, you know, for his new play.

(voice from other end)
I was, I was trying to reach you, you weren't in, so I called the Chelsea and asked for Chris, thinking you were there. No way was I calling the Pierre and getting the daughter of Dracula.

(listens)
He can't. He's inside with Ginger and the judge. I will, sure. Soon as he can.

INT. LIZ'S SUITE - NIGHT - ON LIZ

68

She hangs up. She sits on the arm of the couch, lights a cigarette, looks out the window. She doesn't like her thoughts.

INT. LIZ'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

69

Liz is watching television. She is seated, fully clothed, on the bed. She's on the phone.

LIZ
No answer? I'll call again.
No, I already left a message.
Thanks.

She hangs up.

INT. LIZ'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

70

Still fully clothed, Liz is snoozing. She wakes with a start, looks at her watch. She can't believe the hour. She grabs the phone.

LIZ
Give me 687-4400, please.
Thank you.
(a pause)
Room 218, please. What? No, this is a friend. You must. They asked not to be disturbed?

70
CONT'
(2)

LIZ (contd)
 They who? I want the room of
 Chris Adams.
 (she collapses inward)
 Yes, I know that's his room.
 No, no message.

She hangs up. She slides down on the bed, looks up. She's
 dying.

CUT TO:

EXT. HARVEST HOUSE - DAY

71

Liz comes out of the high iron gates of Harvest House. The
 jurors, Martin and Judy are with her. They mouth goodbyes.

There is an insistent honking. Liz turns and is surprised
 to see a blue limo at the curb. Merry is in back, the
 door open, waving at her. Liz heads for it.

INT. LIMOUSINE - DAY

72

As Liz comes aboard, the DRIVER turns.

DRIVER
 Where to, Mrs. Blake?

Rather than answer him, Merry turns to Liz.

MERRY
 I have lunch uptown with Doug.

LIZ
 I'm going downtown.

MERRY
 (to Driver)
 Go downtown.

The limousine moves off. Liz is still distracted, knowing
 what Merry wants to know, reluctant to get started. Merry
 senses that reluctance.

MERRY
 Well?

LIZ
 I thought we'd have this
 conversation over a drink.

MERRY
 I lost.

LIZ
Not exactly.

MERRY
I won!

LIZ
Not exactly again.

MERRY
(throws up her hands)
What in God's earth --

LIZ
It was a dead heat.

MERRY
A split prize?

LIZ
Not really. It was decided
that two people should win
first prize. You and Sharon -
Gay.

MERRY
Sharon!

LIZ
Both books are in what they
call the American grain,
coming of age in rural
America --

MERRY
I know what they call the
American grain.

LIZ
Sharon's is from the black
woman's point of view, yours
from the white --

MERRY
Sharon Gay.

LIZ
They're both excellent
choices.

Merry chews this like bitter rue.

MERRY
If they had the guts they'd
have given it to the black.

LIZ

What is that?

MERRY

They obviously wanted to give it to Sharon, all the reviews have been licking her feet. But you're on the jury, they had to toss you a bone.

LIZ

Goddamn it, your book is legitimately good and so is Sharon's and -- and I'm a sonofabitch if I'm going to explain myself.

MERRY

You didn't have to share the award. They gave it all to you. Blue RIBBON!

LIZ

It may come as a surprise to you, but we did not write the same book.

MERRY

Meaning mine is worse than yours?

LIZ

Meaning I am sick and fucking tired of you trying to live your life in my skin.

MERRY

Ha! IF I had your skin I'd take better care of it.

Liz stops dead, looks at her, breaks into a laugh.

LIZ

That's truly amusing.

Merry is furious.

MERRY

Stop that! I'm angry and I want you to be angry, too.

LIZ

(leaning forward
to Driver)
I'll get out here.

MERRY
I always wanted to write,
since I was eight and I
started my first diary.

72
CONT'
(4)

The Driver brakes to a stop.

LIZ
(to Driver)
Thank you.

MERRY
It had nothing to do with
you.

Liz looks with elaborate patience at Merry.

LIZ
Merry, be honest. If I had
become a glider pilot, you'd
be behind the wheel of a
747 by now.

Liz gets out. Merry is not a happy woman.

CUT TO:

INT. AUTOMAT - DAY

73

Liz is seated at an Automat table, sipping coffee. Chris
comes from across the room, sits down opposite her. He
opens a small box of cold cereal, dumps it into a bowl.

LIZ
How are you?

CHRIS
Wiped out.

LIZ
I was worried, this jail
business and all.

CHRIS
I had about three hours
sleep.

LIZ
Did you get Ginger out?

CHRIS
They're holding him for
sixty days. Parole violation.

LIZ
Debby must be heartbroken.

CHRIS
I guess.

LIZ
Where is she?

CHRIS
I guess she's still asleep.

LIZ
Marry didn't mention she was back.

CHRIS
Back where?

LIZ
Back at her mother's hotel.

CHRIS
She's not there.

LIZ
Then where is she sleeping?

CHRIS
My room.

LIZ
Your room?

CHRIS
On the couch.

LIZ
How odd.

CHRIS
Huh?

LIZ
She could have come to my hotel. I have a couch.

CHRIS
She was going back to her mom's, but you know how that is.

LIZ
No, how is that?

CHRIS

You upset?

LIZ

I'm upset for Debby, all alone and no place to go. The Chelsea must be all booked up, or she wouldn't have had to impose on you.

CHRIS

You know the Chelsea is not all booked.

LIZ

How do I know? I haven't looked at their books in days.

CHRIS

Christ, I didn't even want to tell you about it.

LIZ

About what? Is there something I shouldn't know?

CHRIS

I knew you'd get carried away.

LIZ

I've never been calmer. It's you who's turned emotional, this sudden compassion for runaway teenagers. Or do you think of them as peers?

CHRIS

Stop, okay?

LIZ

Why couldn't you receive calls? What was that all about?

CHRIS

Debby and her mom were having fights. She kept calling back.

LIZ

What if it had been me --

CHRIS

Why am I on the defensive?

LIZ
-- saying I had been sleepless
all night reconsidering your
proposals, you remember, your
many proposals, your many
insistent --

Chris loses his temper. For the first time, shouts.

CHRIS
Stop!
(the room is startled,
he drops his voice)
You said no. We don't have
to beat it to death.

Liz goes into a pout, a guilty one at that.

LIZ
I'm sorry.

CHRIS
All I said was I wanted to
marry you. You didn't have
to be so goddamn hostile.

That gets Liz's temper up.

LIZ
Then be man enough to end
the hostilities.

Anger from him.

CHRIS
Hostilities end when one side
surrenders.

LIZ
Is that what marriage is to
you, a surrender?

CHRIS
Who the fuck is talking about
marriage?

LIZ
You were until you opened
up a youth hostel.

At this unfortunate moment, Debby appears at the table,
looking no worse for lack of sleep.

DEBBY
Can I join you guys?

This is met with silence, while Chris and Liz exchange uneasy glances. Debby reads the heaviness.

DEBBY
I guess not, huh?

LIZ
I'm sorry, hon, we're just --

DEBBY
No problem. I better go
tell mom what's going on.
(to Chris)
Call you later. And thank
you. Really. You're saving
my life.

CHRIS
Yeah.

Liz notes the hangdog look on Chris, lets it go. Debby gives Liz a kiss.

DEBBY
Bye, Aunt Liz.
This stings a little.

LIZ
Bye, baby.

Debby hurries off. Chris studies the table. Liz watches.
At last --

CHRIS
I'm going on the road, with
Fleetwood Mac. I'm doing
an interview.
(more silence)
Debby's going with me. As
my assistant. It's in the
budget, and the guy I was
using...

He trails off with a shrug. Silence descends. When Liz
speaks, she seems sincere.

LIZ
Debby's been wanting to get
away from home. I think

LIZ (contd)
that's good. Truly.
(Chris is not sure
she means it)
Better than good. It's
fantastic.

73
CONT'D
(6)

CHRIS

Yeah?

Liz leans towards him.

LIZ

Do me a favor.

CHRIS

What?

LIZ

Don't say we're going to be
friends. We're inappropriate
as friends. If I can't have
you as a lover --

CHRIS

What makes you so sure?

She smiles.

LIZ

We really have to agree that
in some ways I am more mature
than you. I have seen some
endings. This is one.

CHRIS

I wanted something from you.

LIZ

I know.

CHRIS

You made me really furious.

LIZ

I know.

She puts out her hand, touches his. He looks down at
the hands.

LIZ

Do me another favor.
(he looks up)
Forget about my interview.

LIZ (contd)
I don't want to read it.
We've written something
sensational together. But
it's a private edition.
Let's don't make it public.

He grins, nods.

CHRIS
You talk some good talk,
you know.

LIZ
Like my old friend Yeats
said, when we're old and grey
and nodding by the fire, we
can take down that book, and
slowly read.

He nods. Liz stands, leans down, gives him a kiss. She
goes off. He watches, done in.

CUT TO:

INT. ALGONQUIN - LIZ'S SUITE - DAY

74

Liz is packing, her suitcases opened on the bed. The door
buzzer is heard. She goes to open it, carrying articles
of clothing draped over one arm.

Liz opens the door. Merry is in an even greater fury
than before. She marches directly past Liz. She
spots the packing. She wheels.

MERRY
You're leaving?

LIZ
I'm going to Connecticut.

MERRY
What about my party?

LIZ
I'm sorry. I was going to
call. I'm so down, I would
only spoil it.

MERRY
I think we have come to a
serious juncture in our
lives when we should examine
the terms of our friendship.

LIZ

Hold this.

She hands Merry a piece of clothing. She opens a suitcase. She puts her hand on the clothing to take it back.

LIZ

Thank you.

Like a stubborn child, Merry refuses to let go of it. Liz is forced to do what she's been trying to avoid, look Merry in the face. Merry is furious.

LIZ

Merry, I'm truly sorry about the award. It's not the worst thing that could happen, there'll be lots of publicity --

Merry lets go of the clothing.

MERRY

That is water long under the bridge.

LIZ

How was Doug?

MERRY

Even longer under the bridge.

LIZ

He still drinking?

MERRY

Dry as the Sahara.

LIZ

(packing)
How's he look?

MERRY

He's getting married.

LIZ

Not to ah --

MERRY

Joyce. From Houston.

LIZ

Oh, poor Merry, what a day
you're having.

Liz puts out a hand to comfort her. Merry steps back
from it.

MERRY

They've bought a house.
With a yard.

LIZ

Sounds wonderful to me.

MERRY

Since when?

LIZ

I'm not immune to the
attractions of a man and
a yard.

MERRY

Or to Doug, specifically
Doug and a yard?

LIZ

I never thought of it..

MERRY

Never thought of Doug as
a loving husband?

LIZ

Never.

MERRY

Along with his ability to
drink, he has lost his
ability to lie. Don't look
away from me.

LIZ

I'm closing my suitcase.

MERRY

I began to smell there was
something he didn't want
to say. I bought him a drink,
and the words came tumbling out.

LIZ

You bought him a drink?

MERRY

What a petty, disgusting confession it was. Me, the unsuspecting wife, blaming myself over the years as I sensed my husband slowly but surely slipping away from me, into the arms --

LIZ

Those don't sound like Doug's words.

MERRY

Isn't it true that all the years we were married he was pouring out his love to you?

LIZ

He mentioned it.

MERRY

While married to me!

LIZ

At the last.

MERRY

And he proposed?

LIZ

I said no.

MERRY

Because of your friendship with me?

LIZ

You got that right.

MERRY

Except for that strange lapse into morality, you would have taken him, huh?

LIZ

He sure deserved better than he was getting.

MERRY

How did you know what he was getting? Did he describe it?

LIZ

If you have any more petty, disgusting revelations, save them for your girlhood diaries, or your novels, they sound about alike.

MERRY

It's happy time for all. Doug and his Joyce. You and your little cradle snatchings. You can have a double ceremony.

LIZ

If you mean Chris, he's gone.

MERRY

Where?

LIZ

Into the arms of what you'd be corny enough to call the other woman.

MERRY

Who?

LIZ

Debby.

MERRY

My Debby? That's absurd.

LIZ

That's what I thought. They're too close in age.

MERRY

I'll put a stop to this.

LIZ

Hell you will. Chris has given her a job. With my blessings.

MERRY

Doesn't that complete the picture!

LIZ

In a painful way.

MERRY

Everything I've ever had, I

MERRY (contd)
share because of you. My
award. My daughter. My
husband. Isn't there anything
that's mine?

LIZ
Your bile.

MERRY
My righteous anger.

LIZ
What a preacher you'd make.

MERRY
Because I don't have the
morals of a yellow dog?

LIZ
I have great respect for
the morals of yellow dogs.

MERRY
One come in the yard, we'd
kick it out.

LIZ
They're refreshingly loyal.

MERRY
They'd hum a snake if it
stood still.

LIZ
I've never tried snakes.

MERRY
A miracle.

LIZ
Now I'm a slut?

MERRY
You said it.

LIZ
What're you saying?

MERRY
How many men have you had?

LIZ
Is that the test?

MERRY
How many?

LIZ
How many before you're a
slut?

MERRY
Three.

LIZ
(giving up)
Kick me out of the yard.

MERRY
How many besides my husband?

LIZ
Three sailors and a jockey,
but never your husband.
(she slams a suitcase
closed)
Which at this point I dearly
regret.

That's it for Merry. She gets very tall in her indignation.

MERRY
What is astonishing is
you have no idea why I
truly hate you at this
point.

Liz looks stricken at this word 'hate.'

MERRY
It's not because of your
jealousy over my work --

LIZ
Oh Jesus, your work --

MERRY
But because you lack the
moral sensibility to
appreciate what I have lost
in Doug.

LIZ
Less than nothing.

MERRY

Liar.

LIZ

A possession. You lost more
in that bear.

MERRY

That is one thing of mine
you won't keep.

She strides over, grabs Hamburger off the bed.

LIZ

Take him. That's one thing
that won't talk back so you
can turn conveniently to hate,
of all godawful exaggerations.

MERRY

I am not such a woman.

LIZ

You're right. You're part
such a woman.

MERRY

Meaning?

LIZ

Gunn.

Merry swings the bear at Liz, hitting her across the head.
Liz grabs at the bear, knocking Merry on the cheek with
her elbow in so doing. Merry is stunned, falls back against
a chair.

Liz scoops up the bear. Merry grabs its leg. A short
tug, and the leg comes off.

MERRY

You see!

Liz screams at this outrage. She clutches the bear to her.
Merry, just as furious, grabs at it. Its stomach tears open,
and the stuffing pours out. It clings in bits to Liz's
clothes as it snows to the floor.

Merry looks in astonishment. Liz is in tears.

LIZ

Filthy filthy filthy
filthy...

Merry backs away from Liz's rage. She hesitates at the door, wanting now to say something. But it is too late. She goes out.

74
CONT'D
(9)

CUT TO:

INT. PIERRE SUITE - NIGHT

75

The suite is jammed with well-wishers. Noise, New Year's Party favors, hats, streamers, the works. But no Merry.

A COUPLE comes in. The MAID takes their wraps, heads for the bedroom. WE GO with her.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

76

The bedroom is dark except for the light of the party in the next room. The Maid enters, dumps the coats on the bed. She goes out.

WE STAY on bed. We notice the dim outline of Merry sitting at the head of the bed. WE GO in slowly on her. She is watching the party, her face deeply sad.

INT. SUITE

77

Merry is suddenly striding out of the bedroom, her coat on. Jules, turns, sees her, smiles.

JULES.

Darling, I've been looking for you.

Merry's face is set as she strides up to the banquet table.

MERRY

Happy New Year, Jules.

She yanks an opened bottle of champagne from its ice bucket. She wraps it in a towel. She heads for the door.

JULES

Where're you going?

MERRY

A party.

Out she goes, leaving Jules confused, to say the least.

CUT TO:

INT. CONNECTICUT HOUSE - NIGHT

78

There are two wing-back calico-covered chairs facing the

crackling fireplace. Liz sits on one, her heels upon the chair. She's in jeans, a brandy in one hand, a cigarette in the other. She watches the fire.

73
CONT'D
(2)

SHE HEARS a car pull up outside. Startled, she looks up.

HER POV

Shooting through the glass top of a Dutch door, we see a yellow Checker cab outside. Merry in mink, gets out, is paying the driver. She holds the towel-wrapped bottle of champagne.

ON LIZ

She looks back at the fire, remains rooted.

ON DOOR

Shooting from inside, we see Merry come up to the glass-topped door, rap on it. She's calling Liz's name.

LIZ

Come in.

Merry opens the door, hurries in out of the cold. She stomps her feet, maneuvers out of her mink while still holding on to the towel business.

MERRY

Do you know how much it
costs to take a cab here
from New York? Ninety
dollars. Ninety. I tipped
him five, was that enough?

Liz doesn't reply, she looks at the fire. Merry notes this. She comes over, sits in the unoccupied chair. She lifts her feet to the fire.

MERRY

Doesn't that feel good?
(no reply from Liz)
Do you have glasses?

She lets the towel fall from the bottle. It is without cork.

Liz flicks the cigarette into the fire, gets up, goes out of frame. Merry calls after her.

MERRY

I hated my party.

Liz comes back almost immediately with two wine glasses. Merry takes them both, sets one on the floor, pours into the other.

78
CONT'D
(3)

MERRY
Damn, the bubbles are gone.

Merry hands the glass to Liz.

LIZ
Thank you.

Merry is encouraged to hear Liz speak at last. She picks up the other glass, pours flat champagne into it.

MERRY
I'm not much good at
apologizing, I guess I never
have, actually, but I am now.

LIZ
You don't need to.

MERRY
I certainly do. I couldn't
hate you, and even if sometimes
I do, I shouldn't say it. You're
my oldest friend. What else
we got in life?

LIZ
Our oldest enemies.

MERRY
As the years go on, honey,
they begin to look alike.

Liz sips her champagne, makes a face. Merry sips hers too.

MERRY
(indicating glass)
Isn't this awful?

LIZ
I've been thinking about us.

MERRY
Really?

LIZ
We're terrific.

MERRY

You don't say.

78
CONT'
(4)

LIZ

We've accomplished a hell of a lot for one lifetime. What we deserve is a rest.

MERRY

And we shouldn't always argue.

LIZ

You're right. You know what we should do? Take a year off, sail around the Greek Isles. Only sleep with guys who can't pronounce our names. All Greeks.

MERRY

I couldn't do that.

LIZ

Just the fisherman.

MERRY

I mean I couldn't -- how would I do such a thing?

LIZ

Simple. Just go there and let it happen.

MERRY

I wouldn't know how to start -- what I would say --

She's obviously thinking it out. .

LIZ

All my life I've wanted men to find something mysterious and seductive in my work, some poetry.

MERRY

(a sigh)
Me too.

Liz gives her a disbelieving glance, goes back to her thought.

LIZ

Now let them find the
poetry in my body and
forget my books.

They watch the fire, into their thoughts. The clock above
the fire begins to ring the twelfth hour. They both look
up at it; see its hands standing straight up.

Merry lifts her glass, in the way of a silent toast, smiles
at Liz. Liz just stares at her a while, as if studying her,
while the clock chimes on. It ends. At last --

LIZ

Merry, do me a favor.

MERRY

What?

LIZ

Kiss me.

Merry is trying to figure out whether she should be shocked.

MERRY

After all these years,
you're going to tell me
there's something strange
about you?

LIZ

(Low)

This is New Year's Eve, I
want the press of human
flesh and you're the only
human flesh around... kiss
me.

MERRY

(also low)

You're serious.

The two women look at each other. By silent agreement they
lean across the space between the two wing-backed chairs.
Beyond them, the fire flickers.

Their lips join in one, soft kiss.

They pull back. Liz lifts her glass, toasts Merry. Merry
silently returns the toast.

They both drink.

FADE OUT.

THE END