

Sleeping With The Enemy

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SLEEPING WITH THE ENEMY

FADE IN:

EXT. CAPE COD BEACH - EARLY MORNING

Early gray light on a still shore. Upscale vacation homes line the handsome beach. They are glass-walled, austere. And silent. No one on the sand this morning, except...

...SARA BURNEY. Blonde and lovely. A quiet face with a woman's mysteries behind pale eyes. There is a grace to her as she stands in her sandy t-shirt and shorts at the water's edge. We see now that she is...

...clamming. Squeezing the wet sand with her bare feet, searching for clams beneath the surface. Dipping now, to scoop her catch into a bucket. She works quietly, alone with her thoughts, until...

...soft footfalls make her turn. Coming to her across the sand...

...MARTIN BURNEY. Tall, slender, strikingly handsome in an immaculate business suit. There is an effortless charisma to Martin. Sara beams to see him.

SARA

I like a man who dresses for clamming.

He smiles gently. Sorry to tell her...

MARTIN

...business. And on our vacation. Do you forgive me?

Her smile says she would forgive him anything. She holds up her nearly full clam bucket for his approval...

SARA

How about these babies? I'll steam them for starters, with that herb broth you like, and...

But his eyes are sorry. Again.

MARTIN

I told the Blanchards we'd do their stupid party.

She lets him see some of her disappointment. He glances to the bucket. A shame to waste...

MARTIN

...all your hard work. I'll call them and cancel.

She shakes her head. You don't have to do that.

SARA

...you're so sweet. I'll dig
you fresh ones tomorrow.

He'd like that. Strokes her hair. And just above a whisper...

MARTIN

Miss you this morning.

That's what she wanted to hear. She nestles inside his arm.
Reaches her mouth up to his...

...the kiss is lingering, beautiful. A dream kiss from a dream
woman. Who suddenly...

...pulls back. Perhaps a little too suddenly. As she feared, her
sandy t-shirt has soiled his silk tie. She is so sorry. A little
too sorry.

SARA

Oh, look what I've done.

She tries to brush it clean. But he takes her fingers in his
hands.

MARTIN

No problem. I have time to
change.

A deep look in her eyes. A reassuring smile. And he leaves her
there. HOLD on her now. Watching him go.

INT. BEAUTY SHOP - DAY

A little GIRL'S face. In a mirror. She is brunette and pouting, as
an OPERATOR works cheerfully above her. Pulling out pink rollers

OPERATOR

You are going...to look...
soooo pretty...

The little girl looks at the glossy magazine in her lap. Another
brunette, with a woman's pout and full red lips. The girl glances
back to the mirror. Uneasy.

PULL BACK now. The line of women in the long mirror. Each in
their own stage of progress toward looking soooo pretty. PAN the
row. Stop at the image of...

...Sara. Staring with a watchful disquiet as CARMEN brushes out
her long yellow hair. As she watches...

...CARMEN sweeps Sara's hair back behind an ear. Sara's fingers
reach up. Tug the hair back down across her forehead. Carmen
disapproves...

CARMEN

Every summer you come down here.
And you never change even...

SARA

...my husband likes it this way.

The voice is soft but very quiet. Definite.

CARMEN

Well, maybe he doesn't know how much
he'd like it...a little different...

The beautiful face stares at itself in the glass. Fingers tug the
forelock once more. Just so.

CARMEN

...just for once, hmmn?

SARA

It's fine like this. Really,
thank you.

Carmen smiles.

CARMEN

Let's ask him.

In the mirror, Carmen glances toward the door. Sara turns quickly,
startling slightly to see...

...Martin, waiting patiently. She beams to see him. And he smiles
back. Sara is already pulling off her smock, standing...

SARA

...we're done, aren't we?

Carmen supposes so. Sara reaches into her purse. Carefully counts
out bills into Carmen's hand. And another...

SARA

...for you.

As Carmen nods her thanks, Sara is going to Martin's side. Excited
to see him, like a newlywed.

MARTIN

You look so pretty.

His hand reaches protectively across her back. Grasps her shoulder.
She seems small beside him.

MARTIN

...feel like some ice cream?

She smiles up at him. Slips her arm around his waist, as they head
off...

EXT. ICE CREAM PARLOR TERRACE - DAY

Wrought-iron tables on a small wooden deck. Couples with their
sodas, sundaes. Beyond the rail, sailboats, the harbor. Breezy
day.

Martin holds Sara's chair for her, seats her. There is a grace to the ritual. Partners in a familiar dance. As he sits now, the waitress arrives with their water glasses. And without looking up...

MARTIN

Caramel ripple for the lady.
I'll have pistachio.

SARA

Oh...

He glances to her. She looks slightly apologetic...

SARA

I just thought. Lemon sorbet
might be nice.

Just a blink. Then his eyes flick to the waitress. Validating...

MARTIN

Lemon sorbet. For the lady,
please.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Sara sits at a lighted mirror. Making her face perfect. She wears a lime green cocktail dress that is clinging and chic.

Martin steps up from behind. Looming over her, as he uses her mirror to knot his tie.

MARTIN

That's a pretty dress. I wouldn't
have thought of it.

There's a pause in her work. Then, she continues tracing the eyeliner.

SARA

...what, you were thinking the
black?

MARTIN

The red, actually.

Her eyes go up to him now. In the mirror.

SARA

...it's backless. Could be
chilly tonight.

But he says nothing. Tugging his knot firmly in place. He walks out of frame.

INT. BLANCHARD'S COTTAGE - NIGHT

Party in progress. Low lights, hors d'oeuvres, soft jazz tape. Upscale summer crowd. Through the wide glass wall, a moonlit beach below. And through the front door...

...Martin and Sara enter. She is wearing the backless red dress after all, and it turns heads. Martin and she are perfect together. He puts his hand on her bare back, guides her through the room, with a gentle smile or wave to familiar faces.

LATER...they stand facing us, near the bar. Listening to a joke from the silver-haired host in his silk sport coat. Across the host's back, we watch their...

...identical polite expressions as the joke builds. Identical laughter at the punch line. The host drifts away, still grinning. We PUSH IN closer, as...

...Sara rolls her eyes at Martin. Can you believe that guy? He can't. We watch the intimacy of their unspoken conspiracy. And very low...

SARA

Have I been social long enough?

She discreetly traces a fingertip up along his wrist.

MARTIN

...for the whole season.

He catches her fingers neatly, the sudden movement almost violent. Their eyes light with mutual anticipation...

INT./EXT. CAR - NIGHT

Driving in silence. She sits close beside him. When they stop at a light, her head lolls on his shoulder. He looks down...

They kiss. Playful. Hungry. They can hardly wait. Her eyes glance to the green light. They have to grin at their own impatience. And the car...

...BLASTS off. Down the shoreline.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Moving through the kitchen of their summer cottage. It is painted a dark oppressive red. She's ahead of him, slipping off her wrap, but...

...he catches up. By the dishwasher. Hands on her, and she shivers with pleasure at the touch. Turns SHARPLY, and...

...FILLS his mouth with hers. Winds her slender arms around his neck. He already has her...

...OFF her feet. Pulling up her legs, her dress...

...she wraps the long legs around him, eating his mouth, the hunger raw, building, their bodies moving with it, as he swings her around, sweeping...

...a crock of wooden spoons from the counter, and it SHATTERS VIOLENTLY on the floor, the spoons SKITTERING in all directions, as he...

...carries her off, through the room, and we...

...follow down the hall, kissing, spinning, bumping off the wall, laughing with delicious hunger in each other's arms, as...

...they disappear into the bedroom, and we...

...stop. The door shuts HARD in our face. Hold a beat. Muffled laughter. And then, music begins...

...Mahler's Ninth.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Martin at the table. Sipping his juice. Sara leaning now to place his breakfast before him. He glances down...

SARA
More syrup...?

MARTIN
No, it's perfect.

Said quietly. She pours his coffee now. Sets the cream beside it. As she returns the pot to the stove, her eyes drift out the window...

...below on the beach, a handsome MAN carries sails onto a small day-sailer tied to the dock. She watches for a beat. And across the room...

...Martin watches her. Then he stands, very quietly. Leaves the room without a word. She notices, and something flickers across her eyes. Then she turns back to gaze absently at the beach...

INT. BATHROOM - MORNING

CLOSE ON a sink, on Martin's hands, rinsing off.

CLOSE ON a towel rack -- on three immaculately pressed and folded guest towels hanging there...their bottoms not quite precisely aligned.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Sitting at her breakfast now, Sara HEARS Martin's footfall. She arranges her hair so it falls just so across her forehead. She opens her robe at the top, just a little. Modestly seductive. And as Martin comes into the room...

...she turns to him. Showing a face that is bright, young, oddly innocent.

Martin comes to her. A silent, restless intelligence behind his eyes. At once refined and purposeful. He stares down at his young wife. And...

...leans gracefully to lift her in his arms. She blinks seductively at him. For a moment, they once more look like newlyweds. Without a word, he carries her off towards the bedroom.

SARA

Isn't it a little early for this?

Martin smiles absently as he detours into the bathroom. He sets her down in front of the sink. The smile stays easily in place.

MARTIN

Everything here...as it should be?

The voice is calm. Unnaturally quiet. A look of what could almost be panic in Sara's eyes as she quickly makes a mental inventory of the bathroom. The fear deepens as she seems to be missing something.

Finally Martin fingers the towels. Sara GROANS apologetically as she straightens them, lines their bottoms up exactly.

SARA

I don't know why I forget.

MARTIN

We all forget things. That's what reminding is for.

There's a chill in the quiet. She smiles sweetly into it...

SARA

Thank you.

Now he kisses her tenderly. When he disengages he simply turns away from her. Runs the tap. Dismissed, she withdraws. We hold on his meticulous hand washing. Then, he dries his hands on one of the towels -- realigning it carefully with the others when he's finished.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Sara is rinsing the lunch dishes. As she works, she is clearly tense, pre-occupied. Suddenly, with obsessive thoroughness, she goes through every cabinet, lining up the cans and containers so their labels face smartly forward. The readjustments are minute, insane.

She stops suddenly. Once more, we hear Martin's footsteps. She shuts the cabinet instantly, and back to her dishes just as Martin enters.

He pauses a beat, holding a glass of wine. Staring at her from behind. She keeps working. Aware of his eyes. He reaches to touch her hair, in a gesture at once tender and possessive...

MARTIN

What's for supper?

Without turning back...

SARA

Lamb. With rosemary. And the peach chutney.

He stares at the back of her head. Walks on, as...

SARA
...and new potatoes, just in butter.
And baby peas...

She turns to see him leaving the kitchen. Calls after him...

SARA
...and I thought maybe I'd...make
some herb bread.

He stops. Just at the doorway. Turns to her expectant face.
And he smiles.

MARTIN
Sounds lovely. I can hardly wait.

...and he's gone. The front door opens. Closes quietly. Sara
leans to the window, watching Martin descend the wooden stairs to
the beach.

EXT. DOCK - DAY

Martin walks down to the dock with the glass of wine in his hand.
Watches the man with the sailboat load several seat cushions on
board. Waves at him when he turns.

MARTIN
You renting from the Driscoll's?

The man smiles and comes up to him, sticks out his hand.

MAN WITH BOAT
John Fleishman. Just for two weeks.
I guess we're neighbors.

MARTIN
Martin Burney. We own that one.

FLEISHMAN
That must be your wife I keep seeing,
looking down from the window.

And Martin smiles. Easily.

MARTIN
Sara.

Fleishman's eyes glance up toward the window.

FLEISHMAN
It's a handsome cottage. Best on the
beach.

Just a flicker before...

MARTIN
Well, thanks. You're from Boston...?

FLEISHMAN

I've...escaped from Mass General.
I'm a neurologist there.

Martin's nodding his approval. Affable as hell.

MARTIN

We live in Wellesley. I'm an
investment counsellor.

Fleishman glances toward his boat...

FLEISHMAN

Listen, I'm sailing across to Bankton
tonight, just there and back, check
out some new running lights. Maybe
you and your wife would like to come?

Martin looks down at the sand. Wistful, somehow.

FLEISHMAN

I'd love the company, and she's a
comfortable little boat.

MARTIN

I'll tell you, I try to get my wife
into a boat at least once a season.
But it's hard for her, emotionally.
She can't swim...

FLEISHMAN

We'd be riding high and dry in a sea
like this, and no weather on the way,
as far as I can tell.

MARTIN

Actually. She had a brother grown
when she was young. She was with him,
and...

Martin's voice trails off. Shares his wife's agony.

FLEISHMAN

Well, I can understand that.

MARTIN

Look, you're kind to offer. I'll
raise it to her. Gently.

Disarming grin...

MARTIN

If she can handle it...I'd be
grateful for the chance to get
her on the water.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Sara is bending at the oven. Checking on the progress of her bread.
Martin appears in the doorway. She doesn't seem to realize.

MARTIN

Nice-looking man. The doctor.

She startles slightly. Something in the tone.

MARTIN

He says I have a handsome...cottage.
Best...on the beach.

Real fear now. He comes slowly toward her.

MARTIN

When was he in here? Yesterday?
While I was in town?

He's right there. She seems so small.

SARA

Doctor? Martin, I don't...

MARTIN

Sure, you do. Blond, young.
Outfitting his sailboat down there...

Twist of a smile.

MARTIN

He says...you've been staring at him.
From the window. All...day.

As her head begins to shake involuntarily, his arm LASHES OUT, the back of his closed FIST CRASHING against her ear. She SLAMS against the oven and crumples to the clean tile floor. So sudden, so violent, she is too stunned to cry. Her eyes wide and staring, like a dead person.

MARTIN

Does it give you. That much pleasure.
To humiliate me?

And now, the soft sobbing begins.

MARTIN

Stop it.

She can't. And so he KICKS her SAVAGELY. Only once. She grasps her thigh in agony. And somehow, she manages to desperately choke back the sobs, the sounds. He stands above her...

MARTIN

Now you'll sulk, won't you?

Gasping for breath. Shaking her head, no. I won't. He kneels. Just beside her head. His voice is no longer menacing. It is gently chiding, parent-to-child...

MARTIN

Yes, you will. You'll pout. And
spoil our supper.

His hand caresses her hair. Very gently. She tries not to shiver at the touch.

MARTIN

...our beautiful supper. The
lamb...with the chutney.

His voice itself is a caress.

MARTIN

...and the baby peas. And that
bread. Just smell the bread...

His face is very near hers now. Voice just above a whisper...

MARTIN

...will you smile?

...and somehow, somehow, she does. It's even pretty. He kisses her lips. Tenderly. When he pulls back...

MARTIN

Your doctor friend asked us to go
sailing. Tonight.

She's caught her breath. But there's a new terror now. Something deeper than mere assault. Almost inaudibly...

SARA

Darling, you know how...

His finger touches her lips. And she stops.

MARTIN

Just to Bankton. Less than an hour
each way.

In spite of herself, her head is shaking, no. Please, no.

MARTIN

I'll be right there, princess. Right
by your side.

Reassuring. Caring.

MARTIN

I know how you feel. But we can't
conquer our fears. By running away.
(smiles)
Do it. For me?

She draws a ragged breath. Her head nods. And the fear stays in her eyes. He stands now. Slowly.

MARTIN

Think I'll run into town. Anything
you need?

Her head shakes. She's fighting back the tears again. His smile is disappointed. Sure there's nothing I can do for you? No? Well, then.

MARTIN

I'll be back.

He turns and leaves. She lies frozen, listening to the steps. The door open. Quietly close. Still afraid to move. Is he really gone? Finally, slowly, her fingers explore her hairline just above her ear. Blood. Just a trace.

She tries awkwardly to rise. Winces sharply at the pain in her leg. Lifts her skirt to reveal a shocking BRUISE. Blackening yellow and purple. As she stares at it, her tears begin. Silent now. Unnoticed.

Struggles to her feet. She limps first to the fridge. Cubes of ice. Ties them in a dishcloth. She's done this before. To a small cherrywood bar now. Tear-streaked face looks blankly at a row of bottles. She doesn't know one from the other. Takes the vodka. And a glass. Sets them on a low table by a soft leather chair.

To the breakfront now. Leg still stiff, but she's ignoring that. Behind a locked glass case, a few books, artifacts. She fumbles in her pocket for a small keyring. Unlocks the case. Sniffing now, choking back what remains of the tears, she pulls from the shelf a volume in worn green leather. Faded gold letters: DIARY.

She eases herself into the chair. Lifts her skirt to apply the ice pack so slowly, carefully. Holding her breath against the pain. Opens the vodka next. Pours three fingers. Stares as if it were hemlock. A slow, deep swallow. Screws up her face with distaste. Then another. She's calmer now.

Finally the diary. Has its own tiny golden pen. She runs her fingertips over the smooth pages. Draws a cleansing breath. A sad look in her eye. Analytic. Purposeful. As she writes, we HEAR...

SARA (V.O.)

A neighbor asked us to sail tonight.
Martin insisted that we go.

Thinking this over. Very carefully.

SARA (V.O.)

He only wants the best for me, I know.
My fear of water upsets him so. He
thinks confronting the terror will
somehow make me well.

Another pull on the vodka. Closes her eyes. When they open...

SARA (V.O.)

I only pray he doesn't start harping
on swimming lessons again. I don't
know what I'd do.

But she doesn't look fearful at all. Nods slightly to herself, as she writes...

SARA (V.O.)

I might...truly...lose my mind.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Sara on the lonely beach. Walking by the low wall in front of the cottages. There are beach lights on poles, and coarse rocky grass just against the wall. She stops. Staring at the gentle waves of the bay. Not fear, but fascination. As if there were something out there.

She dips to the rough grass. Scrabbling for stones. Big ones. A handful at last. Stands once more to survey the beach. There is no one. Only her cottage. And Fleishman's down the way.

She squints up now. At one of the beach lights. Suddenly HURLS a stone at it. Misses. Not by much. Another, and we HEAR the glass TINKLE and break. She stares down at the shards for a beat. Then...

...takes aim at a second light. Throwing and throwing and finally...the gentle CRACK once more. The glass rains down. She looks at it thoughtfully.

Drops the rest of her stones. Heads slowly back up toward her cottage.

INT. KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Sara at her cutting board. Dicing herbs with a large knife. Her face absent, reflective. HEAR the door open now. Softly. The tension flickers across her eyes. The door closes. Still dicing. Footfalls approach.

MARTIN (V.O.)

Afternoon, Miss. You all alone in here?

She looks up with her best expression of delight. He's holding a dozen roses. Red. Like the kitchen.

SARA

Oh, darling. They're so lovely.

They are. Perfect. He comes to her counter. Sets the flowers down gently. Produces a box. Beautifully wrapped.

MARTIN

I'm sorry we quarreled.

The barest flicker as she stares at the box. She's been here before. But quickly enough, the bright eagerness is in place. Her fingers fumbling girlishly with the ribbon. He watches her face intently, as the box comes open...

SARA

Oh. Oh, my...

Sara pulls from the tissue a red silk TEDDY. She drapes it across her body, lacy and clinging.

MARTIN

If you don't like it...

SARA

You know I do.

Shy. Seductive. Perfect. He says only...

MARTIN

Have you showered?

Her smile is warm and small...

SARA

Well, of course. Just an hour ago.

His eyes move across her face. And then he smiles at last. The smile makes him handsome, loving. His fingers go to her blouse. Gently undoing the buttons. Pulls the cloth back from her body. Kissing her skin.

Her fingers dig into his hair, as if thrilled by his touch. Her lips kiss his head, neck, as he swiftly undresses her. We see the blotches, the marks on her skin. Old and new.

She is naked now. At her kitchen sink. He holds the teddy for her to step into. She does, and he slowly pulls the silk up along her body. Across her breasts. Slipping the straps over her shoulders. He says so softly, considerately...

MARTIN

Is it too early? In the day.

She slips her arms around his neck. Her dreamy, lying smile.

SARA

Please, now. Don't make me wait.

He slides his arms beneath her. And carries her off.

INT. BEDROOM

The room is as dark as curtains can make it. HOLD on a chair, with Martin's clothes nearly folded across its back. Over the sounds of Mahler's Ninth Symphony, we HEAR...

...Sara's SOUNDS of love, we pan to the foot of the chair. Martin's shoes, perfectly aligned. Panning to...

...the bed. Martin's rhythmic, ferocious cadence, as if synchronized to the Mahler. Violence as passion. Sara's hushed, exquisite moaning. As Martin finishes, she brings her song to its appropriate instant of crushed ecstasy.

Her audience rolls over. Stares at her face. So close to her. She holds the smile. Perfect to the end. His eyes linger, opaque. Then he slips from their bed, without a word. Into the bathroom, closing the door.

Her breath holds until we HEAR his shower stream clatter against the tile. And, finally, the air within her slowly releases.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Candlelight. China. Crystal. Sara brings the supper one platter at a time. Martin sits, sipping his wine absently, eyes far away. She serves him, but he scarcely seems to notice. When she returns to her seat...

MARTIN

You want something.

Calm. Neutral. But the eyes are intense. A small smile now, that doesn't change them...

MARTIN

I know my princess.

Her eyes flutter down. Nothing to say.

MARTIN

It's not about...our sail tonight.
I thought...we'd...made up our minds.

She turns her face up to his. Her jaw set. Silent. He contemplates that for a moment.

MARTIN

I'm waiting.

SARA

Mrs. Clark. Called from Wellesley.
She says the library could...use
me full time, now.

Full time. It sits there.

MARTIN

And how would you honor. Your
responsibilities. At home?

Silence. This is an old lesson. But he is never too tired to teach it.

MARTIN

Marriage is a partnership. Based on
mutual responsibilities. And trust.

His voice gentles. But his eyes do not.

MARTIN

I do my best. Is there anything
you lack...to make your life...
perfect?

She can only stare.

MARTIN

You work three mornings a week.
And I support that. Because I
know your love of books.

(beat)

Don't you love our home. As much?

She draws a breath...

SARA

Has your dinner been late to the
table? Ever once?

MARTIN

Oh, I can remember once. It was
late...by two days.

A deep silence. A clock is ticking. A man is waiting.

SARA

That was six months ago.

She looks to him. Searches his eyes.

SARA

My mother. Was all I had. And
I'll never forgive myself...for
not bringing her to live with us.

He actually smiles. His voice so quiet...

MARTIN

You shouldn't beat yourself.
You always treated her with love.

SARA

She died, Martin. How could I
not go to her funeral?

He seems to lean forward.

MARTIN

But that isn't the point, is it?
We know. What the point is.

Yes, they do.

MARTIN

If you had told me. I would
have taken you.

(beat)

Given me a chance. To pay my
last respects.

He sighs. As if more weary than angry.

MARTIN

But you sneaked off. Inexplicably.
Without a note, a word.

An honest man. Grievously wronged.

MARTIN

Need I remind you. How I worried?

SARA

No. You reminded me enough. The night I came back.

She is looking directly at him. That is strange. Her courage interests him.

MARTIN

You aren't suggesting I enjoyed that.

SARA

God, no. That would make you a monster.

And holds it steady. Right at his eyes. He doesn't know how to take that. His face, dead as stone, finally curls the trace of a smile...

MARTIN

If I didn't...know you better.

The words hang. In the air.

MARTIN

...I might think you were...
deliberately...provoking a quarrel.
So that you'd be...unable. To sail
tonight.

The deadly smile blooms.

MARTIN

This is a useful discussion. But one
best...postponed. Until after our
sail. Don't you think?

Reaches for the platter now. In silence, he begins to slide the lamb onto his plate. As if he were alone in the room. HOLD on Sara. Watching.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Sara dips to put the last of the dishes in a low cupboard. Martin looms up behind her.

MARTIN

Time to go.

And though her back is to him, she nods slightly. Time to go. And when she rises, as he gently helps her on with her jacket...

...her eyes move about this room. They glance at one object, then another. And her fingers reach absently. Touch a...

...small stone carving. The primitive figure of a round, comical woman. With an enigmatic smile.

MARTIN

...thinking of our honeymoon?

She is. Her eyes are naked, lost in it. But her back is to him.

MARTIN

The night I gave you that. I
taught you to dance.

Just there, his voice is lovely. The whisper holds no malice.
Only remembered love. And when she turns to him, we see...

...she remembers that, too.

SARA

Those were the happiest days.
Of my whole life.

Complete honesty in that. Her wide eyes stare at him openly,
unafraid. He's not used to that. But in this moment...

...he rather likes it.

EXT. DOCK - NIGHT

Martin and Sara walk together through the night. Toward the dock,
where the day-sailer waits. As Fleishman turns to see them
approach, Martin instinctively takes Sara's hand.

Fleishman waves and smiles. From his POV, they look like lovers.
The man gently helping his wife up onto the platform. Taking her
hand once more.

FLEISHMAN

Evening. I'm John Fleishman, Sara.

He holds out his hand, and Martin virtually presents him with
Sara's. As if it were his to give.

FLEISHMAN

Thanks for coming, I...

But Sara is trembling. Despite her lovely smile.

FLEISHMAN

Are you all right?

She hugs herself. As if it's a chill. Nods happily.

SARA

Just a little cold.

But it isn't cold. Martin has stepped lightly onto the boat.
Turned back to help her, as...

FLEISHMAN

You know, real sailors can't swim
either.

Her eyes shoot to her husband. Embarrassed that her weakness has
been revealed.

MARTIN

I wanted to be sure we took things
nice and easy.

Still, she seems a bit angry. Turns her smile to Fleishman.

SARA

I'm a big baby about this stuff, I
guess. But I'll be fine...

And although Martin is reaching to help her, she gives her hand to
Fleishman...

SARA

...I promise.

And Fleishman helps her into the boat. Once on board the gently
shifting deck, she is clearly uneasy. She moves awkwardly to the
stern. Sits carefully. Fleishman is concerned.

SARA

Once we start, I'm fine.

MARTIN

Let me sit with you.

SARA

No, you help trim the jib...or
whatever you do.

Martin frowns. Lets it pass. Turns to help with the sail as
Fleishman casts off.

EXT. SAILBOAT - NIGHT

Fleishman steers and Martin holds the main sheet on the windward
side of the cockpit. Sara sits and shivers on the leeward side of
the stern.

MARTIN

Those lights over there. That's
Bankton.

Sara doesn't look.

FLEISHMAN

(to Sara)

How are you doing?

MARTIN

She's a brave girl.

FLEISHMAN

(ignoring him)

We can go back, if you want.

She presses her lips together and shakes her head. The effort to smile is visible. Fleishman smiles back helplessly.

SARA

Tell me about your practice, John.
Martin says you're a neurologist?

FLEISHMAN

Can't imagine anything more boring.

SARA

Not to me. Girls are fascinated by
such things.

Fleishman can't suppress a grin. Martin just stares out to sea.

EXT. THE BAY - NIGHT

A WIDE SHOT of the boat rounding a buoy.

A SHOT of the moon fading behind a dark cloud bank.

ANGLE - THE COCKPIT

MARTIN

Now you can really see the lights.

(to Sara)

Isn't that pretty?

Sara nods energetically, facing into the wind. Clearly holding herself together by an act of sheer will. She fixes her eyes once again on the floor of the cockpit, as though wishing the sea away. Fleishman peers out into the restless gloom ahead of him.

FLEISHMAN

I wish that moon would come back.

A long pause as they run almost silently. Then the first of the big, noiseless swells hits them. Fleishman turns the rudder to try and take it bows on but the JOLT loosens Martin's grip on the main sheet. As he fiddles for it on the floor of the cockpit in the wash taken on with the swell -- and as Fleishman watches him helplessly infuriated -- a second big, slow moving sea HITS them hard abeam.

Martin finds the end of the sheet, reins in the sail; Fleishman feels the rudder to find his headway; they both NOTICE at the same time that Sara is no longer there at the leeward rail.

For a moment they seem only interested in this as a curious fact. Then it dawns on them what has happened, what it means. Fleishman PUSHES the rudder furiously, as if he could turn the boat around by sheer main force. Martin stares hopelessly into the blackness around them.

FLEISHMAN

Oh, my God.

MARTIN

(furious, screaming)
She can't swim! What are you going
to do! She can't SWIM!

Martin starts to go over the side of the boat. He's halfway in the water, about to let go, when Fleishman grabs him, tries to wrestle him back into the cockpit...

FLEISHMAN

Jesus Christ! I'm not going to lose
both of you!

...but Martin FLINGS him away, and...

...PLUNGES into black water. He looks desperately around him,
DIVES beneath the surface...

FLEISHMAN

Burney!

...and REAPPEARS. And DIVES again. And again. Gasping. WHIRLING
now, his head lurching in all directions at the darkness...

MARTIN

SA-RAAA!!

Rage. As if he could command her to return from the waves. And
then...

MARTIN

Sara...

Helpless. A lost child.

INT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Martin sits hunched forward. Hands clasped, fingers absently
twisting at each other. His eyes are far away. Around him, the
low-voltage shuffle of midnight at a village police station.

To one side, a SERGEANT is hiked up on the corner of his desk,
taking Fleishman's story. With them is a young HARBOR PATROL
officer. Their voices are only an irritating buzz that cannot
penetrate Martin's isolation. Until...

SERGEANT

Mr. Burney...?

Martin turns very suddenly. Something a little crazy in that. But
the sergeant understands. The red eyes stare. Bore in...

MARTIN

You try to do...everything right.

His voice creates a silence around them.

MARTIN

You try so hard.

The sergeant clears his throat.

SERGEANT

Mr. Burney, we're pretty much through here. Now we can drive you home, or...

MARTIN

What do I do? Tomorrow, huh? Next week. Have you thought about that?

Harbor Patrol just looks down at his feet. Fleishman stares helplessly.

MARTIN

I'm supposed to...what, go to work? Go to our...our home?

Voice breaks on that. A single tear begins its journey.

MARTIN

Can you IMAGINE? What...this...is?

The sergeant turns to Harbor Patrol.

SERGEANT

Why don't you go on home, Roy. Nobody expects you to go out there looking for bodies in the ocean.

Roy turns to see the glare of a man who does. But the man says only...

MARTIN

At least I dove in. To save her. for God's sake! But he...

An arm stabs out. A finger accuses Fleishman.

SERGEANT

Now, just a minute, sir...

MARTIN

(pleading)
She couldn't swim...

SERGEANT

Just don't go blaming the doctor, here. The way the tide pulls through that section. Even a real good swimmer would...

MARTIN

You try. To make everything perfect. And this is what they do.

Once again, the self-pity turns everyone silent. Martin's gaze holds straight at the sergeant. Sudden, complete honesty in...

MARTIN

She was the only thing. I
ever loved.

EXT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

The police car pulls up to the cottage. Fleishman and Roy help Martin to the door. He waves them off and goes in.

INT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

Darkened cottage. Door swinging open. Martin's silhouette.

Only a single dim lamp. Walking aimlessly, thinking of Sara. To the cherrywood bar. Opens the cabinet. In the darkness, he squints at the bottles, not unlike the way we saw Sara do it. He takes down the scotch. Fills the tumbler nearly half full.

Into the bedroom now. Stands before the bed. Where they made love. Still holding his drink, he gathers the sheets and coverlet into his arms. Buries his face now, crying. A low MOAN of agony and...

...his eyes come up. The dresser. A framed photo. We can just make out Sara and Martin. Her arm around him. Her head back. Laughing.

ANGLE...the kitchen. Martin with his scotch. Stopping at...

...the stone carving. The round, comical woman smiles her enigmatic smile. He lifts her slowly. Staring at her, remembering only hours ago...

...into the living room. His eyes come up to the picture to...

...the glass wall. The balcony and moonlit bay beyond. His own image superimposed on the window. Capturing his helpless, self-pitying rage and he...

...FLINGS the stone carving VIOLENTLY...

...THROUGH the glass, which EXPLODES with shocking force, the cold wind RUSHING in, and Martin...

...STALKS toward it, through broken glass CRUNCHING heedlessly beneath his feet, PUSHING through dangling SHARDS at the window and...

...OUT into the night. Grasping the balcony railing, throwing back his head in grief and loss as we CUT TO...

EXT. THE COTTAGE - NIGHT

A WIDE VIEW of the place, with its unlighted windows, its quiet aura of tragedy. HOLD here a long while, listening to the sound of the WAVES gently lapping at the beach. And one thing more...

...an overlapping SOUND. Pen scratching across paper. The sound we've heard when Sara wrote in her diary.

SARA (V.O.)

That was the night Martin Burney
lost his wife. The night Sara
Burney died. The night I was lost...

EXT. THE BAY - NIGHT

Moving swells in moonlight. We are just at the water's surface. In the far distance, a dim flashlight beam. A voice fading in wind and sea...

MARTIN (V.O.)

Sa-ra! Saa-raaa!

PULL BACK slightly to see the buoy. The arm and hand grasping tight. The blonde hair trailing, eddying in the waves.

SARA (V.O.)

...and someone else was saved.
Someone who was afraid of water,
but who learned how to swim...

INT. YWCA POOL - DAY

Close on a woman's body in the shallow end of the pool. Blonde hair stuffed up under a bathing cap. Behind her, SEE three middle aged ladies, among them VANESSA SHELLY, clap and cheer her on as she paddles deeper, over her head -- but all in silence, as we still LISTEN to the WIND and indistinct HISS of the waves on the bay beside Bankton.

EXT. THE BAY - NIGHT

Back in the darkness.

SARA (V.O.)

Who knew a night like this would
come, exactly how it would happen,
if she waited. Someone who could
wait -- long enough.

See her now, blonde hair trailing, a small figure swimming on a dark sea. Slow and steady strokes.

REVERSE ANGLE SHOWS

The line of cottages on the shore. The Burneys' place clearly marked by the absence of two beach lights. The ones Sara smashed.

EXT. THE BEACH - NIGHT

Under a shattered light, a woman's figure rises above the water's surface, finds a foothold, struggles up to dry land shedding her wet, cold clothing. Sara walks onto the shadowy beach, holding her clothes, shaking out her hair, like a goddess just born out of the waves.

She wraps her wet jeans around one foot and her wet shirt around the other, and walks an erratic path up the beach to her cottage, smearing away her footprints as she goes.

Just before reaching the porch, she finds a plastic bag in one of the pockets of her jeans. Begins shoving the wet clothes into it.

INT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

Darkened cottage. Door swinging open. Sara's silhouette.

She leaves the lights off. Walks through her kitchen. The dishes are rinsed and stacked, but she ignores them. Pauses instead at a crystal vase. Twelve roses carefully arranged. They look black in this light. Black and perfect.

Through the living room. She slows at the bookcase. Her eyes trailing over the volumes she will leave behind. The breakfront. Behind the glass, the volume in worn leather. The diary. It too seems black now. She walks on by.

Into the bedroom. Past the bed, neatly made. Past the photo on the dresser. No thought for these. Into the closet. Flick on the light. Drop to her knees...

Sara pries up a floorboard. Begins to pull out a series of plastic bags. These are filled with clothing, toilet articles, all brand new. A rolled-up wad of money. Candy bars and cheese and biscuits. And finally...

...a diary. In worn leather, just like the other. Only this leather is brown. And this diary is real. She rifles its pages slowly. Her years with Martin. In a small, round, careful hand.

She checks the few possessions carefully. Then places them in a rolled-up nylon duffle also taken from beneath the floorboard. One plastic bag goes with her now. To the bathroom mirror. She pulls out dry clothes. A small pair of scissors...

SARA (V.O.)

Someone who thought of everything...

Grabs nearly a foot of her long blonde hair. And slowly, calmly... cuts it off.

SARA (V.O.)

Almost.

Sara realizes she doesn't know what to do with the fistful of hair. She looks around. Goes to the toilet. The golden hair settles softly on the water. And is flushed away.

As Sara turns back to the mirror, we HOLD on the toilet. The backwash has RETURNED a few yellow strands to the bowl.

At the mirror now, Sara is quickly dressing. Pulls from the plastic bag a short brunette wig. Fits it on. Stares at the stranger in the mirror. Pencil now. Eyebrows dark and thicker. A bright red mouth. Tinted glasses from the bag. Fitted carefully. The stranger is complete.

She tries to pull off her wedding ring. But it won't come. Twists, tugs. Too tight. Water and soap now. Lots of soap. And off it comes. Into the plastic bag. Check the bathroom now, for any signs. The sink. The counter. The floor. And...

...the toilet. She sees the long blonde hairs. Stares at them for a beat, without expression. And pushes the plunger. She leaves. But we do not...

...from floor level, just behind the toilet bowl...a slender LOCK OF HAIR. Gleaming gold.

EXT. THE COTTAGE - NIGHT

Sara comes out the back door and slips across the road into the shadows there. She walks off into the night, following the road, keeping to the shadows.

The headlights of a car sweep across a bend up ahead and Sara crouches down behind bushes in a ditch. Waits for the car to pass. Then she gets up and keeps moving along the road.

INT. BUS STATION - NIGHT

A tiny station in a tiny town. Sara comes up to the ticket counter. After a long time the sullen CLERK looks up at her.

CLERK

Where to?

SARA

Iowa. Cedar Falls.

Not something he hears everyday. The man opens a schedule book of routes and rates and studies it for an impossibly long time. Sara stares at him as though half expecting him to say: You can't get there from here. Finally...

SARA

I have to change in Boston, New York, Chicago, and Waterloo, Iowa.

CLERK

I know. I can read.

SARA

It's eighty-five dollars.

INT. GREYHOUND - DAY

Late afternoon, sunlight slanting over brown fields. Sara looks at them without seeing anything. When she turns back, the woman next to her is holding out a large green apple. The woman is fifty, but weathered and older somehow. The apple is clearly being offered to Sara. She doesn't understand.

WOMAN

Doncha like green? I haven't got a red one left.

Sara's eyes go from the woman to the apple. We realize she is hungry, before we hear...

WOMAN

You ate the last of those cheese and biscuits an hour ago. Seemed like you were looking for more.

(smiles)

Please. I got plenty.

And Sara smiles back. The first honest one we've seen. And so, the most beautiful. She nods her gratitude and takes the apple.

WOMAN

Apples is nice.

SARA

(biting in eagerly)

Kindness is nicer.

But even kindness has its price.

WOMAN

You...visitin' out here?

Sara thinks that over as she chews.

SARA

My...mother's all by herself in a nursing home.

The words come evenly. Carefully.

SARA

She's blind, poor thing. Can't move her right side very much...

Quiet now. Thinking. Or remembering.

SARA

She sort of...flickers in and out. Like a Christmas light. And she's...very dear to me.

When her reverie ends, she finds the woman's eyes waiting.

WOMAN

Nice. To see a girl with feeling for her momma.

Sara bites into her apple.

WOMAN

So you...live back East?

Sara chews. She can't look away.

SARA

I was with an old friend. Who needed me.

WOMAN

Sick, was she?

But Sara doesn't answer. The woman seems a little hurt.

WOMAN

...course, it's none of my business.

And without knowing why, Sara blurts...

SARA

...she left her husband.

There is a desperate need to know. How a normal person will react to...

SARA

...he beat her. Horribly. It started right...after their honeymoon.

She's searching the woman's eyes. Looking for judgement.

WOMAN

How long did she stay?

SARA

More than three years.

The woman looks disapproving. But somehow not surprised. She's heard of such things.

SARA

He said, if she ever left. He would punish her. And his punishments were...more terrible than you could...

WOMAN

That's what they say. Those types.

SARA

He meant it. And he's very brilliant. He could find her. Anywhere.

Sara draws a ragged breath. The woman understands. Pretty upsetting stuff.

SARA

She talked to the police. In secret. And even a lawyer. The process of law is so...pathetic. Against a man like that.

(beat)

She was naked.

Sara's eyes have filled. The woman wants to touch her hand. Doesn't know if she should.

WOMAN

How did she leave?

SARA

She risked her life.

The woman nods. Clearly moved by the story and the telling.

WOMAN

Brave girl.

SARA

She says she's a coward. On her last night with him...she told him he was a monster. But in a clever way. So he wouldn't beat her just then.

(beat)

She even flirted. So timidly. With a doctor. Just to make her husband crazy. And then she ran away. Before the punishment.

Quiet now. Sara can't really go on.

WOMAN

Don't you let her think she's a coward. Girl like that.

But Sara's eyes are lost again. Out a window. At a wheat field. Her lips murmuring only...

SARA

Three years. And seven months.

INT. GREYHOUND - NIGHT

Early morning, pitch black outside. The woman is gone. In another configuration of passengers around Sara, who is the only one awake, under her solitary reading light. Writing in her brown diary...

SARA (V.O.)

Someone who could do things by herself, and go where she wanted, and hang the towels upside down.

She stops writing. Looks thoughtfully through the window. And slowly, her face crumbles around the large staring eyes. Becomes the face of a child, crying in misery. But there are no tears. No sound.

Far across the cornfields there is the slightest trace of blood red light along the horizon, the first hint of dawn. She turns back to the diary. Writes...

SARA (V.O.)

Someone who didn't have a name yet. And was still afraid.

Sara flips forward through the pages now. The dates that mark her future. They are blank, but shimmer with a kind of promise. As she smooths them with her fingertips, it is nearly a caress.

Back to where she's been writing now. Scrawls across the end of it: TOMORROW. And draws a line under it.

INT. GREYHOUND, CEDAR FALLS - MORNING

SERIES OF ANGLES...as the Greyhound rolls slowly through the small college town. Quiet Victorian homes. Lazy shopping streets. Library. Post office, with its flag going up. The town square.

A safe haven in gentle golden light. And reflected in the window...

...Sara's face is shining. This is really happening. Life beginning within her, as...

...we roll to a stop. She is the only one getting off. And as she gathers her things, and as she moves down the aisle, there is something in her eyes that makes the driver ask...

DRIVER
Coming home...?

And skipping down the steps...

SARA
Even better.

HIGH ANGLE...from across the perfect green town square. Sara nearly bounding toward us, across the grass now, hand reaching up...

...TEAR the brunette wig away. Shake her hair free in the sunlight, and...

...SLAM DUNK the wig in a trash basket, as she...

...STRIDES past. And gone.

EXT. TREMONT STREET - DAY

An old, immaculate Buick pulls up in front of a grand Victorian pile, small but sprawling just the same, on a street of old Victorian piles.

A short, immaculate blue-haired lady gets out from behind the wheel and Sara gets out of the passenger's side. They walk up to the porch of the house.

Sara's eyes are wide: the place is a dream. The old lady, MRS. NEPPER, watches her sharply.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sara comes down the stairs in silence. Mrs. Nepper trails just behind. Still watching her. They stand at the edge of the room. Sara looks around. Eyes lingering on every inch of the place...

Mrs. Nepper walks straight past her now. Out the door, to...

EXT. FRONT PORCH - DAY

...the graceful, weathered porch. She waits until Sara joins her. Then turns, a little coldly, to hear...

SARA

I love it. But six hundred...

MRS. NEPPER

Can't take a penny less. Got two couples comin' this afternoon...

She just lets that sit. This is too easy. She watches Sara's short, anxious nod.

SARA

I'll need to find a job. I don't have much cash with me.

MRS. NEPPER

First and last month. In advance. Can't hold it no other way...

And Sara reaches to her pocket. The neat roll of bills. She counts them out. There's nearly nothing left if she does this...

She looks up. So clearly the prisoner of her desire that even Mrs. Nepper seems to feel a trace of guilt. Or at least compassion.

MRS. NEPPER

Miss Ray...

SARA

...Pray. Laura Pray, Mrs. Nepper.

A beat, and...

MRS. NEPPER

Maybe I could tell those other folks...I can't show the house til tomorrow. Give you today to find that job.

Sara smiles. Thrusts out the bills.

SARA

I want the place. If I have to eat the furniture.

Slowly, Mrs. Nepper takes the bills. Admits...

MRS. NEPPER

Telephone's outta order. May take 'em a while to get by.

Sara doesn't care. About anything. She is Laura now. With a home.

INT. LAURA'S HOUSE - DAY

Laura drifts through the living room, its furniture covered with ratty old sheets. She runs her hand across the mantle, SEES her finger is nearly black with dust. She smiles and moves on.

Up the stairs, and into the master bedroom. She looks around and smiles again -- imagining the possibilities, apparently, because the room is as shabby as the rest of the place. She falls backwards onto the bare mattress, closes her eyes. Then gets up and goes into the bathroom.

She grabs some Comet from a shelf and starts cleaning the place, furiously, happily.

LATER...the room is spotless now. There are towels piled on the back of the commode. Laura emerges dripping from the shower, drying off. She absently folds her towel and starts to line it up with another towel on the rack. Then she catches herself. Yanks the towel deliberately off kilter.

She walks naked into the bedroom. Sits on the edge of the bed, where her clothes have been laid out. As she lies back...

...we HEAR a lawn mower next door. She LOOKS up now, and notices that the breeze is blowing the tattered lace curtains in, exposing the room. She leaps up and goes to...

...close them. Peeking through a slender opening now to see...

...her neighbor, cutting the grass. He is BEN WOODWARD. Thirty, dark quiet eyes. The playfulness is below the surface just now. But as he works without a shirt, he is a smoothly-muscled masculine presence. And turning his back...

Laura is watching. Watching. As we SNAP TO...

FLASHBACK ANGLE...Martin's bare back. He is on the deck of a sailboat, docked at a quiet cove. He turns now, and we see a gentle, loving smile. He brings a glass of wine and a towel to a wet, shivering Sara sitting against the railing.

Martin kneels beside Sara, slips the towel protectively around her. She looks at him with honest love. Her fingertips touch the muscles of his bare chest, and we SNAP BACK TO...

...Laura's window. Staring down at the half-naked man below. Quietly, she pulls the shade.

INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

A vast place, an endless warehouse of food. Laura pushes an empty shopping cart past an enormous deli section bursting with cheeses and delicacies of every description. Laura looks neither right nor left, not wanting to know, but we can see that the smells are driving her nuts.

She pauses by a clerk price-marking potato chips, which she also tries not to see. Stops at the rice. Her eyes travel over the

bags. Big. Bigger. Industrial strength. She hefts the last one, dumps it into her cart. Pushes on.

INT. LAURA'S KITCHEN - DAY

The place is spotless now, cleaned within an inch of its life. Laura empties her grocery bag. Coffee, milk. Salt, pepper. The rice. An equally large bag of dried beans. That's all.

The meagerness of this supply seems to strike her suddenly and she slumps down in a chair, staring at it. Then, softly...

LAURA

Boil water, Laura. One foot in front of the other.

INT. KITCHEN - DUSK

Laura heaps rice and then beans onto a plate, then pours boiling water into a cup of instant coffee, sits down at the table and starts shovelling the rice and beans into her mouth. Then she stops. Sits upright.

Goes and rummages in a drawer until she finds an old candle, which she lights, sticks onto a saucer and places on the table. Then she turns off the overhead lights in the kitchen and sits down to her meal with dignity.

She eats slowly and carefully and we WATCH her for a long time. Laura grows solemn, deeply moved.

LAURA (V.O.)

It was the first meal Laura Pray had eaten in the old house. In my own place. The evening was so beautiful, and I never wanted it to end -- the quiet, and the beautiful light. Salt and pepper, rice and beans. They were so good.

LATER...as V.O. continues, Laura is at her sink. Carefully washing and stacking...

LAURA (V.O.)

Nothing could have made the evening more perfect...

...and her glance roams out the window. Her neighbor's yard. Moonlight framing an apple tree. In her eyes, a flicker of criminal intent.

LAURA (V.O.)

Except. Dessert.

EXT. BEN'S BACKYARD - NIGHT

Laura in moonlight. Gathering fallen apples from the ground. Holding them in her skirt, as if it were a basket.

She works quickly, silently. There is mischief and fear lightly on her features. Mostly haste.

She has nearly a dozen. Sorting now. Getting choosier. This one. Not that. Okay, the last one. Stand up quickly, turn and...

...the GASP STRANGLES in her throat. For a MAN stands inches from her. And just above a whisper...

BEN

Stop thief!

She is frozen solid. It is her neighbor with the dark eyes. And just now, the wisp of a playful smile.

BEN

Harvest time?

She holds her apples in her upturned skirt. Staring at him. Has to struggle to find her tongue...

LAURA

They were bruised and damaged,
and...

A crooked grin...

BEN

I'll be the judge of that.

...and plucks one apple from her skirt. Holds it up to the moonlight. Squinting as he turns it carefully.

LAURA

...well, that's a good one.

BEN

What are we doing? With my apples.

He's cheerful, enjoying this. But there is a reckless air, something electric about the guy.

LAURA

I'm making pie. If I go buy
crust.

BEN

How d'you know I even like pie?

LAURA

...I'm not making it for you.

Ah. And now he just stares at her. As relaxed and self-possessed as she is not.

LAURA

What are you looking at?

He only smiles. A very friendly one, in fact.

BEN

I'm mentally dressing you.

Realizing the height of her skirt, she abruptly LETS GO, the apples spilling and BOUNDING all about their feet. And when they stop...

LAURA

Go ahead. Call the police!

...she sweeps by him. Storming off toward the screen door to her kitchen. When she's too far away to hear, he murmurs...

BEN

...pleasant meeting you.

INT. LAURA'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Laura at her sink, flustered, flushed and scrubbing a pan with ferocity. As she rinses...

...the SOUND. So slight she is only subliminally aware of it. She shuts off the water to listen better, and...

...a small SCRATCHING. She WHIRLS to see...

...Ben at her screen door. He carries all her apples in his upturned t-shirt. She just stares, until...

BEN

I'm sorry.

He stands so easy. There in the half-light behind the screen. Her expression questions: Sorry?

BEN

I'm sorry I wised off. Please
take the apples.

She doesn't want any part of this. But the kindness of his tone has her cornered. Slowly, she walks to the screen. And when she gets there...

BEN

I'm Ben Woodward. I live
next door.

LAURA

I know that.

BEN

And I was lying. About the
being sorry part.

In spite of herself, the barest trace of a smile.

LAURA

I knew that, too.

Staring at each other through the screen. Only inches apart.

BEN

Okay. I teach drama at the college. But that's the last tidbit you're gonna pry out of me.

There is charm. But he is too attractive. And that has her right on edge. Feeling the silence...

BEN

This is working good. I can push the apples to you through the screen...

Oh. She forgot he's still out there. But she can't quite commit to changing that. So he grins...

BEN

Decision time. Will she let the neighbor in...?

(Jaws theme)

Bom-bom, bom-bom, bom-bom...

Now she's embarrassed not to. Opens the door. And walks away into the room, a little too quickly. Ben stares at her back for a beat. He isn't smiling anymore...

...he's thinking. That makes his face more interesting. As he enters, he puts the smile back on.

BEN

So. Who are you? Where are you from? What are you doing in these parts?

He goes straight past her to dump the apples in the sink. Runs water on them. Starts to clean them off.

LAURA

I'll do that.

BEN

Are you a woman of mystery?

Said disarmingly straight. And when he turns. And sees her face...

BEN

My god. Maybe you are.

...said softly. He leans back against the sink.

BEN

Pardon the come-on, okay?
It's just my way.

No spin on that. He can be gentle when he wants to.

BEN

Let's change this to an old-fashioned neighborly welcome.

LAURA
How do we do that?

BEN
I don't know. Maybe I'm too late.

Unsmiling, honest. It seems to increase her anxiety.

BEN
Is there anything you need? To
settle in.

LAURA
...a job.

She doesn't know why she says that. Perhaps because it seems he
really wants to know.

BEN
What work do you do?

LAURA
I can work in a library. If
I don't need...credentials.

Intriguing. That last part. Quietly...

BEN
There are four libraries at the
college. I'll ask around.

LAURA
Please don't.

She's not sure why she said that either. She's not sure of much
just now.

BEN
I will, anyway.

And walks past her. To the door. And turns back, to...

LAURA
I said. Please don't.

BEN
Don't you feel guilty, rejecting
kindness? Or is it easier cos
I was such a dork.

LAURA
It's easier. Because I have a
high guilt threshold.

Ah. Was there a smile in that? Almost.

BEN
Well, I'm gonna test that.

Open the screen. Stand in the doorway.

BEN

Tomorrow, I come home at four.
And work my ass off, cooking
dinner for two. And if you're
not there, with an apple pie, by
eight o'clock...

(beat)

...it starts getting cold.

Turn away. The screen clatters SHUT behind him. And gone.

Hold on Laura. Alone with her thoughts.

INT. BEACH COTTAGE, CAPE COD - DAY

Suitcases. Matched. Standing by a door. Waiting to go.

SARA (V.O.)

Dear Diary. These are my first
moments alone with you...

The empty kitchen. The bay through the glass. On the counter, a
dozen dead roses. Withered and rotting. Still perfectly arranged.

SARA (V.O.)

And they are all the more
precious, because...

The breakfront. The glass case hanging open. The wood splintered
where the lock has been jimmied.

SARA (V.O.)

...my Martin gave you to me.

See MARTIN now. The leather chair where Sara once sat. The glass
of scotch at his side. The worn leather volume across his lap...

SARA (V.O.)

He wants so much for me to have a
place to go...to be with myself.
There is a...respect in that. The
most wonderful part of his love.

He turns the page. Thoughtful. Impassive.

SARA (V.O.)

And he does love me. I know that
in my body and my heart. I know
he'll marry me. And that...

(beat)

...I would give my life to make
him happy.

Without looking, his fingers find the glass of scotch. A slow,
measured sip. He skips many pages. Stopping at...

SARA (V.O.)

...the smooth feel of his shoulders.
His back. Physical attraction is
important, I think. It holds a
marriage together.

He rubs his fingers absently across the page. Feeling its smoothness. Turns once more, several pages, to...

SARA (V.O.)
...only wants everything to be right. The way it should be. But I ask myself, what have I done...to become a...thing. That he would beat...and beat...and...

Martin staring. Hard.

SARA (V.O.)
...what can I do...to make him love me again?

No expression in the silence. Then, very carefully, Martin tears the page from the book. As if it does not belong. Folds it into thirds. Meticulously. Tears the paper evenly into small scraps. Sets them on the table.

This done, he rifles pages now to the end. The last entry...

SARA (V.O.)
A neighbor asked us to sail tonight. Martin insisted that we go.

See the change in him now. The tension. The memories of that night. He skims the page. Turns to the last...

SARA (V.O.)
...harping on swimming lessons again. I don't know what I'd do. I might truly lose my mind.

The tension shades to regret. Deepens. His breath audible now. More ragged, as he reads...

SARA (V.O.)
I'm so ashamed. Of my weaknesses. My failings. I look into Martin's eyes...and I know that a man so... devoted to perfection...
(beat)
...would be better off without me.

Martin's eyes are shining now. He stares. And stares. Choking back the feeling. Shakes his head. Murmurs...

MARTIN
...never.

EXT. LAURA'S KITCHEN DOOR - NIGHT

Laura's kitchen door, as seen from the darkness. Somewhere, hard-driving rock music PLAYS. The porch light flicks ON, and...

...Laura edges through the screen door, juggling an apple pie. She finds a covered path through lilac bushes. As she makes her way toward Ben's back porch...

...the sledgehammer music gets LOUDER. It's coming from his place. Its pulsing energy seems to slow her. Make her even more cautious. When she reaches Ben's screen door...

...he's bending over an oven from which smoke is POURING. As he struggles to pluck a roast from the grease fire, his butt is still wiggling to the rock beat from his portable cassette player. It's a comical sight, and we see her relax. A little.

Ben manages to get the roast up to its platter on the sink. The charred surface is still aflame in one spot, and he gingerly snuffs it with a handy dish towel. His back is still to us, as he...

...SLAMS off the tape player. A sudden SILENCE. Knowing she hasn't been seen, makes Laura awkward. But without turning...

BEN

That's okay. Just shove the pie through the screen.

Busted, she opens the door. He still doesn't turn around. Fussing over his roast. So she enters to see...

...the kitchen table set with a cloth, place settings. Platters of new potatoes, green beans. Hot rolls in a basket. Coffee pot. No wine, no candles. And as she stares at it, we SNAP TO...

FLASHBACK ANGLE...an elegantly set table in a high-tech apartment. Candles are the only light, wine is chilling. And...

...Martin steps into frame. He holds a casserole toward us, like a chef showing off his piece de resistance. He is grinning, playful. We pull back to see...

...Sara as his audience. Her hair spilling over smooth shoulders, she is lovely. And thoroughly charmed. The shining eyes and subtle half-smile of a woman in love. As she goes to take the casserole we SNAP BACK TO...

...Ben's kitchen table. And as she stares absently. He is watching.

BEN

Did I forget something?

LAURA

No, it's just...I thought all these places had a...

(beat)

...separate dining room.

She does look a little fragile just now. Oddly so.

BEN

I didn't want to overdo this. We're only neighbors.

Said soft and friendly. A show of good faith. She nods. A little shy, but wanting to respond to his tone. He breaks the tension by glancing warily at his roast...

BEN
Y'like charred rare? Or do we
send out for pizza.

She crosses to him. Sets the pie on the counter. They are standing quite close as she pokes the roast. Moving slightly away, she lifts the carving knife from the counter and...

...cuts a small slice. The meat is red and tender.

LAURA
It's great.

She holds the slice up for him. He takes it from her fingers. Pops it into his mouth, staring at her so directly. She feels awkward once more. Fears she's been misleadingly intimate.

BEN
Want a drink, while I carve?

LAURA
I'll do this.

...and she takes up the carving knife and fork. Begins to work, relieved that her eyes are off him.

BEN
Like some music?

LAURA
Sure. I haven't been...around
rock music. In a long time.

She doesn't look up. He's clearly intrigued by this first small revelation.

BEN
Classical all right...?

LAURA
...anything but Mahler.

Intriguing once again. In the silence...

LAURA
...his Ninth gives me the chills.

BEN
I'll have to go buy one.

She keeps working. He smiles at the back of her head. Then goes to rummage through a drawer of tapes...

BEN
Oh, ten-thirty tomorrow morning.

She's finished. Hesitantly puts down her tools...

LAURA
...excuse me?

BEN
Your interview. At the Humanities
Library...

And he turns to her. So easily.

BEN
That's why you came over, isn't it?
Silence. His gentle...

BEN
Why you baked the pie.
Maybe it is. She doesn't know. Just stares at him.

BEN
Gin okay? I forgot to buy wine.

LAURA
(very quietly)
Gin is fine.

He slips a tape into the deck. Brahms filters across the room.

BEN
No...credentials, you said.

LAURA
And no I.D. either. It's
all lost.

Lost.

BEN
Do you have a name?

She hadn't realized. He's never asked her name.

LAURA
It's Laura Pray.

BEN
That's a start.

His eyes linger. Then he turns to a cabinet. Pulls out the gin,
glasses. She watches, then takes the roast to the table.

BEN
We'll cook up a story...

That stops her. He glances to her as he pours the drink...

BEN
They'll take my word for it.

A held stare between them.

LAURA

Look. I do need the job.
And the help.

BEN

But...

LAURA

...I'm uncomfortable. Taking
from you.

His smile fades completely. He thinks before he says...

BEN

You're right. It's a lousy
beginning for us.

Shrugs. His face lightens, a little. Starts toward her.

BEN

Kindness is sappy, these days.
Evil is exciting.

As he reaches her, she seats herself before he can help. He sets
her drink in front of her. She looks up...

LAURA

You're going to ask. All kinds
of questions.

Slowly, he nods.

BEN

Just the important stuff.

Sits. Across from her.

BEN

...what do you read?

And with his easy smile, he gives her peace. For the moment, at
least. She draws a breath...

LAURA

I'm very selective...

He finds that funny. Murmurs...

BEN

I'd have bet the farm.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

She's drying the dishes. He's putting them away. The music is
reggae now, and as Laura works...

...she is unconsciously moving her body to the music, just a
little. It's not even dancing. And it's certainly not meant
for him. But he is watching.

BEN

I have two of those tape decks.

She is loving this one song. Never looks back...

LAURA

I'm very impressed.

BEN

I could lend you one. But
knowing you as I do...

(beat)

...you'd probably resent it.

Her smile. Small and free.

LAURA

You could try begging.

...and when she glances up. He is very close. He reaches out...

...softly touches her hair. She meets his eyes dead on. Not
afraid to set things straight, if this is the moment.

BEN

You looked so pretty. Standing
there.

And gently...

LAURA

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to.

His hand comes slowly away. But he doesn't step back, or seem
awkward. Just his easy, direct gaze.

LAURA

It's late.

He nods. Guess it is. She takes the step backward. Folds the
towel. Looks up to his eyes, and...

...he holds out the tape recorder. Still throbbing its reggae
number. Go ahead, he nods. Take it.

BEN

Something for the guilt threshold.

She smiles. She really does like him. See it right here, as her
eyes linger. She takes the tape deck slowly.

LAURA

Well. Thanks for everything.

Nods her gratitude. And leaves the frame.

HOLD on Ben. Watching her go. Hear his screen door clatter SHUT...

LAURA (V.O.)

...see you.

INT. LAURA'S BASEMENT - NIGHT

A faucet. In dim light. Dripping. Against absolute silence. Dripping slow.

LAURA (V.O.)
Dinner with Ben Woodward.

Over the drip, hear the scratching of Laura's pen...

LAURA (V.O.)
I'm so ashamed of my fear. I
know it showed.

PULL BACK from the small discolored sink. Move along a dark, low-ceilinged basement. Jumbled with ancient abandoned things...

LAURA (V.O.)
I won't let him feel it's his
fault. He doesn't deserve that.

A single hanging bulb dimly illuminates Laura. She sits on a battered washer-dryer, next to freshly stacked clothes. Her diary in her lap.

LAURA (V.O.)
I'll be his friend. I'll
handle it.

Yes, she will. Soft, determined eyes. There's a leftover apple. She takes a slow, reflective bite. Silently reading...

LAURA (V.O.)
I know you'd like him. But I
don't know why.

Draws a ragged breath. Her eyes starting to glisten.

LAURA (V.O.)
That's how I think of everything,
now. My house...my hair...my
supper...
(beat)
...would mom like this?

Staring at the page. Wanting not to cry. Lifting the pen. To add a whispered...

LAURA
...miss you so.

INT. MARTIN'S OFFICE, BOSTON - DAY

Stock market TICKER TAPE, flashing above two dozen cubicles. Brokers on telephones, at quotron monitors. The BUZZ of an overload morning.

PAN to a row of private offices. Glass-enclosed. The key producers. STOP at Martin Burney. His high-rise view of downtown

Boston. His tasteful decor. His calm and elegant manner as he punches up a phone line...

ANGLE...with him now. His eyes roaming the green print on his monitor, as...

...a door opens. He looks up to a secretary, who stands with a middle-aged woman...

SECRETARY

...this is Mrs. Shelly. She only wants a minute...

As Martin draws a breath to object...

VANESSA

I knew your wife.

And Martin stops. In mid-breath.

VANESSA

I admired her very much.

Martin's face softens. He rises, courteous now. Gestures Vanessa to a chair, as the secretary withdraws.

VANESSA

I'm sorry to intrude on your grief. But she seemed such a fine young Christian woman...

Her eyes so strong. So eager to lend comfort.

VANESSA

My husband is a deacon in our church. Any support we can give...

Her voice trails off. But her smile remains.

MARTIN

Where did you...know her from?

VANESSA

The YWCA.

The simple words. Sharpen Martin's eyes. He brings up a smile of professional politeness...

MARTIN

I'm sorry, ma'am. You may have the wrong person. My wife...

VANESSA

No, I recognized her picture in the paper. Recognized it right away. I thought it was a different name. Langer or...Langley, but... I could never forget that face. So pretty and...so brave...

MARTIN

But my wife never went to the Y.
Never once.

VANESSA

Well, of course she did. And all
of us just loved her.

(beat)

The way she hated to swim. And
just made herself do it. Such...
determination...

Martin isn't smiling anymore. There's a full beat. His voice is
low. Measured.

MARTIN

There must be some mistake. My wife
drowned. Because she couldn't swim.

VANESSA

No, no. She was a gymnast, wasn't
she?

A moment's relief. The wrong woman. But before his smile can
fully return...

VANESSA

That's why she had those terrible
bruises. All over her poor body...

Martin's face freezes. The rictus of what could almost pass for a
smile, and slowly...

...he turns his swivel chair away. Toward the glass...

VANESSA (V.O.)

Mr. Burney...?

He is in darkened silhouette. Framed against the glass. Rising
slowly...

MARTIN

I'm sorry. Just...the thought
of her body. All she's...

...resting his hands on the window ledge for support.

MARTIN

...been through.

Our ANGLE rotates now. To catch his face in light...

VANESSA (V.O.)

It is so sad. Tempts you to
wonder...

His eyes, jaw, every muscle. Frozen. A look we've never seen.
Even at its worst.

VANESSA (V.O.)
...about God's plan.

EXT. POST OFFICE - DUSK

Laura coming out of the old-fashioned post office. Someone is pulling down the flag. The green square is mostly empty, as Laura...

...steps to a pay phone. There is an air of tension, compulsion about her. She drops coins. And as she waits...

...we can almost feel her heart pounding. What can this be? Four rings, five. Her anxiety building until...

NURSE (V.O.)
Fredsburg Nursing Home.

LAURA
May I speak to Chloe Williams,
please?

NURSE (V.O.)
Who's calling?

LAURA
It's a friend of the family.
(beat)
Julia Langer.

NURSE (V.O.)
Just a minute, Ms. Langer. I'll
have to get a phone to her bed.

A long wait. Laura is about to hang up the phone, then...

CHLOE (V.O.)
Hello?

The voice is dry, ancient, hopeless.

CHLOE (V.O.)
There's no one there. I don't
know a Mrs. Landner...

Tears start running down Laura's cheek. She places her hand over the phone's mouthpiece and whispers...

LAURA
It's all right, mom. You
just forgot. Oh, god...

CHLOE (V.O.)
There's no one there.

A silence. Laura's hand is white, across the mouthpiece. Clutching the phone tight enough to crush it. Murmurs...

LAURA
I love you. I'm okay.

There is a CLICK. And the BUZZ of a disconnect. But Laura still holds the receiver. From all her heart, a vow...

LAURA
...see you soon.

EXT. HUMANITIES LIBRARY - NIGHT

Graceful old brick building, facing a dimly-lit quadrangle of grass and trees. Dark, quiet now. The building says: HUMANITIES LIBRARY. And down its steps skips...

...Laura, clutching three books to her chest in the mild night air. Steps onto the grass, and...

...STARTLES. At the figure. Under the darkened tree.

BEN
How'd it go?

She smiles to see him. Relieved. And maybe pleased as well.

LAURA
It's all right. Slow, but that lets me read on the job.

He just waits. So she strolls over.

BEN
Thought you could use a ride.
Not many busses this late.

Her smile warms. And gets smaller.

LAURA
...my guardian angel.

Almost a murmur. He falls in beside her, and they start up the path. She looks straight ahead, and he watches her. She's deciding whether to say...

LAURA
...other night. You said I only came over. Because I needed the job.

He says nothing. Just that light smile. Likes looking at her.

LAURA
Women are devious, huh?

BEN
Not normal women.

That brings her eyes over.

BEN
Just mafia wives, on the run.

And that makes her smile.

BEN
Or unrepentant nuns. Starting
over.

LAURA
...women of mystery.

BEN
Coal and steel heiress. Escaping
the shallow values of Manhattan
society...

LAURA
I like that one.

She is really grinning now. Happy and safe in his company.

BEN
My personal favorite...you
fainted in a jewelry store.
While they called the doctor,
you swallowed a diamond.

LAURA
...emerald. I like emeralds.

BEN
I'll keep it in mind.

They keep walking. But then...

LAURA
I asked a real question. About
men and women.
(beat)
Who uses who?

As looks over. Really want to know...?

BEN
Women play men. Like a concert
violin. More power to them.

She glances down. Smile fades, just a little. A full beat
before...

LAURA
Would you live on someone else's
money...in someone else's home...
even if it's supposedly yours
because he says it is?

She looks up. He sees how deep this runs.

BEN
Look, whoever hurt you...

LAURA
...it's not about him. This is
men. And women.

She licks her lips.

LAURA

A couple enters a party. Eyes turn to them. If he puts his hands on her body, he's declaring ownership. If she puts her hands on his body, she's insecure. Maybe desperate.

BEN

I think men expect...

LAURA

Men expect that women are always thinking of little things to please them. Things to say, to cook, to do in bed. A touch, a look. Loving. personal. That's what we do. It's expected.

BEN

And when a man...does something like that for a woman...

LAURA

...he expects...gratitude.

(beat)

He expects that something...buys her loving him...more than he loves her.

BEN

Guys are all alike, huh?

LAURA

In that way. Down deep, I think so. Even the nice ones.

Even the nice ones.

LAURA

A man and a woman make love. And it's wonderful for both of them. He expects her to be grateful.

(beat)

How was it, how was it? Tell me how good I did you. How incredible I made you feel.

(beat)

Did a woman ever ask you for that?

They have stopped beneath a dark, spreading tree. It is not too dark for their eyes to lock. A wave of heat surges across the moment, and he leans to her, as...

LAURA

Ben...

But his mouth is ON hers, and she TWISTS aside, his hands going to her hair, and she...

...WRENCHES herself free. She has to fight to catch her breath. Even in this light, her eyes are flaming.

Just her breathing now. In the silence.

LAURA
I thought you understood.

BEN
I think I do.

No smile in that. Hard and sure of himself.

BEN
There's some reason you don't want this. Even though you do.

LAURA
Men always think you want...

BEN
This man thinks...

And that stops her. A command in the voice.

BEN
...you need your hands on the controls. And that's okay.

LAURA
...until the next time.

BEN
No next time, Laura Pray.

He takes a slow step back. And another. Out of reach.

BEN
I'm a little bit hooked. It's a mesmerizing package...

He has to smile at himself. How did I get here?

BEN
You're allowed to be scared.

...and with that. The smile is for her.

BEN
From here on. You set the rules.

LAURA
I've heard that before.

BEN
But you never heard it from me.

Silence.

BEN

You want a ride home?

LAURA

Hell, no.

He just nods. Your call. Turns straight around. Heads off, without a backward glance.

HOLD on her in moonlight. Watching him go.

EXT. HIGHWAY, CAPE COD - SUNSET

The colors of sunset move across the bay. A lone car cruises the highway just above the sand, as...another car TEARS by, impossibly fast. Streaking toward something.

INSIDE the speeding car. Martin at the wheel. Eyes clear and cold. Driving with a purpose.

EXT. BEACH COTTAGE - NIGHT

Martin's car parked at the entrance to the cottage. Every light is on.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

PAN the room as Martin methodically dismantles it. Every drawer open. Carefully through her clothes. Sweaters. Blouses. Panties. No sentiment, no reverie. Only hands exploring the sides, the bottoms, every inch of each drawer.

Into the closet. Meticulously sliding each garment down the rack. Inventory. Is anything missing? Patting down anything with a pocket, a lining.

The bathroom now. Both toothbrushes still in place. A tube of paste. Into the medicine chest. Cosmetics. Band-aids. All there. Open the drawers. Each area reviewed with insane precision.

The toilet cubicle. Sits on the floor, just in front of the bowl, to open the low cabinet. Paper. Kleenex. And a small pouch. He unzips it. Tortoise-shell bobby pins. Small barrettes. Nothing more. He scoops out a small handful. Sits staring into distance with dead eyes. End of the road.

Slowly now, he stands. Starts to go, and...

...DROPS one of the bobby pins. A tiny, useless item. On a floor he'll never see again. But reflex makes Martin bend. Pick it up. And see...

...behind the bowl. The lock of yellow hair. Hacked off. Nearly a foot long. He stares. Absolutely frozen. A stab wound through Martin's brain. His fingers reach now...

...gently take the lock of hair into his palm. Caresses it with his fingertips. But not his eyes.

INT. LAURA'S BASEMENT - DUSK

The old sink. The rusted faucet. This time, the drip has dramatically worsened. Water leaks steadily in the silence, until...

...a BLAST of reggae cuts the air. Into frame steps...

...Laura. A wrench in one hand. The borrowed tape deck in the other. She sets the deck on a shelf. Studies the faucet, the plumbing below the sink. Looks like she knows what she's doing.

On her knees now. Working with the wrench on a lower pipe. Gives it a mighty PULL, and...

...the faucet SLOWS. Considerably. All right.

Brushes her hair back. Gets a good grip. PULLS again. Won't budge. Once more. Nada. Stands up. Walks in a little circle. Frustrated. Building up steam, and...

...back on her knees. Grabs on for dear life. YANKS with everything in her, as the pipe...

...SNAPS in two, water GUSHING straight at her, as she YELPS and SWEARS, ROLLING out of the way.

Staring at the geyser. From her hands and knees. As the flood spreads. Shit.

EXT. LILAC PATH - DUSK

Wet Laura, under a flame-lit twilight sky. Holding her wrench like a valid excuse, she heads down the lilac path to Ben's kitchen, as...

...the music is Mahler's Ninth. And Laura stops. The music that Martin made love to. There is a rising tide of dread.

But she blinks it away. Continues to Ben's screen door. He's at the kitchen table. Grading essays, the papers spread everywhere...

He doesn't sense she's there. Or pretends not to. Finally...

LAURA
Mahler's Ninth.

He looks up. Tries not to show how glad he is to see her.

BEN
It came highly recommended.

LAURA
Could you turn it off?

And he does. Gently. Motions her in, without rising. She comes just inside the door. Still wet. Still clutching her wrench. Draws a breath...

LAURA

The bitch next door. Needs to use you for something.

BEN

I like the sound of that.

They're smiling at each other now. Very, very small.

BEN

You turn off the main?

LAURA

The valve's rusted tight.

BEN

Too proud to call a plumber?

LAURA

They've gone home. By morning, my little house will have floated down to Pine Street.

He leans back. Tilting his chair at a precarious angle.

BEN

So basically. First little excuse, you come dashing over.

LAURA

...that's about it.

He just nods. Thinking it over. And softly...

BEN

Hey. Glad to be of service.

INT. LAURA'S BASEMENT - DUSK

The basement is flooding fast. The splashing mingles with the reggae tape, which is still going strong. Ben leads the way down the steps, sizing up the situation.

The gusher around the sink isn't going to make this easy. Or dry. He holds out his hand, and she gives him the wrench. Surgical assistant passing the scalpel. As he slogs through the mess...

BEN

Okay if I take off all my clothes?

He's there now. Staring at the problem.

LAURA

Go ahead. Then I can mentally dress you.

He gets down gingerly. Hands and knees. Staying as dry as he can. Studying the plumbing like it could speak to him. Puts the wrench at a joint below the leak, and...

...PULLS hard. The water stops. Stops cold.

LAURA

Holy moley.

She gives out a long, low WHISTLE. As he turns with a modest flourish to acknowledge her approval, he SLIPS, and...

...falls FLAT in the water. She doesn't want to laugh. But she has to, a little. He climbs to his feet with slow dignity. Soaked. Slogs toward her...

...hands her the wrench. Keeps going up the steps.

LAURA

...thanks for stopping by.

He turns at the gentle sarcasm.

BEN

I didn't mean to rush off. You got some live wiring you want me to hold together?

No. Something else.

LAURA

There's a bake sale. At Mrs. Nepper's church. I promised a lemon pie...and a devil's food cake...and...

(beat)

...I could use an escort.

He pulls his soaked shirt away from his body.

BEN

I'm unavailable. We buffoons have our pride.

He throws her a straight, easy smile. See ya, kid. And trudges up the steps...

LAURA

...should I try begging?

But he's gone.

EXT. REST HOME, MINNEAPOLIS - DAY

Brick and ivy and stone steps. A shaded street. A small sign that says: RUTH EVANS FOSTER SANITARIUM. SERVING MINNEAPOLIS - ST. PAUL SINCE 1937.

A man in a crisply-tailored suit, passes the sign. Skips briskly up the steps. Martin.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Martin sits across the desk from DR. RISSNER, the Director of the facility. White coat, sixty. A fleshy face with the calm gaze of someone perpetually interested in what you have to say.

MARTIN

Sara's passing was so...sudden.
So shocking. I tried to contact
as many of her family, old friends,
as I could locate...

He spreads his hands. A helpless gesture.

MARTIN

I thought perhaps someone here
might recall...or have records
of...visitors. When her mother
was in your care.

Rissner seems slightly puzzled. Though he continues his barely perceptible professional nod.

RISSNER

And you flew here just to...

MARTIN

Well, no. I thought Sara might
want to be laid to rest here. In
whatever place her mother was buried.

Professional sadness ensues.

RISSNER

Her mother...has passed on as well?

Martin's face stops. There's a beat before.

MARTIN

Six months ago. Her mother died
in this place. In your care.

And now the doctor's stare is very strange indeed.

RISSNER

Six months ago...your wife removed
her mother from this institution.
She was handicapped, of course, but
otherwise in reasonable health.

One more surprise for Martin. He tries to hold it together through...

RISSNER

Mrs. Burney simply showed up. Paid
the bill. And collected her mother.
(concerned)
Mr. Burney, are you...

MARTIN

Did she say. Where was she taking her?

RISSNER

Why...home, of course. To live with you.

EXT. CHURCH GROUNDS - DAY

Booths and streamers in a graceful church yard. Bake sale is a family day, four generations on view. Tasting the goodies. Spilling lemonade. Everyone seems to know each other. And across the grass...

...Laura sits alone. On a smooth log beneath a tree. She watches with an outsider's eyes. Her paper plate of brownies balanced on her knees. As she lifts one to her lips, we see...

...a man's lower body cross the frame behind her. She doesn't sense him. Chews on, unaware, as his legs step...

...over her log, and she startles slightly. As he lowers himself to sit beside her, Ben doesn't look at her. Just stares ahead, eating a double slice of pie. She watches his profile for a beat...

LAURA

Thanks for coming.

He glances over. Does a take, as if amazed to see her. Then another, as if realizing...

BEN

Oh, you meant this bake sale...

Large mouthful of pie. Dark eyes locked to hers, as he struggles to say...

BEN

I thought you meant...one of the...many other...

(beat)

...bake sales...

(beat)

...currently...

(beat)

...in progress.

She looks so happy to see him. Softly...

LAURA

My lemon pie any good?

His eyes say it's great. His mouth says...

BEN

Overpriced.

LAURA

Well, it's for charity.

He nods. That it is. Surveys the bustle and chatter all around them...

BEN

Heartland, huh?

Said with affection for this place. She's watching his profile again...

LAURA

You've stopped asking...why I came out here.

He shrugs. Never looks back to her. But beneath the easy exterior, he's holding his breath.

LAURA

This is close to my mom.

There is trust in her voice. It is a gift offered, her first secret. And it moves him.

LAURA

And she means everything to me.

He keeps his eyes ahead. As if turning might frighten her away. Finally...

BEN

I'd love to meet her.

LAURA

I haven't seen her yet. Haven't gone there.

Pain and fear, so close to the surface. When he looks, her eyes flutter down. She murmurs to her brownies...

LAURA

I'm not sure it's safe.

His turn to watch her profile. Ben's heart goes out to her. He doesn't know what to say. And she...

...stands. Shakes her hair free. Looks at the happiness around her. Whispers...

LAURA

...buy me a lemonade. Please.

...and walks slowly off. It's a beat before he stands. And follows after her.

INT. OFFICE, MINNEAPOLIS - DAY

PHOTO of a WOMAN. She looks sixty. Gaunt. Smiling bravely, with watering, vague eyes.

LOCKE (V.O.)
...but this isn't your client?

See him now behind his desk. Young, hard. An ex-cop, maybe, in executive dress. He's not getting an answer...

LOCKE
Mr. Saunders...?

Mr. Saunders is Martin. Standing at a window. Gazing down on the city.

MARTIN
My client died. That's his sister.

Martin turns easily. Fixes Locke with a stare as flat as his own.

MARTIN
Under the terms of my client's will...we're going to have a devil of a time settling the estate, unless we find her.

LOCKE
What makes you so sure she even...

MARTIN
One witness. Who died last year. Claimed to have seen her in a nursing home. Blind, partially paralyzed. She looked...four, five years older than this picture...

Locke nods. Jots a note.

LOCKE
So you tried this rest home...

MARTIN
No home by that description exists. I tried every facility in this city. Dead end. She may have been driven elsewhere...but in her condition...not very far.
(beat)
I'd suggest...two days drive at most.

LOCKE
...in any direction.

Martin just stares at him. The cold, quiet look we've seen before.

MARTIN
I thought needles...in haystacks...were your specialty.

Not very friendly. But Locke's concern is elsewhere...

LOCKE

I can put three men on it. But
it'll cost.

MARTIN

Good. Let's all take this very
seriously.

The look holds. Then Locke pulls a contract from his desk. Martin steps over, taking out his gold pen. Glances down the page. And to Locke's surprise, Martin begins to write at the bottom...

MARTIN

...and if she's found. A ten
thousand bonus to the man who
does. In cash.

(beat)

...and another ten to you.

Locke can only stare at the page. And then at Martin's eyes.

LOCKE

Very. Seriously. Indeed.

EXT. LAURA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Laura comes up the walk to her own house, carrying her library books. It's very late. Very still.

LAURA (V.O.)

The monsters. Are in your head.
But they can hurt you.

Up to the porch now. To the silent front door.

LAURA (V.O.)

The house is empty. My things.
Exactly where I want them. My kitchen
gold and warm. Not red and horrible.
Towels uneven, sideways, upside down.

Laura stands now. Staring at the door. Then, fits the key.
Opens...

...the blackened hallway beckons. She enters. Closes the door
behind her. At the end of the silent corridor...

...a dark stairwell.

LAURA (V.O.)

There's no one lurking in the closet.
And the creaks at night are the old
house dreaming in its sleep. Funny
old ghosts.

(beat)

Nice people in a nice town. Thousands
of miles. Thousands of miles... away
from...

...but she stops. Staring now. Was there a noise? Upstairs. Straining to listen. And in the silence, we SNAP TO...

FLASHBACK ANGLE...another staircase, in an elegant home. This one is lit, though dimly. Empty. Until...

...the sound. Shuffling. And then...footfalls. At the top of the winding staircase. As...

...Martin descends. A drink in his hand. A flat, far-away eye. And he...

...stops. Halfway down. Turns slowly, directly, to us. The bottomless eyes. Measuring, processing. As we SNAP BACK TO...

...Sara's dark hallway. She is alone. But scarcely breathing in the silence, as we HEAR...

...a soft KNOCKING on the door behind her. Insidiously soft. Diabolically soft. Tears in her eyes now. One slow ragged breath, as...

...the knock REPEATS. And she...

...WHIRLS to the door. THROWS it open...

Ben's smile fades. As he sees her face. She is still breathing deeply. Licks her lips against that.

LAURA

Hi.

...said thin and strange. He wants so much to ask. But instead, he puts the easy smile back up there...

BEN

You know how you're always
pestering me? To see where
I work.

She nods. Slow.

LAURA

...that's cos you're such a
charismatic guy.

He nods, modestly. Supposes that's the reason.

BEN

Well, if we hurry. Right now.
There's immediate seating.

HOLD on her. Panic forgotten. Immediate seating...?

INT. COLLEGE THEATER - NIGHT

Laura sits in the center of a theater balcony. She is completely alone. The theater, the stage, empty. As she stares at the stage below...

...snow begins to gently fall. And from the control booth...

BEN (V.O.)
What's your favorite color?

Without turning, she murmurs...

LAURA
Green.

And the snow before her becomes flakes of jade. Drifting softly to rest on a shimmering lime-colored stage. Laura begins...

...to clap. Slowly.

BEN (V.O.)
That's right. You like emeralds.

INT. THEATER CATWALKS - NIGHT

Ben leads Laura along the catwalks. High above the stage. Through the metal grating below their feet, we see scrims and drapes and cables. He points...

BEN
That's where the snow falls from.
It's for Lear...

She looks around at the tangle of ropes. It is magical, after all. She smiles with that.

LAURA
It's like a cobweb.

They go down twisting iron stairs. On one of the landings, she turns a sharp corner and her breath CATCHES to see...

...a SKELETON in shadows. Sitting on a folding chair. In its arms is nestled an empty whiskey bottle.

BEN
One of my predecessors. He's still waiting to see a standing ovation.

He's skipping down the stairs ahead of her. She's a little bit charmed.

INT. COSTUME ROOM - NIGHT

Ben shows Laura into a vast room filled with racks of clothing from many productions. Dressmaker's dummies wearing costumes from Candide in various stages of completion.

Slowly, Laura goes from one exquisite dress to another.

LAURA
These are amazing.

Her eyes are shining now. She's forgotten that they shouldn't. Running her fingers over velvet, lace...

BEN (V.O.)
May I show you...something in
your size...

Without turning...

LAURA
Oh, I couldn't. That would be
childish.

BEN (V.O.)
Maybe you shouldn't. Takes someone
...breathtaking. To wear this.

That had the sound of a gentle challenge. She turns to see him
holding...

BEN
Desdemona's first change. From
Othello.

Her eyes. Devouring the gown.

ANGLE...Ben alone at a wall-unit tape deck. He punches up the
melody. Strauss. Elegant waltz. Turns, HEARING...

...a RUSTLE. Gentle BUMPING of crates and props, and finally...
she EMERGES in the Venetian court gown.

She walks with the poise of a dancer, fitting her deportment to
the period. She laughs, but she looks ravishing and she knows it.
Whirls past a row of mirrors. Spinning, turning to the waltz,
multiplying her bewitching image. Ben watches in silence, as...

...she disappears once more among the racks. He waits again,
seeing a glimpse of her bare flesh between the rows of clothes.
His face reflective. Private thoughts.

MONTAGE: LAURA MOVING ACROSS THE MIRRORS in a succession of
costumes from a half dozen productions: Greek chiton from Tiger
at the Gates, silvery flapper from O'Neill, Edwardian bustle from
Pygmalion. And then...

From behind a clothes rack...

LAURA (V.O.)
Damn. I'm trapped!
(beat)
Could you...could you help me...

He hesitates. Then, brushes through the clothes to find her in a
near-diaphanous fairy's gown. A Midsummer Night's Dream. Zipper
stuck halfway down.

She clutches at it. Grins over her shoulder.

LAURA
I may have to go through life
like this.

He just nods. Maybe you will. He puts his hands on her, TUGS the zipper free, and it slides easily straight down her bare back.

She clutches her front. Turns to him.

LAURA

Do you know as much about make-up?
As you do costumes.

There's a purpose in that. A mystery.

BEN

Make-up is a specialty of the
house. Like plumbing.

Her eyes are very steady. She wants something from him.

LAURA

Could you make me look. Like a
man?

BEN

You mean...more than you already do.

LAURA

Even more than that.

Fascinated, he slowly nods.

LAURA

Prove it.

INT. MAKE-UP ROOM - NIGHT

Laura lounges in a make-up chair. She's dressed as an English country squire from the Tom Jones era. Maroon doublet, high leather boots. Ben is shaking out a coarse russet-colored wig. She's watching him separate clinging strands. He seems experienced, absorbed.

He takes a bottle of collodion now. Begins to carefully fashion a nasty scar across her cheekbone.

LAURA

I like that. A scar is the best
disguise. People don't want to look.

He pulls away. She looks in the mirror. A young woman with a scar. In funny clothes. Carefully now, almost tenderly, Ben fits the russet beard in place. Smoothing the moustache around her lips. Presses it down firmly.

Eyebrows now. Russet. Full. Her eyes moving over his face as he works. He seems oblivious. Setting the wig on now. Just so. A small adjustment. And he steps away.

In the mirror. Is a man. Young, pretty. From another time and place. But a man. The eyes flash in the glass, the lips curl in a devilish leer. She stands. Tries to walk in character...

BEN

Don't stomp. Just move with more weight. Deliberately. And don't wave your hands around. No tiny motions...

She looks at her hands. Like it's their fault.

BEN

...man aren't subtle.

LAURA

(deep)

...tell me about it.

She clears her throat.

BEN

Growly, but lame. Try putting your voice...way...down...here. In your chest.

Laura suddenly turns. Slows everything down. Assumes an air of quiet authority that is almost menacing. Worthy of Martin. And in his steady, controlled voice...

LAURA

Something...like this.

The transformation is startling. Makes Ben a little uneasy. He's very quiet with...

BEN

...something like that.

She walks slowly toward him. Ominously dead-eyed. Right in his face now. The Martin imitation becomes inspired...

LAURA

Now, Princess...

...she chucks him condescendingly under the chin.

LAURA

...you know I like my lamb...with the peach chutney. And those little...baby...peas...

...staring flat at his eyes.

LAURA

...why would you want to... disappoint me?

Absolutely chilling. He can only say softly...

BEN

...spooky.

Yes, it is. She turns in an exquisitely slow circle for the mirror, arms outstretched. And in her own voice...

LAURA

Men and women. It's so dumb. So arbitrary, the signals we give each other. What excites. Threatens...

She stops. Stalks the mirror. Glowers.

LAURA

Almost works, in period. But not contemporary, I suspect.

She picks up the bottle of collodion he used to build her scar.

LAURA

Can I have this?

And turns to him on that. Real slow. A straight look...

LAURA

You're really not going to ask, are you. About any of it. About... anything.

BEN

No. I'm not.

She's grateful. And quietly...

LAURA

You're very good to me.

She turns away. Maybe a little quickly. Staring once more at the bearded young man in the mirror. Ben covers with...

BEN

So how about it?

(beat)

Would you date you?

She thinks that over.

LAURA

I'm not my type.

Peels off the beard. One last look.

LAURA

...never was.

INT. LAURA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The darkened hallway. The door opening. Laura enters and flicks on the light. For an instant, we think she's alone. Then, Ben enters behind her. Softly closes the door.

She's walked into her small living room. Facing the print sofa. Slips out of her jacket. Slowly. Reflectively. And from behind her...

...Ben is there. Just watching. But she doesn't see.

LAURA

You know that hoop skirt? I wore one, in a high school play...

...and SPINS in an impulsive, graceful pirouette, as...

...Ben CATCHES her. By the waist. Just that instant for their eyes to lock, and we SNAP TO...

FLASHBACK ANGLE...it is MARTIN. So close. So strong. Piercing eyes as leans to kiss her, and BECOMES...

...BEN once more. She fights THROUGH the terror. Her lips part, her eyes flutter closed, and...

...he has kissed her. Beautifully, lovingly. With more tenderness than she knew was in him. Her hands go to his shoulders, but they do not push away. The kiss lingers, deepens, as...

...the hunger hits her. INTO his mouth now, starving for him, his hands reaching BENEATH her shirt, PULLING it up, OFF...

...she's TEARING at his shirt. His mouth and hands crossing her body. He takes her DOWN to...

...the floor. She writhes beneath him. His hands finding her belt. Slipping her jeans down, and suddenly, Laura...

...STIFFENS, but he stays with it, smothering her body with his own, as a helpless...

LAURA

Ben, no...

...and she PULLS her knees up between them, SHOVING him away with all her strength, WHIRLING her face to the wall in a desperate...

LAURA

NO-O-O-O-O!!

His frustration FLASHING in pure rage, his arm FLYING back as if to strike her, the wall, anything, but...

...her SOBBING begins. Soft and low from deep within her. A MOAN of agony and shame and fear, and he...

...GRASPS her shoulder, YANKS her onto her back...

BEN

What the HELL was that!

She's sobbing with everything in her, gasping for breath...

LAURA

You said...

BEN

I said you'd call the shots, and
GODDAMN you, you did!

Holding her with powerful hands, as she writhes. Pinning her
shoulders. Fury as heat, something Martin never showed her...

BEN

Dancing in the goddamn mirrors!
In and out of your clothes! You
TELL me you didn't WANT this!!

LAURA

God, go AWAAAY!!!

A wrenching SHRIEK from the pit of her soul, and she PULLS free,
rolling her body into the wall, BURYING her head in her arms for
the blow that will surely split her in two...

CLOSE on her now. As she cringes. But the only blow is...

BEN (V.O.)

No problem, lady.

The sound from high above us. A fist SLAMS the wall.

BEN (V.O.)

Just stay outta my fucking
FACE!!

The sound of him STORMING through the room, the kitchen. The
ferocious SLAMMING of her screen door. And silence. As we...

...HOLD on her. The terror gone. The gentle sobbing of a beaten
child.

INT. LAURA'S BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

Early light streams past translucent curtains. And on her bed...

...Laura sits. Cross-legged. Arms hugging herself with empty
comfort. The eyes are dry now. Red and staring. They have cried
their last tears many hours ago.

So still. So perfectly motionless. She is frightening to watch.
And through the window. On the still morning air. Comes...music...

...Mahler's Ninth. Her eyes blink to life. An absent SHIVER runs
across her body. And above the sound of the music...

...Ben's lawn mower begins.

EXT. BEN'S BACK YARD - EARLY MORNING

A grassy back yard. Ringed by tall, spreading trees. Ben without
his shirt. Mowing his lawn to the sweeping movement of the Mahler.

His face is hard, preoccupied. He needs more of an outlet than this for the fire inside him, as...

...the music STOPS. So does he. Turns slowly around...

...she is kneeling at his tape deck. And when she turns her face up to his...

...there are silent tears.

He goes to her. Slowly. Sinks to the grass beside her. So close. She seems ready to shatter in a thousand pieces.

LAURA

Everything you said. Is right.

He just reaches his fingers. To her tears. Silently dries them. Meticulously. As if restoring a Michelangelo.

LAURA

There was a man. And he wasn't...good to me.

No, he wasn't. Ben just nods. Very, very close to her.

LAURA

And after him. I can't ever be...

Her voice trails off. And softly...

BEN

It just feels like never.

He's not smiling. But his eyes are so strong.

BEN

Some day. You'll surprise yourself.

That makes her tears start again. He says only...

BEN

This man. Where is he?

LAURA

Far away.

Ben nods. And just above a whisper...

BEN

Then he's lucky. Cos if I ever get to him...

He brushes her hair back from her eyes. Such a small, tender movement.

LAURA

I need a favor. I need a best friend.

BEN

Forget it.

But his smile says, anything I've got.

LAURA

I'm taking a day-trip. I want to
borrow your car...

BEN

I'll expect gratitude.

She smiles. He's very dear to her just now.

LAURA

You'll have it.

(beat)

And I want you to...disguise me.

She means that. He is intrigued.

LAURA

...as a man.

Captivated.

LAURA

It's time. To see my mom.

INT. CHLOE'S ROOM, FREDSBURG NURSING HOME - DAY

A small room. Antiseptic, but reasonably pleasant. Sunlight falls on Laura's mother, CHLOE. She is, of course, the woman in Martin's photo. She sits in a wheelchair near a hospital bed, crocheting with a long hooked needle.

The room is completely still. Chloe's blind eyes stare into an absent distance as her fingers work haltingly. She stops now. Reaches slowly to a hospital stand. Finds the paper cup filled with water. Brings it carefully to her lips. The tiniest sip, as if only wanting to dampen the skin. The trembling hand returns the cup, as we SNAP to REVERSE ANGLE revealing...

...MARTIN. He's standing not five feet in front of her. Lifeless eyes staring. A silent reptile measuring a meal. She has no idea he's there. Her fingers resume their work, and she begins to HUM...

...a rasping, broken version of Peg O' My Heart. Oddly loud, as might suggest someone hard of hearing. On silent feet, Martin steps closer now. Directly to her. She is oblivious. Slowly, he circles her chair. His eyes sweep the room...

...a small desk. A few toilet articles. A blind woman's photograph in a filigreed frame. Chloe in her forties. Slim and handsome. In her arms, a beaming round-faced child of four. Laura's golden hair frames the child's face, and Martin cannot help but stare.

He turns back to Chloe now. And as her humming continues, he steps up directly behind her. Staring down with eerie concentration...

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

E.C.U. on Laura's face. Her eyes are looking up into the light. Blinking just a little. Full black brows, and as she shifts position, we suddenly see...

...the SCAR. From the cheekbone to the corner of her mouth. A man's hands come into frame. They attach a dangling silver earring to one of her ears.

LAURA

...you're sure it's the left.
I'm not gay, you know.

BEN (V.O.)

...coulda fooled me.

His hands return with a wispy black moustache. Like a kid trying hard to grow one. Once it's in place, we pull back to see...

...Laura perched on the counter of Ben's bathroom sink. She's wearing leather and zippers. Carefully now, Ben fits the wig in place. Black and sleek, a biker's special. She's trying to catch the mirror from the corner of her eye...

BEN

OK. Give me sleazy youth, here.
Travesty of macho...

She does. He has to grin. It's damn good. Arrogant, pretty biker. Jimmy Dean to Johnny Depp.

BEN

More sullen. Wasted.

Even better. The lids drop a bit. The mouth curls. A teeny-bopper's cheap thrill.

BEN

Course you'll blow it with
the wheels.

He pulls out the Toyota keys.

LAURA

...so rent me a Harley.

She nabs the keys. Squeezes his hand as she hops down from the counter. Their eyes hold a beat before...

LAURA

Now check out the walk...

She shambles off. Hands in her jeans. He just stands there. Checking her out.

INT. TOYOTA - DAY

Biker Laura tooling along the Iowa highway. Clear golden light

across the fields. She's lost in thought as she drives, seeing none of this. Reaches to the tape deck...

...clicks on the reggae. Loud. Then turns UP the volume, as we CUT TO...

EXT. HIGHWAY

...Laura BLASTING down the open road at eighty-plus.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

The Toyota pulls into VISITOR PARKING. Up ahead, the two story building: FREDSBURG NURSING HOME. Laura cruises past the visitor lot, and around the side. The entrance says: EMPLOYEES ONLY.

ANGLE...Laura near the door, watching two nurses exit. As they head off, Laura slips through the door into...

INT. NURSING HOME - DAY

Down a corridor, past nurses, orderlies. No one pays particular attention. Past the doorway of the cafeteria. She stops. Trays are stacked for lunch.

Laura steps cautiously inside. Name cards on the racks. DONALDSON - 8 ... EVANS - 9. Keep scanning to...

...WILLIAMS - 14. Low sodium. Low cholesterol.

NURSE (V.O.)

May I help you?

Laura freezes for an instant. Then turns slowly, in character. The nurse is JULIE. Dark and young and very pretty. Laura clears her throat. At once insouciant and polite...

LAURA

Could you, uh...point me to the men's room? Ma'am.

ANGLE...the door says GENTLEMEN. A little drawing of a gentleman next to the word, in case some foreigner is wandering around an Iowa nursing home. The door opens, and Laura exits the john...

...turn a corner. Past rooms 22, 20...and then to 14. No one is watching. She enters quietly, closing the door behind her. Chloe is alone. Hands twisting absently in her lap. Listening to a soap opera on the television.

Laura stares at Chloe. As if she had thought she might never be with her again. She crosses to the TV now. SNAPS it off.

CHLOE

Miriam...

Laura goes silently to her mother's wheelchair. Kneels at her feet. Chloe looking around the room. Looking for a sound...

CHLOE
Is that you, Bobby...?

And softly, Laura begins to sing...

LAURA
Peg of my heart,
I love you...
Don't let us part,
I love you...

But her voice is breaking now. And she stops. Chloe's eyes have filled. Her hands grope in wonder for...

CHLOE
...Sara??

And Laura takes them. Holds them tighter than tight.

LAURA
Hi, Mom...

That's as far as she gets. Her own tears are flowing now. She brings Chloe's hands to her lips. Kisses them. Puts them against her own cheeks, so that Chloe can feel the tears...

LAURA
You look...so wonderful...

Chloe's fingers explore the face eagerly. And stop. The moustache.

LAURA
It's a disguise, Mom. I'm hiding.

The old fingers come slowly away. Laura snuggles to her. Arms around her waist.

LAURA
I ran away from Martin. He...he
was very bad to me, Mom. But I'm
all right now.
(beat)
Everything's...great now. God,
you're so beautiful.

Chloe's hands find the biker's oily hair...

LAURA
It's a wig. Martin thinks I'm dead.

She strokes her momma's hand. Tender. Reassuring.

LAURA
But if he starts to suspect.
You're his only clue. His only
way to find me. So we have to
just be...careful, OK?

LAURA (cont'd)
You forgot our old code name,
didn't you?

CHLOE
Cold...name...?

LAURA
It's OK. I'm supposed to be a
boy now. Johnny Gray.

Chloe's eyes sharpen on that.

CHLOE
He was...my first...

Her voice trails off.

LAURA
...lover, sure. Red hair and skin
like new soap, you used to say. The
way it smelled and felt. So you'll
remember. I'm Johnny Gray now. And
I'll call. And I'll come.
(beat)
Quick. Who am I?

Is she getting this? There is a slow, warm, wonderful smile. It
melts Laura's heart and ours.

CHLOE
You're Johnny Gray. From
Wisconsin. Prairie du Chien.

Laura's tear-streaked face beaming back.

LAURA
Are you happy, Mom? Are you
happy here?

CHLOE
Now.

Laura nods. Their fingers are wound together now. Reeds of a
basket. Links of a chain.

CHLOE
Are you all right without Martin?
Alone.

And from behind Laura, unseen, the door opens slowly. Silently.
Just a crack.

LAURA
I'm better alone. I always will be.
But I have...a wonderful friend...

...the door opening wider.

CHLOE
...a man, is it?

And Laura laughs. From behind her, a face peeks in. Afraid to disturb. It is EDNA, the head nurse.

LAURA
He teaches drama. At a college. And
he takes care of me when I'm lonely.

Edna's head withdraws. The door shuts soundlessly.

CHLOE
Well. I'll do that now.

HOLD on Laura's eyes. And CUT TO...

EXT. CHLOE'S CORRIDOR

Edna heading back down the corridor toward us. Passes BOBBY, a black orderly, is wheeling his rack of lunch trays past room 24. He is juking ever so slightly to the beat of his Walkman.

A man in a business suit strides past our POV. We have a shoulder-to-floor view of him reaching to stop the moving lunch rack.

MAN
Excuse me...

As Bobby pulls the phones from one ear, we see that the man is...

MARTIN
I'm looking for a nurse.

BOBBY
Ain't we all.

Martin's smile of camaraderie comes a beat slow and a shade hard.

MARTIN
The nurse. Who has room 14.

BOBBY
Julie.

Bobby looks around, as...

...Julie emerges from Room 17 up the corridor, just across from Chloe's room. Gestures toward her with his eyes, and...

...Martin heads straight off, jostling the cart as he goes. Beverages slosh neatly over the rims of glasses. Bobby glowers at the mess, as an oblivious Martin...

...approaches the attractive nurse. He is all soft-spoken charm...

MARTIN
Excuse me, Miss. My name is...

JULIE

...excuse me one sec, okay?
There's a minor emergency...

...and turns quickly down the hall. Too quickly to see the cold flash of rage cross his eyes. She disappears into Room 21.

He is alone now, except for Bobby, slowly wheeling his cart toward us. Martin glances back at...

...Chloe's DOOR. Room 14. He steps to it. As if deciding. Then...

...reaches for the knob. And calmly, quietly, as if afraid to wake a sleeping patient, Martin...

...OPENS the door. Steps smoothly inside to find...

...Chloe ALONE. Smiling. The room around her is still. She seems to sense a presence. Turns straight toward him...

CHLOE

Miriam...?

He stands staring. Cold, dead eyes.

CHLOE

Miriam...?

...and silently, he withdraws. Closes the door behind him. And...

CHLOE

...I want you to meet somebody.

...Chloe's bathroom door opens. Laura EMERGES with water and pills.

LAURA

Who you talking to...?

CHLOE

Nobody.

And as Laura kneels, puts the cup into Chloe's hand, the water SPILLS slightly, and we CUT TO...

INT. CHLOE'S CORRIDOR

Bobby and his cart. Across from Room 17 now. As he lifts two juice cups from the tray...

...a HAND touches his arm. Slightly startled, he turns to...

LAURA

Uh, 'scuse me. The old lady in there needs some Kleenex.

Bobby looks at the biker. Down the hall, in soft focus, we see Julie join Martin in the corridor. Bobby points Laura in the opposite direction...

BOBBY
Supply cart's there, man. Take
what you want.

REVERSE ANGLE...close on Martin and Julie. Her fingers are
smoothing her black hair behind an ear, a reflex to look her best.

MARTIN
...it's a little...well,
embarrassing. But you seem
like...an understanding person.

She nods. Wants to be. And beyond her shoulder, in soft focus
down the hall, Laura is heading for the supply cart.

MARTIN
My...younger sister. Used to
work for the lady in Room 14.

Down the hall, Laura has reached the cart. Rummaging through.

MARTIN
I understand she's returning to
this area. And I know she'll want
to visit Mrs. Williams.

JULIE
...and you want to leave her a
message?

His smile is shy. This does seem awkward.

MARTIN
The thing is...my sister married
a man we didn't...approve of,
really. And we grew apart.
(beat)
I was wrong to let that happen.

SNAP to focus on Laura. She has her Kleenex. Heading back this
way. And in the soft focus f.g....

MARTIN
I want to...surprise her, sort of.
If she knows I'm here, she...won't
see me, or...take my call.

Laura's still coming. Eyes dead ahead.

MARTIN
I just need someone to...tell me
she's here. Someone I can trust.
To keep a secret.

Laura turns into Room 14. We SNAP back to focus on...

MARTIN
This is my name, and the motel
number...

He holds out a slip of paper. And a neatly folded hundred dollar bill.

MARTIN

...it would sure mean a lot to me.

Julie takes paper and the money. Glances down. Then up with her loveliest smile...

JULIE

So...Brian. You're from around here...?

INT. CORRIDORS - LATER

Laura walking down a corridor. Rolling her shoulders slightly in her loose biker's stroll. Our ANGLE is left to right, as she turns a corner, and we CUT TO...

...Martin walking another corridor. Briskly. Heading this way. Our ANGLE on him is right to left, as he turns a corner, and we...

...INTERCUT between the two. Each moving faster. Switching the angles, to create the awareness that they are converging toward a common point. End on...

...Laura now. The front entrance with its nurse's station is clearly in sight, as Laura...

...stops. At a water fountain.

CLOSE on her now. Standing over the fountain. The button seems stuck. She SLAMS it with the heel of her hand and the water shoots up. As she leans down we snap to REVERSE ANGLE...

...Laura bending toward us, drinking. A figure moves into frame behind her. MARTIN. He stands behind the leather-studded chair. Waiting his turn with faint impatience.

Laura takes a long slow drink. When she finishes, the button won't come back up. Water keeps pouring. She fiddles with it, oblivious to Martin, glancing to his watch behind her.

Finally, she SLAMS it again. And the water stops. Laura nods. She heads for the entrance now. Never looks back.

Martin takes her place at the fountain. His turn to struggle with the button. Finally SLAMS it like the biker did, and the water comes on. He takes a quick drink. Leaves the water running and...

...heads for the entrance. Following Laura down the corridor. She's well ahead, but ambling along. He's gaining. She passes through the doorway. Skipping down the steps toward the lot. As he reaches the doorway himself...

EDNA (V.O.)

Oh, Mr. Randall...

Martin turns. Edna is still on the phone. Holding up one finger for him to wait, then continues with her murmured conversation.

Martin can't decide whether this could be trouble. As he's evaluating, Edna smiles across at him, hand over the receiver...

EDNA
...won't be a minute.

Warily, he comes closer now. Steps to her desk. She ignores his presence, as...

EDNA
Well, I told him he could stick his thing in a gopher hole and twirl for awhile. Yes, twirl, for all I care.

Martin watching her. Edgy.

EDNA
...and aren't they all. Listen, I'll call you after, and...sure... why not...bye, now.

She hangs up real slow. Turns that neutral smile up to him...

EDNA
...and how are you today

He's fine. Just a little tense.

MARTIN
You...wanted to see me...

EDNA
It is the most surprising thing. Chlore Williams not having one visitor for six months. And now today...

Every nerve in his body springs to full alert

MARTIN
...a lady?

EDNA
A biker boy. Pretty as a girl if girls wore a moustache. He just walked out that...

But he's gone before she can say...

EDNA
...door.

EXT. STEPS - DAY

Martin on the steps. Looking frantically around the lot. No one. Nothing. Except...

...way up ahead. A white Toyota turns onto the highway.

EXT. LAURA'S STREET - NIGHT

Toyota pulling up the street. Turns into Ben's open garage. Laura the Biker jumps out. Her energy still running at red-line. As she reaches the grass...

...Ben is standing. Across the lawn. And she...

...FLIES to him. Giddy, joyful biker. Her feet scarcely touch ground as she...

...LEAPS into his arms. He SPINS her. HOLDS her. And when he looks down...

...her face is shining.

BEN

...couldn't see her, huh?

She just stares. And grins.

LAURA

It was the best day. Of my whole life.

(softly)

...and I am very grateful.

He searches her eyes. It doesn't mean what he's hoping. So he does a comic leer, that makes her laugh.

LAURA

Okay, my treat. Movies or beer?

BEN

Slow dancing.

But he's smiling. Just kidding, boss. She throws an arm around his waist. And they head off.

INT. CHLOE'S ROOM - DAY

Chloe sitting in her hospital bed, waiting for lunch. Bobby has set the tray on the roll-away stand.

BOBBY

Now, we've got salisbury steak.
Nice and well done. Carrots.
You like carrots?

Chloe nods. She likes them a little. Since she can't see him, he stares at her like the burden she is.

BOBBY

Let me get your steak all cut
up...nice and...

...wearily sits down to his task of feeding her.

MARTIN (V.O.)

...that's all right. I can do that.

Bobby turns. It's the jerk who jostled his tray yesterday. Only this time, Martin is smiling easily. Offering to lighten Bobby's load for a change.

Bobby takes a quick look at an uncomprehending Chloe. Stands. Nods to the stranger...

BOBBY

...all yours.

And on the way out...

BOBBY

...I'll come back for the tray.

Shuts the door behind him. Chloe is confused and increasingly anxious. Martin watches that for a beat. Then...

MARTIN

Mrs. Williams...

Soothing. Smiling. A strong, friendly voice. Its very timbre relaxes her a little.

MARTIN

...will you let me help you with your lunch? It does look delicious.

He settles in. Watching her with a razor-sharp gaze.

CHLOE

Who...who are you...?

MARTIN

My name is Daryl Walker, ma'am.
I'm a police officer...

He unfolds her napkin. His hands gently reach to tie the napkin around her throat...

MARTIN

Goodness, I used to do this for my Grandma Eve. When I was ten years old.

CHLOE

Am I...under arrest?

He chuckles good-naturedly. But the eyes are Martin's eyes. Always.

MARTIN

No, ma'am. Not hardly. Shall we start with some steak?

He holds a forkful up to her lips. She hesitates. Then takes it into her mouth.

MARTIN

You had a...visitor yesterday.

Chloe chews thoughtfully. As if trying to recall.

CHLOE

Johnny Gray. He's from Wisconsin.
Prairie du Chien.

...and Martin chuckles again. Just as friendly.

MARTIN

Good girl. Sara should be proud
of you. Carrots?

Her fear is easily read. He pauses.

MARTIN

We need to get word to her, ma'am.
The Boston police have called us...
(beat)
Her husband. Is in this area. We
think he wants to harm her.

The old woman is frozen still. His voice comes quietly...

MARTIN

So when she calls. You have her ring
the police in Sioux City. Ask for...

CHLOE

She won't call. Til Sunday.
She said.

He lets the silence hang.

MARTIN

That's...a long time.

Chloe's eyes are beginning to fill. His voice is soft.

CHLOE

He's a crazy man.

And at the sound of that word. The magic word. Martin's eyes
become impossibly hard. Stones of ice. His voice is all the
softer...

MARTIN

...I know that.

CHLOE

He...beat my baby.

A tear falls. And she lets it go undisturbed.

MARTIN

Help us find him, Chloe. For
God's sake.

Her head is shaking now. Absently. Distraught.

CHLOE

I don't...know where...

MARTIN

Who is she with now? A man, perhaps.

(beat)

A man who's...nice to her.

A dim light. In blind eyes.

CHLOE

He teaches...dramatics. In a college.

INT. COLLEGE AUDITORIUM - DAY

A dozen DRAMA STUDENTS on stage. Glare of footlights. Beyond the orchestra pit, prowls the STUDENT DIRECTOR. Preppy and confident, eyes moving down his text.

DIRECTOR

Scene 5, Portia's garden. Mr. Potts for Lancelot. Miss Bailey is Jessica. Enter together, and...

On stage, a large earnest boy begins...

POTTS

Yes truly, for look you, the sins of the father are to be laid upon the children...

As he reads, we PAN the class seated in the theater's front rows. Dimly-lit faces, staring as the voice drones.

BAILEY (V.O.)

And what hope is that I pray thee?

Still PANNING. The last of the class. The empty rows beyond. In the dark. At the very back. A lone figure.

POTTS (V.O.)

Marry, you may partly hope that your father got you not...

...CLOSE on Martin. Watching motionless from the shadows.

POTTS (V.O.)

...that you are not the Jew's daughter.

PROFESSOR (V.O.)

Don't punch the word 'Jew', Timothy...

SEE the professor now. It is not Ben at all. His name is GARBER. Lean and forty. Still blond, attractive. Patient with...

GARBER

...the contempt is in the context. Not the voice. All right, Merilee...

HOLD on Garber. Professionally attentive as...

BAILEY (V.O.)

That were a kind of bastard hope,
indeed! So the sins of my mother
should be visited upon me...

CUT back to Martin. The lifeless, staring eyes.

EXT. STREET, AMES - DAY

A tree-shaded street. Empty. In the f.g., a well-cared-for Chevy sits at the curb. Into frame comes Garber. Stops at the car. Fumbles for the key.

Unlocks the door, climbs in. He pauses. Lost in a private thought for a full beat. Then turns the key, as...

...a hand LASHES OUT from behind, GRASPING Garber by the hair, SNAPPING his head back against the seat. Before Garber can scream, an arm is across his throat. In its hand a small black PISTOL.

Garber's eyes bulge with terror. They lurch to see the head from the back seat, grotesquely unrecognizable in a nylon stocking.

MARTIN

(very quietly)

...where is she, friend?

He releases his grip on the man's throat. Sliding the muzzle of the pistol tight against Garber's ear. Garber is fighting for breath. For presence of mind. The voice comes lower still, unimaginably menacing...

MARTIN

.. please don't make me ask again.

He JAMS the pistol in the man's ear. Garber WINCES sharply.

GARBER

I don't...I don't know who...

MARTIN

...my wife, friend. She's only my
wife. Wonderful fuck, isn't she?

(beat)

...great little ass. And she rolls
it...so...slow...

Garber swallows hard.

GARBER

Mister...you have the wrong...

The head SLAM VIOLENTLY against the seat. Garber GASPS in agony.

MARTIN

Gosh, that's disappointing. I
hate to be wrong.

Garber's eyes are rolling wildly...

GARBER

Why...why is it me...?

The silky voice. Just above a whisper...

MARTIN

Because you teach drama. At a college.

GARBER

Jesus, God, there must be a dozen...

MARTIN

...I've been to three. You're the first...attractive...male. Congratulations.

Garber's breath coming in short bursts.

GARBER

You don't...understand. I live with...another gentleman. Ask...ask anyone...

A frozen beat. Then the pistol swings away and CRASHES back in fury. CLUBBING Garber prone on the passenger seat.

HOLD on Garber's still form. The trickle of blood. A low, helpless MOAN.

MARTIN (V.O.)

If you tell the police. If you tell anyone. You...and your...gentleman playmate...

The voice trails off. The back door opens. Clothes piling. Footsteps walk away.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

Slow-moving river. Overhanging willows. From around the bend, we HEAR...

...a SPLASH. A giggle. Two inner tubes float into view, with...

...Laura and Ben. They hold hands, so they won't drift apart. She lays her head back, eyes closed. Smiles at the sun.

BEN

...so, it's not so bad.

LAURA

You said I wouldn't get wet.

BEN

Well, you're not. Just your butt.

LAURA
...that's a lot.

He smiles. A soft...

BEN
No comment.

They drift peacefully. Passing us now. And from nowhere...

LAURA
You're done this before. With
girls like me.

BEN
Not. Exactly like you.

She opens one eye. Studies him with it.

LAURA
How come there's no special
parking for the emotionally
handicapped...?
(beat)
I oughta get something out of
being like this.

He's smiling back. But...

BEN
What? You think you're the
Lone Ranger...?

Up ahead toward the next bend, the water is moving faster.

BEN
Everyone's afraid to fall. Tain't
I wouldn't be scared...
(beat)
...falling for a girl like you.

LAURA
Better believe it. I'd put you
through hell.

That clear-eyed stare of his. Says simply...

BEN
It's not you. It's love.

That word. Makes things quiet. He smiles against that.

BEN
You know how much power you
give away? When you love
someone.

And slowly back...

LAURA

I have an idea.

There's a chill in that. He pays it respect. Her turn to smile against their silence.

LAURA

For you, it just means...not jumping the prettiest sophomore in your class...

Teasing eyes. Honey voice.

LAURA

Do they flutter their eyes at you? I'd bet the farm.

But he won't let her change the subject...

BEN

Every playwright knows this stuff...the scariest issues there are. Trust. Self-esteem. Losing control...

Heading into the next bend now, water speeding up. But she is held by the look in his eyes.

BEN

The eternal triangle. Man... woman...fear.

They're rounding the bend. Suddenly, they SHOOT forward, and she SQUEEZES his hand for dear life, as they face...

...WHIRL WATER. She whips around to his eyes. He's smiling back at her...

BEN

Love. Is the ultimate terror, kid.

(beat)

That's why they call it falling.

...as she draws a breath, they...

...HIT the swirling water, SPINNING wildly, and she...

...SHRIEKS with fear and delight and anger...

LAURA

...you BASTARD, you KNEW this was...

...BOUNCING off each other, being SEPARATED, she is WHIRLING like a mad teacup ride, and...

...LAUGHING now, clear and strong above the spray, laughing as they go...

...OVER a tiny waterfall, and her inner tube is...

...DUMPED over. He's IN the water now, as she THRASHES madly for him, and he...

...GRASPS her hand.

BEN

Stand up.

Her head JERKS up to him in wild disbelief.

BEN

Stand up, willya. It's three feet deep.

And he does. So she does too. A moment of stunned staring. A low healthy LAUGH. A soft...

LAURA

...there's a lesson here, somewhere.

And takes his hand. Leads him toward shore.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

C.U. of Ben. That crooked smile of his. But the eyes are dead straight. Intense.

BEN

...because the whole...damn...
act. Turns there. Right there.

VIEW from the back doorway. A small classroom. There are some pretty sophomores, all right. Staring with all disguised adoration at...

...Ben hiked up on his desk. He's berating a straw-haired boy, who stands uneasily.

BEN

Bernard loved Biff. He never really knew him. He was never loved by him. But he loved him.

(beat)

He is the only character...in this goddam piece...who tries to save Biff from himself. You follow?

Straw-hair nods. From our POV at the back, we see Ben slip off the desk. He paces. Then WHIRLS back at Straw-hair, eyes brimming with pain and regret...

BEN

(in character)

...remember those sneakers with University of Virginia printed on them? He was so proud of those. Wore them every day.

Closer to Straw-hair. Stalking him.

BEN

(in character)

And he took them down in the cellar.
And burned them up in the furnace.

In his face now...

BEN

(in character)

We had a fist fight. It lasted at
least half an hour. Just the two of
us, punching each other down in the
cellar, and crying right through it...

(beat)

I've often thought how strange it was.
That I knew he'd...given up his life.

(beat)

What happened in Boston, Willy?

Stops. The character fades. And softly to the boy...

BOY

...you ever love someone that
much, son?

Straw-hair doesn't know what to say. Our POV SHIFTS slightly, and
we realize we have been sharing someone's view. Someone watching
from the doorway. We TURN AWAY now. We start down the corridor.
Can still hear...

BEN (V.O.)

...to save...a stranger. From
himself.

...walking quickly now. Faster and faster and...

EXT. FACULTY PARKING LOT - DAY

LONG VIEW from inside a parked car. Through the windshield, a man
is strolling between the rows. As he turns, we see that he is...

...Ben. He reaches the white Toyota. Sorts through his keys.
Unlocks the door. Climbs in as...

...our IGNITION turns over. Our engine softly purring to life.
Across the lot, Ben is backing out. Pulling away, as...

...our car eases from its spot. Heads slowly off...

INT. DRESS SHOP - DAY

Laura in a mirror, staring thoughtfully. She wears a green sun
dress, cut dangerously low. Daringly short. She twirls slowly
before the glass and the green skirt flutters about her thighs...

SALESWOMAN (V.O.)

That's the one.

See the woman now. Hovering discreetly. Laura says only...

LAURA
I'll take the white.

SALESWOMAN
Oh.

Laura's fingers trace the bustline...

LAURA
You don't like the white.

SALESWOMAN
The young man. Will like the green.

Makes Laura turn. Stare at the woman. And then smile.

INT. LAURA'S ROOM - DAY

Laura wearing a white sundress. Not as revealing as the green, but backless and clinging and lovely. She stares at her face, close to the mirror...

...takes out her lipstick.

EXT. FAIRGROUNDS - DAY

The huge banner says: WELCOME CATTLE CONGRESS. And through the heat, through the ambling shifting crowd...

...we are tracking Ben. He stops at the ticket booth. Clearly looking around. Moves on now, and...

...we follow. Food stalls. Ben still looking. We lose him through shifting bodies and...

...find him again. He moves down dusty aisles between booths and exhibits. French Fried Eggplant. Hand-blown Glass. Cow Pregnostic: Tells If Your Animal Is In The Family Way.

...he is picking his way through the hot, happy crowd. Still searching. Help Prevent Child Abuse. Caramel Apples and Elephant Ears. Rows of stacked cages with pigeons fluttering. Through the stalls now...

...into the Kiddie Rides. Caterpillars and Tilt-A-Whirls. Looking, looking, and...

...he stops. So do we. He TAKES OFF now into the crowd. But we don't move. And as our view clears, Ben is standing with...

...LAURA. She's got a purple cotton candy on a stick, and some has lodged on her face. Ben leans to her...

...gently pulls it off. Strokes her skin. So close together now, and...

...one kiss. Tender and real. Something that could only pass between people who care. HOLD on their moment across the distance, and then SNAP to REVERSE ANGLE...

...MARTIN. What we see in his eyes is more complex than rage. A glaze of righteous triumph that is nearly ecstasy. HOLD on his silent, horrible excitement, and SNAP TO...

...his LONG VIEW of Ben, tugging Laura toward the ferris wheel. Pointing up. But she gently pulls him the other way. Wraps a slender arm around his waist, and...

...they stroll off. We give them a lead. And then follow. Moving smoothly. Keeping them in view well ahead. Past the Penny-Toss, Softball-Throw, barkers call at us, but we keep moving, into...

INT. EXHIBITION HALL - DAY

The milling crowd is thicker here. Buzz of voices, polka music. We catch up a little, pushing, fitting through the crowd so as not to lose Ben and Laura...

...past cages of rabbits, geese. And up ahead...

...Laura STOPS. Turns toward us, our VIEW SHIFTING, as we look away. When we turn back...

...they have moved on. And we follow. Our sight of them appearing and disappearing, as the crowd shifts and we move faster, and...

...they have stopped at one exhibit. Multiplan Combination Bar-Fireplace. They are gesturing, laughing. This is the most free we've ever seen Laura. And perhaps the loveliest. As we watch, a parade of...

...HEREFORD cuts off our view. Children walking their 4-F projects through to the viewing ring. We press forward, but the crowd is thicker here. Like waiting for a train to pass. Applauding, calling out. Our efforts to slip through become more agitated, as...

...the way suddenly CLEARS. And...

...Laura and Ben. Are gone.

EXT. PHOTO BOOTH - DAY

The sign says: Old Times Portrait Studio - Your Picture In Five Minutes. Ben and Laura still holding hands, stare at sepia photos of costumed patrons...

...Indian maiden with her brave. Victorian bride and groom. Southern belle with her Union soldier. Everywhere, costumes and guns and feathered hats line the walls.

Ben and Laura look at each other. What the hell?

ANGLE...a beefy PHOTOGRAPHER fastening a white ruffled shirt onto Ben. Helps him into a fancy velvet coat, that ties in back to fit like skin. String tie, broad-brimmed hat. Holsters and six-guns...

PHOTOGRAPHER

The Kid. Wizard at Poker. Devil
with the ladies. Death with a gun.

Ben confirms all this in the mirror. Then his eyes stop cold. In the glass, a figure emerges from the curtain behind him...

...Laura as a dance hall floozy. The top of her dress is a lace corset trimmed in red velvet. Ruffles on her petticoat. A slit skirt that she holds together with one hand. She seems a little shy about this. There's lots of folks looking on. A sharp WHISTLE from somewhere. She keeps her eyes only on Ben.

LAURA

...pretty sleazy, huh?

BEN

Guys are getting excited all the
way to Kansas.

The photographer takes her by the shoulders. Positions her next to a seated Ben. Throws a feather boa around her neck. Sticks a whiskey bottle in her hand. She has gloves to her elbows, and he props one of those elbows on Ben's shoulder.

He steps back behind his tripod...

PHOTOGRAPHER

Leg up, darlin'. On the edge of
his stool.

...The kind of LAUGHTER that men call good-

LAURA

I'm OK like this. Just take it.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Don't be shy. It'll make the
picture work.

Ben sends the photographer a sharp glance...

BEN

Snap it. Or forget it.

More good-natured MOANS. Ben's pissed and she loves him for that. Rumples his hair. And lifts her leg up onto the stool. The skirt falls away, revealing all of her leg. Ruffled garter above black stocking.

She waves carefully at the animal sounds from the gallery. The photographer comes over. Sticks an Ace of Spades in her garter. Ben looks up to her. She smiles down with real affection. A soft imitation of his cocky tone...

LAURA
...lighten up, kid.

PHOTOGRAPHER
This way, children. Chins up. No
smiles now. Cold and sexy...

They comply. She runs her fingers tantalizingly through his hair.
The shutter CLICKS, and we...

...FREEZE FRAME on the portrait. They do look the part. Then,
SNAP to...

REVERSE ANGLE...the crowd of onlookers. The hearty shouts and
applause. All but one...

...Martin.

EXT. FRONT YARD - NIGHT

Laura and Ben. Walking from the garage in the soft night air. Our
POV is stationary, as they come slowly toward us. Angling to...

...Laura's kitchen door. They stand.

BEN
Sure it's warm enough? We
could use my place...

LAURA
No, it sounds like fun.

She squeezes his hand...

LAURA
Let me grab a shower. I'll
knock on your door.

They exchange only smiles. His lingers as she goes alone through
her kitchen door. When she's safe inside, he heads down the lilac
path toward his own.

INT. LAURA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Darkened room. Light flickers on. Laura stands for a moment in
the silence. Hugs herself absently.

Into the bathroom now. Begin to run water into the tub. As it
fills, she strolls to the sink...

...stares at her face in the mirror. She does look a little
dreamy. Catches herself at that. Sends her image a rueful, self-
mocking smile. Watch it, girl. Turns on the tap...

...begins to remove her makeup. Slowly, deliberately. Not a sound
in the place, but the sink. And the tub. Her face is naked now.
She smiles, as if she likes what she sees. Reaches behind her back
now...

...unzips her sundress. It falls to the floor.

HOLD on the tub, still running. Very full. Her hand reaches into frame. Shuts it off.

She eases her body into the water now. It is hot and wonderful. She lays her head back. Completely under the surface. Comes up dripping, wiping her eyes clear. Sweeping the long hair back.

The house is absolute silence. No sound but the movement of her body in the water. She begins to...

...hum now. Our reggae tune. Throaty and full. And...

...stop. Very still. Because across the room, her eye has caught...

...three TOWELS on the rack. Two of them have their edges precisely aligned. But only two. She stares. Stares and wonders. Stares and...

...stands up. Water sloshing over the rim of the full tub. Hand reaching for a terry robe. Slipping it on as she...

...steps from the tub. Approaches the towel rack. As if it were an alien life form. Stares. Reaches slowly...and gently...

...tugs the center towel. Out of line. But she's still staring. As if it might move back. All by itself. She doesn't feel so well now. Turns back to the sink...

...runs a pond of cold water into the stopped basin. SPLASHES her face. Blinks against the cold, and suddenly...

...LOOKS UP to the mirror. No one there. Nothing. Just the view into her empty...

...bedroom. She goes there now, clutching the robe around her. The made bed. Dresser. Armoire. And...

...the closet door. Slightly. Slightly. Ajar.

She closes her eyes. Can't believe she's doing this to herself. Shakes her head. She doesn't want to. This is insane. But when her eyes come open...

...the door is still ajar. And she goes to it. Slowly. Slowly. And reaches for the knob, and...

...FLINGS it open, to see...

...no monsters. Only clothing. Jumble. She backs away. Shaking her head to clear the cobwebs. Into her hallway. Stop at...

...a closed door. Another room. Staring at it. Will she yield to the compulsion. Reaches and...

...pushes it open. Into the spare bedroom. Light from the hallway falls across the darkened bed. She FLICKS ON the light...

...empty, clean room. Her glance goes to...

...the closet door. It's closed. Then...

...to the bottom edge of the bed. Is a boogeyman lurking? She backs out of the room...

...pulling her robe righter around her. Down the staircase now. Very slowly. Stopping to listen. But the house is completely still. And she goes...

...all the way down. Steps into the darkened living room. Turn on a lamp...

...the room is ordered. Nothing out of place. Perfect. She smiles at the room. A little uneasily. Back into the hallway now, and face-to-face with...

...the hall CLOSET. It is most definitely ajar. A black gap of several inches. She stares at that. She wouldn't have left it this way. Or did she?

She reaches slowly. Reaches. Fingers touch the knob. And open so gently, as if not to disturb a sleeping creature, as the door swings silently open onto...

...blackness. She has to step forward. PULL the cord to a flash of yellow light. Her one coat. An empty rack. But still she stares. Slides the coat down a foot. To where it ought to be.

Into her kitchen now. Tugging the cord on her robe tighter. Pick up the teapot. Set it on a burner. And stop DEAD...

...five handtowels. On a long rack. Two have edges precisely aligned. Two in the center. She stares. And stares. Her arms involuntarily hugging herself. And suddenly, she...

...BOLTS to the overhead cabinets. THROW open the doors...

...dozens of cans, bottles, packages. All stacked haphazardly. careless disarray. The air comes finally out of Laura. Reassured, she grins at herself. What a nightmare! Back to the oven now, turn on the burner beneath the kettle, and...

...head out of the kitchen. Back up the stairs. Climbing. Climbing. But in the silence...

...a SOUND makes her stop.

...drip. Drip.

That is strange. Up the last few stairs. Through the lighted bedroom. Drip. Into the bathroom where...

...the sink faucet is dripping into the standing pond of cold water. Only slightly peculiar. As our angle PUSHES IN...

...she goes to the faucet. Shuts it TIGHT. Immediate silence. She glances in the mirror to...

...the towel rack. Three towels askew. Just as she left them.

Back into her bedroom now. The open closet. She pulls out a skirt. Throws it onto the made bed. Checks the closet for a blouse. Can't find what she wants, and...

...steps to the armoire. As she pulls open the door, its inside mirror moves PAST the fleeting IMAGE of a ...

...MAN BEHIND HER, a split second before she can WHIRL SCREAMING to...

...BEN, who JUMPS a foot. A frozen instant of shocked staring. And she SCREAMS again, right at his face, the SHRIEK turning into...

...LAUGHTER, head thrown back. Wild and free and almost a little crazy. He's just staring at her in wonder. And as her laughter subsides, becomes warm and reassuring...

BEN

Boy, you're something when you go nuts.

LAURA

...you don't know the half of it.

He goes to her. Puts his hands on her shoulders...

BEN

Gives a new dimension to... startled.

She puts her hands over his.

LAURA

I think I'm saying goodbye to old ghosts

Very warm smile...

LAURA

It's a phase we go through. We women of mystery.

The look holds. And holds. And quietly...

LAURA

I'll get dressed. Meet you out back...

EXT. BEN'S BACK YARD - NIGHT

Two people. On a picnic blanket. Eating their supper under stars. They are ringed by flickering candles, and by the tall black trees above. As we watch them from a distance...

...they are close together. They do not kiss. They do not touch. But they are lovers. And when the man stands...

...the woman kneels. And blows out the candles. He helps her to her feet. And hand-in-hand. They walk...

...toward us. And we PULL BACK to...

...a LONG ANGLE of their approach. They are on the lilac path now. Heading for her kitchen door. Comfortable in the silence. And in each other.

When they reach her kitchen door. He runs his hand along her hair. Says simply...

BEN

Well. Want some company?

Her eyes. Moving across his face...

LAURA

I think I'm still a little...
spooked. By my ghosts tonight.

She is. He can see that.

LAURA

I want company. Very much.
When I'm feeling right.

BEN

How old will I be?

She takes his fingers to her lips. And kisses them.

LAURA

How old will you be. Tomorrow
night?

That satisfies him. He leans down. Kisses her good night. They taste each other for a beat. He takes a step back.

BEN

Think I'll go work out.

Takes another step back. She sends him a little wave. Murmurs...

LAURA

...don't break anything.

He just turns his back on that, saunters off. She watches him go. Then steps into...

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

When she enters the kitchen, the ghosts aren't with her. Only thoughts of Ben. She stops now, at...

...the tea kettle. Touches it, and...

...PULLS her hand back. It's red-hot. But under the burner...

...no flame. That's peculiar. Looks back to the screen door. A little breeze has picked up. Blowing the kitchen curtains gently. Looks back to the burner. Maybe it was the wind...

She turns the burner on. Heads back past the kitchen table where...

...Ben's tape deck sits. She PUNCHES the button ON as she goes by. Into...

...the hallway now. Climbing the stairs. As she hears...

...MAHLER'S NINTH. The liquid notes STOP her. Right there on the stairs. Then she has to smile. Ben. When did he manage that?

Thinking of him, up the last few steps. Into her room. Flick on the light to see...

...her bed. Still made. But the covers are slightly turned down. As if inviting her. She blinks. Did she do that? And as she stares...

...drip. Drip. And so slowly...

...she turns. To the bathroom. But it's very dark in there. She hesitates a beat...

...drip.

...and walks toward it. Flicks ON the light. The sink is NOT dripping. So how...?

...drip. And her head SNAPS to...

...the TUB. The dripping has somehow filled the tub to the rim. A clear, empty lake. Just beginning to...

...SPILL over the edge. Trickle in a thin sheet down the side...

...drip. Drip. She watches with staring eyes. Her steps are backward, halting. Into...

...her bedroom. Looks to the closet...

...open. Lighted. The bed...with its turned down covers. She approaches it. From downstairs, the Mahler plays on. But she doesn't notice. Mesmerized by the bedcovers. Leans slowly. Fingertips reaching to just...barely...touch...as...

...SCRRREEEEEE, and she GASPS, as the tea kettle HOWLS from the kitchen, and she...

...BOLTS out of the room, RACING down the stairs, the SHRIEKING kettle BLASTING above the Mahler, as she STUMBLES, catches herself...

...DOWN the last stairs, INTO the kitchen, the steam JETTING from the kettle, and she...

...LURCHES to YANK it from the burner. Flick off the gas. Her shoulders HEAVING now, fighting to catch her breath. The Mahler playing in what seems like distance. The only sound against the silence, until...

...the CLATTER. Soft, irregular. Turn to...

...the screen DOOR. The wind has dislodged it. It clatters open. And shut. Open. Shut. Take a step toward it...

...and FREEZE. The towel rack. Five towels. The three in the center have edges meticulously aligned. She stares. Murmurs...

LAURA

Two. Wasn't it...only...

Slowly, her eyes turn. To the cabinets.

CLOSE ANGLE...on the closed doors. HEAR her footfalls. As if drawn in a trance. The Mahler plays on, so far away, as...

...Laura steps into frame. Hands reach to the knobs. Steady. And...TEAR them open...

...three dozen cans. Face perfectly straight. Their labels aligned by an insane hand.

Laura's hands are at her mouth. They can't stifle the strangled SCREAM that leaps from within her. She staggers backward. Her eyes LEAP in terror to...

...the screen door. Open. Shut. Open. And she...

...WHIRLS away. Into the hall. RUNNING for her life, running to the front door, and...

...STOP. Eyes wide in horror. For there on the doorway, just against the door...

...the TAPE DECK. Its music smoothly flowing. Guarding the door like a sentinel. As she stares, immobile, we SNAP TO...

REVERSE ANGLE...her face. And over her shoulder, the hallway stretches its full length behind her. As in soft focus...

...a FIGURE MOVES past the frame. Far behind her. A frozen instant for its reality to register on us, and we SNAP to SHARP FOCUS on...

...MARTIN, at last. The hand with the PISTOL dangles at his side. APPROACHING stealthily from behind her shoulder. Laura can't hear him above the Mahler, as she stares dead ahead...

...too terrified to move. Or scream. And Martin is closer. And closer. Stepping now...

...JUST behind her. LOOMING above her as at the water fountain. And we TIGHTEN ANGLE to only...

...Laura's face. Her eyes...

MARTIN

...hello, princess.

...the frozen instant. Before she can...

...WHIRL, panic STRANGLING her, to face...

...the calm, knowing smile.

MARTIN

Have you missed me?

The pistol hand unobtrusively at his side. He lifts the other, as if to gently reach toward her, and...

...she FLINCHES horribly. His smile curls at one corner. Becomes even a little more knowing.

MARTIN

Yes, the first touch. After so long apart...

He leans. A little closer. Almost a whisper with...

MARTIN

Exciting. To anticipate.

She stumbles backward. Into the door. No more room.

MARTIN

Have you been...thinking of it, too?

And he steps toward her...

MARTIN

All...these...

...the KNOCKING stops him. Short, sharp RAPPING on the door at her back. They hold their breath...

BEN (V.O.)

Laura? Are you there...?

Martin's gun hand. Rising slowly. The barrel levels dead at her eyes.

BEN (V.O.)

You locked the screen door.
Can you hear me...?

Martin reaches. Just past her face. Slips the door CHAIN into its slot. So quietly. Then gestures with the pistol...open it!

As he steps back, away from the opening. She calls through the door...

LAURA
...just a second.

Martin backs away one more step. Pistol levelled. And Laura...
...opens the door. The chain PULLS tight.

BEN
Hi.

She nods. Tries to keep her smile easy.

BEN
Felt like talking metaphysics.
So I thought I'd drop by...

LAURA
I'm sleepy.

And now there is silence. His eyes flick to the chain. And back to her...

BEN
...still spooked by ghosts, huh?

LAURA
I guess.

One more silence. And then...

BEN
Those ghosts still...lucky?

She blinks.

BEN
You remember. I told you why
they were...real lucky.

And now she remembers.

LAURA
No. They're not lucky anymore.

His eyes reach to her. Across the distance. He just nods.

BEN
Well. You're sleepy. Buy you
breakfast...?

She nods back. Fights to keep the tears from her eyes.

BEN
Night, kid.

PULL BACK to view from over Martin's shoulder. His raised pistol. Laura at the door's opening. Stepping back as she closes it softly, and the door...

...CRASHES OPEN, as Ben CRACKS the chain bolt FREE, the door HURLING the tape deck like a missile, just PAST Martin, SPLINTERING against a wall, and Ben...

...SEES Martin, in the instant the pistol...

...SLAMS THROUGH Ben's face, his body FLYING back into the door and...

...crumpling. Limp and motionless. Blood running from his wound, as Martin steps across his body and...

...KICKS the door VIOLENTLY SHUT.

Absolute silence now. For the first time.

Laura against the wall. The hallway is empty, except for a small buffet at the far end. On it, a china figure, a telephone. Above it, a mirror, in which we see...

...Martin gesturing toward Ben's body. With the pistol.

MARTIN

What's his name?

...so quietly. A pleasant question. And when there is no answer, the pistol raises at the still, fallen form, and...

LAURA

...Ben.

Ah. As if that were an interesting name. Pistol still levelled, he studies Ben now. An interesting species.

LAURA

Martin, he...

MARTIN

...doesn't have anything to do with us.

And turns to her. Silken, silent...

MARTIN

Does he.

He comes for her now. One step at a time.

MARTIN

He's not the man you need. I think you know that, in your heart...

And he's there. Inches from her.

MARTIN

...don't you, princess?

An innocent question. She licks her lips. Staring into his strong, calm eyes...

MARTIN

You need. Someone more.

The hand comes up. The fingers gently curved. Just away from her hair.

MARTIN

Someone more. Isn't easy.
Nothing perfect...nothing
really right...ever is.

The hand touches her hair. But she does not shudder. Her eyes looking so directly at his...

MARTIN

But it is. Thrilling.

And as the hand strokes her hair. In a firm caress. She tilts her head back. Moves with...

...involuntary pleasure. At the touch.

MARTIN

Do you remember. Our
honeymoon...?

She nods slowly. And her eyes soften. Yes, she does.

MARTIN

The night...I taught you...

The barrel of his pistol traces now. So delicately up her leg.
Her thigh.

MARTIN

...to dance?

The pistol at her waist now. The flat side of it travelling up...

...scarcely brushing past her breast. There is a small shiver of pleasure in her. We can hear her breathing now...

MARTIN

You said. Those were the
happiest days...

The pistol. The fingers. Touch her face.

MARTIN

...of your whole life.

He leans to her. She murmurs...

LAURA

Martin, I'm so...

Leaning closer. His lips parting...

LAURA

...so confused, and...

...her eyes flutter closed. Her lips part. And as he leans his mouth into hers, Laura's knee comes...

...sharply UP BETWEEN his legs, his SLO-MO CRUMPLING in shock and pain, her DOUBLED FISTS LASHING OUT...

...crashing SOLIDLY into the pistol, which FLIES across the hall, as Martin sinks to his knees, and she is...

...PAST him like a cat, SCRAMBLING up the hall, CRASHING into the buffet, going DOWN HARD, as...

...the china figure falls, SHATTERING in a thousand shards, the telephone spilling after it, Martin LURCHING to his feet, LUNGING after her as Laura...

...WHEELS on him from her knees, pistol LEVELLED at his face.

An instant's impasse. And then he smiles. Takes one step toward her, as...

...BLAM, a deafening SHOT straight PAST his head SPLINTERS the wall behind him. And he stops. But the smile, knowing and calm, remains...

MARTIN

I'm impressed.

There is the timbre of the old Martin. A faint thunder of distant menace.

MARTIN

Now let's end this. While
you're still ahead.

From her knees. Laura straightens her spine. Holds the pistol rock steady. And in a voice he's never heard before...

LAURA

Walk this way, Martin.
Come to me.

...he thinks. A reflection unnerving to watch. Before his soft...

MARTIN

Always my pleasure.

He walks toward her now. Down the hall. Very slowly. The closer he gets, the more anxious she seems. Finally...

LAURA

That's close enough.

He stops. No question, he is enjoying this.

MARTIN

Oh, I don't think so.

Takes one step closer. And another.

MARTIN

Here, feels right.

Very close now. Not within reach. Not quite.

MARTIN

Well, there's a telephone...

He points to her feet. The phone that was knocked from the buffet. We can barely hear the purr of the disconnect against the silence.

MARTIN

You could call the police.

But she doesn't move. His ease is making her all the more nervous.

MARTIN

...but you don't know. If you really want to.

His voice is intimate now. No other word for it.

MARTIN

With everything. I love you.
And you've always known that.

(beat)

And like no one else. I know
your mind. Every...thought.

She holds the gun as steady as she can. But we see it waver.

MARTIN

You're wondering...can the
police really...protect you.

Shakes his head. Almost sadly.

MARTIN

They'll book me. Release me.
There may be a trial someday...
if you press charges. Disgrace.
For us both. But well in the future.

He spreads his hands. A gesture of inevitability.

MARTIN

In the meantime. There may be a
court order. Instructing me to
stay away. From my own wife.

He draws a deep breath. The condescension just below the surface.

MARTIN

Now as well as I know you...
you know me.

(beat)

I have. Strong feelings.
About the woman I love.

Straight at her eyes.

MARTIN

I'll always be there for you.

The maddening smile is gone now. There's a tenderness, an honesty,
in the voice...

MARTIN

I wanted to frighten you. And
hurt you. The way you hurt me.

(beat)

But we're even now. We can
start fresh.

He takes a step closer. She brandishes the pistol, and he stops.
He's watching her eyes...

MARTIN

Better than fresh. Because I
see you differently now. There's
a...courage. A self-reliance.

And softly...

MARTIN

You see, respect...is a thing...
that must be earned.

They stare for a frozen moment. Slowly, she reaches for the phone.
Gun pointed dead at his chest. She hangs up the phone with a
smile...

...she lifts the receiver once more. Punches 911.

MARTIN

Think carefully. You don't want
to act out of anger. Not anymore.

LAURA

Yes, give me the police. Hurry,
please.

She's still crouching below him. Staring up. As if held by his
eyes.

MARTIN

There's still time to hang up...

We HEAR the click. The officer's muffled VOICE. But Laura says
nothing.

MARTIN

You have a chance here. To do
the right thing.

She draws a ragged breath...

LAURA

Yes, this is Laura Pray. At
28 Tremont...

Staring at the eyes. That know her so well. And just above a
whisper...

MARTIN

...take that chance.

She seems to sway before his eyes. And into the receiver...

LAURA

...come quickly.

(beat)

I've just killed an intruder.

The disconnect. Laura rising in slow motion. Martin's
uncomprehension as she...

...FIRES straight into his chest.

He is BLOWN backward in slow motion. His features have time only
for astonishment...

His body lies twisted. Blank eyes stare. HEAR the pistol clatter
to the floor...

Laura on her hands and knees. Staring through tears, at the chance
she's taken. To do the right thing. And then...

LAURA

Oh, God. Are...are you
all right...?

...and BOLTS to her feet, FLYING past the phone and the gun and...

...Martin's body, and...

...TUMBLING to the floor at Ben's side. He is stunned, blinking.
She holds him still. Puts her face so close to his...

BEN

The guy. Where...

LAURA

Shhh. There's no guy. There's
just us.

Her fingers trace around his wound. Stroke his hair so gently. He
glances back to the splintered door, the dangling chain-bolt...

BEN
I did okay, huh?

And her tears begin. Soft. Silent. He reaches his fingertips to touch them...

LAURA
You did great.

She leans to kiss his mouth. All her heart is in it. And when she pulls back, he sees...

...in soft focus...Martin's still form. Ben's eyes flick back to Laura. Silence. And just above a whisper...

LAURA
I did better.

No joy in her tear-streaked face. Only quiet strength. And certainty.

The sight of her has tears standing in Ben's eyes. He reaches for her. Pulls her to him, as we...

FADE TO BLACK. ROLL END CREDITS.