

Sleeping With The Enemy

Ronald Bass
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SLEEPING WITH THE ENEMY

OVER BLACK SCREEN:

FRED ASTAIRE

(singing)

Like a sailor that goes to sea,
Like a robin upon a tree,
Like an unwritten melody
I'm free -- that's me.

FADE IN:

INT. SUMMER COTTAGE, LIVING ROOM -- DAY

SARA BURNEY sits at a handsome picture window LOOKING out at a dock, a sparkling beach, a bay. She stretches and her long blonde hair falls off her shoulder, backlit, like a halo around her head. Down on the dock a tall, handsome MAN carries sails onto a little day-sailer tied up there.

FRED ASTAIRE (V.O.)

(from tape player)

No strings, no connections,
No ties to my affections,
I'm fancy free,
And free for anything --
Fancy...

INT. BATHROOM -- DAY

CLOSE ON a sink, on MARTIN BURNEY'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. LIVING ROOM -- DAY

Sara HEARS Martin's footfall. She arranges her hair so it falls just so across her forehead. She unbuttons the top button of her blouse, arranging it to reveal a seductive glimpse of frilly black lace bra. She turns as Martin comes into the room, showing him her bright, young face, oddly innocent, as through half-formed. She's in her mid-twenties, beautiful, sweet.

Martin comes up to her. Tall, slender, strikingly handsome. He's nearly forty. A quiet, restless intelligence behind the eyes. At once refined and charismatic.

He stares down at his young wife. Then leans gracefully to lift her in his arms. She blinks seductively at him. For a moment they 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

Sara is rinsing the lunch dishes. The kitchen, otherwise pleasant, is painted a dark, oppressive red. Sara looks oddly tense, preoccupied. 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 footfalls. 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.

But Martin seems quiet now, and Fleishman grows somewhat awkward.
Wants to make friends...

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

Waits for Martin to reciprocate. When he doesn't, Fleishman shifts his weight to the other foot.

FLEISHMAN
Hot. In the city now.

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

Martin's eyes are patient. Watchful.

FLEISHMAN
(indicating boat)
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.

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 drown 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 with 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? This morning?
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 new 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 her arms beneath her. And carries her off.

INT. BEDROOM

The room is as dark and quiet as curtains can make it. HOLD on a chair, with Martin's clothes nearly folded across its back. As 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, methodical cadence. 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

Am I making too many...calls in the morning? You know, the market doesn't close when we're on holiday. And my clients need attention too.

That's not it. And he knows it. The voice chills. Slows...

MARTIN

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

She turns her face up to his. Tear-streaked. But silent. He contemplates that for a moment.

MARTIN

Why don't I drive you to town tomorrow?
You can buy yourself...something pretty,
hmmn? I'll give you a hundred dollars.

If she speaks now, she'll cry. So she just shakes her head.

MARTIN

My God, this isn't about a checking
account again, is it? Credit cards?

Her head shakes once more. Of course not. But his mouth hardens. There's clear menace in a quiet...

MARTIN

Dry. Your. Face.

And she does. With her napkin.

MARTIN

Have merchants stopped...accepting
cash?

Her eyes stare at the table. Frozen. But...

MARTIN

I'm waiting.

SARA

Sometimes, it's embarrassing. I'll be at the grocery counter. And I'll be... a few dollars over what...you've given me...and...I have to put something back. And there's a long line, or...

MARTIN

Well, we know who's to blame. Don't we?

She nods slowly at the table. She seems so tiny. Of course she knows. Who's to blame.

MARTIN

Marriage is a partnership. Based on... mutual responsibilities. And trust. Trust that those responsibilities will be honored.

He's not angry anymore. This is an old lesson. But he is never too weary to teach it. His responsibility.

MARTIN

God knows, I meet mine. You have a fine house. A fine car. Every... appliance, convenience, to make your tasks easier...

His voice gentles. The honest condescension of the truly superior...

MARTIN

I allow your...job. At the library. So you can be near your precious books. Instead of making your home more perfect. For us.

She nods in the direction of her dinner fork. Yes, he does. And she is grateful.

MARTIN

And how. Was I. Repaid?

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

SARA

It was two years ago.

She looks to him. Searches his eyes.

SARA

My mother...was all I had.

(beat)

She died, Martin. I couldn't help that.

MARTIN
You loved her in life. But what
earthly good did it do her...to
attend her funeral?

SARA
It wasn't for her. I went for me!

He nods. Exactly his point. How simple this all is.

MARTIN
And left me. On my weekend. My one
weekend. Alone.

SARA
You win every year! I know. It's
a regional award. It puts food on
our table!

Her jaw is set. There is anger flashing in her eyes. But none
at all in his. He is amused by the outburst. The trace of his
smile is maddening, worse than blows.

MARTIN
And all I ask. Once each year. Is
to take my princess to the ball.

Softly...

MARTIN
In something regal...

SARA
Last year, I was nearly naked in
that gown you bought...

MARTIN
...and every eye. Was on you.

That memory warms him. But fades with...

MARTIN
But two years ago. I was alone. My
wife...had run off to Minnesota. Without
a word to her husband. Can you conceive
of my humiliation?

(beat)
Can you imagine what the men in that
room were thinking?

Her lip trembles. But her eyes hold firm.

SARA
I left you a note. It was only two
days. You had your supper waiting for
you Sunday night.

MARTIN
That was not. The point!!

The word rumbles. Almost echoes.

MARTIN

You asked. I said no. So you took
our credit cards. And our check book.
And deserted me.

He searches her eyes for repentance. Instead there is a spark
that approaches defiance. And this makes him curious.

MARTIN

And so...I had to take away the...
instruments. Of your irresponsibility.
To remind you.

SARA

That wasn't the only way you reminded
me. That night.

No, it wasn't. But she's looking directly at him. That is
strange.

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.

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. Protective.

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 little 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. Little 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 around them.

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 darkness around them.

FLEISHMAN

Oh, my God.

MARTIN

(furious, accusing)

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, wrestles him violently back into the cockpit.

FLEISHMAN

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

Martin is crying. Fleishman, staring into the night, is crying too. Suddenly...

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

She was. The only...thing. I ever loved.

Silence.

SERGEANT

Would you be more com...

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

I tried to dive in. To save her, for
Godsake! But he...

An arm stabs out. A finger accuses Fleishman.

SERGEANT

Now, just a minute, sir...

MARTIN

(pleading)

She was so small...

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...

MARTIN

You're going home, aren't you?
To your wife.

There's a sob from deep within him...

MARTIN

Why wasn't it you?

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.

He leaves the lights off. Walking aimlessly. The kitchen.
Dinner dishes rinsed. Stacked so neatly by the sink. He stares
at them in the half-light. Thinking of Sara. Carefully lifts a
glass...

To the cherrywood bar now. 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. And Martin...

...WHIRLS, flinging his glass VIOLENTLY at the mirror above the bed. Glass EXPLODES into glass with shocking force. HOLD on the shattered mirror. Hear the CRASH of the dresser being cleared.

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, eddy 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 most of her 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. Hacked off. Two feet long.

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.

Sara hands him a roll of bills that contains eighty-five dollars exactly. He counts it, then writes out a ticket. As he hands it to her, Sara takes it with a slightly trembling hand. Otherwise, she appears calm.

She puts the ticket in her duffle, then looks around the shabby waiting room. Walks with sudden purpose to the Ladies' toilet.

INT. LADIES' ROOM - NIGHT

Sara takes out biscuits and some cheese from her duffle, makes a few tiny sandwiches with them, then goes and sits on a chair by the stalls, and devours them.

EXT. BUS STATION - NIGHT

Sara waits on a bench outside, reading a paperback she's brought. Updike. The clerk's voice, muffled and slurred, booms out over the station intercom:

CLERK (V.O.)

Bus for Boston.

When Sara SEES its headlights sweeping up the street, she stands suddenly to attention. Looks around desperately. As the bus comes up, she NOTICES a public phone on the wall near her. As the bus stops and its door opens, she gives the phone a wild, terrified look. The look HOLDS...

She turns and gets on the bus.

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 was older when I was born. After daddy died, she had a stroke. She's blind now, 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's eyes move over the woman's face. Deciding. Then...

SARA

I was visiting my cousin. In the East. She left her husband.

The woman is listening. But it really doesn't matter.

SARA

Her husband...started beating her. Even on their honeymoon.

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.

SARA
Her mother died. My cousin's. Two years ago. She sneaked away to the funeral. And he...beat her. And beat her. He broke her wrist. He broke her rib. She was...coughing blood for...so long...

(beat)
And then he sat down. And ate the supper she'd cooked him.

WOMAN
Can you imagine.

Brings Sara's eyes back to this world. No, they say. It is hard to imagine.

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 crazed. 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.

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 crazed. And then she ran away. Before the punishment.

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WOMAN

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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; there is 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. BUS STATION, CEDAR FALLS - DAY

Sara, obviously just off the bus, is thumbing through the "Cedar Falls Citizen" on a bench in the station waiting room.

The brunette wig is gone. And with it, the bold make-up and the glasses. What's left of the blonde hair has been trimmed carefully now. The short boyish style only makes her delicate features seem all the more feminine. The face is fresh, scrubbed clean. For today is tomorrow.

OVER HER SHOULDER we can read a headline in the classifieds:
Apartments - Furnished.

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 sadly...

SARA

I'm sorry. Two hundred thirty is just...

She misses the place already. As if it were her own.

MRS. NEPPER

Well, it's roomy and...has some real charm, I think. Still, I s'pose it does need paint pretty bad and... fixing up here and there...

Sara turns to her...

SARA

I'd do all that. I mean the labor. I'd love to. If it could...help on the rent.

The old woman is torn. She could take advantage of the eagerness. But she likes this girl.

SARA

I'm a very careful person, and I... take pride. In what I do.

MRS. NEPPER

I s'pose...two-ten. Or two-five, even.

Sara wants it so badly. Still has to shake her head...

SARA

Maybe after I...find a job.

MRS. NEPPER

I thought you wanted to enroll at the college.

SARA

Maybe. In the fall. But I'll need a job right away. You don't know someone who needs housework, do you? I'm a very...

Stops. They share a smile. And for Mrs. Nepper, that's an event.

MRS. NEPPER

...careful person, yes.
(thinks)

There's Hazel Channing. She was a professor, til her car accident last year. Mostly paralyzed now...

SARA

My mother. Before she died, she had a stroke. I did everything for her.

Mrs. Nepper is studying Sara. Deciding whether to go with first impression.

MRS. NEPPER

The girl that cleans and cooks for her is leaving. Week from Monday. I'll talk to Hazel.

Sara nods her gratitude. Mrs. Nepper is ready to close.

MRS. NEPPER

Two hundred is the best I can do, Miss...Ray is it?

SARA

Pray. Laura Pray. Can I wait til my first payday? From the professor?

MRS. NEPPER

Can't hold it. Without one month cash.

Sara stares. And stares. Then quickly into her pocket. Counts out nearly all of her remaining cash. Thrusts it forward with a smile. Sara is Laura now. With a home.

INT. BEN'S HOUSE - DAY

In the house next door, a man's hand pulls a curtain aside to get a better VIEW of the porch where Mrs. Nepper stands talking with Laura Pray.

REVERSE ANGLE on an Abyssinian cat. Impassive, beautiful. He's held by BEN WOODWARD. Ben is thirty, angular. A long, lean body and a face more pleasant than striking. It's the eyes that attract. They are quick, with humor and hurt sharing space beneath the surface.

BEN

How 'bout it, Dickens? That looks like a renter. But where's the husband, huh? Maybe it's a boyfriend. Have to sneak him in through the back.

Dickens is not amused.

BEN

Hey, Dickhead. Run over there and see if she's wearing a ring. The suspense...

(as he studies Laura)
...is killing me.

Dickens looks up directly into Ben's face. Ben tries to look innocent.

BEN

Just kidding.

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 towels deliberately off kilter.

She walks naked into the bedroom. Sits on the edge of the bed, where her clothes have been laid out. 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 pull the shade.

EXT. LAURA'S HOUSE - DAY

LOOKING in her window, from the POV of the second story of Ben's house. SEE the fleeting image of a naked Laura moving to the window and lowering the shade.

REVERSE -- THE WINDOW OF BEN'S HOUSE

The cat watching alone. Dickens stares blankly. Inscrutable.

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.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Laura scrapes old paint off the living room walls.

INT. BEN'S STUDY - DAY

Ben sits at a desk buried under a pile of papers in a room decorated with theater posters and commedia dell'arte masks. He is not looking at the papers but OUT HIS WINDOW, INTO THE WINDOWS of Laura's house. Dickens is sitting on a high and perilous pile of theatrical reference books.

Ben SEES Laura walking from her back porch to the living room carrying a bucket of paint and a dropcloth.

BEN

If you were half a man. You'd go offer to help.

Ben turns to Dickens.

BEN

I'm talking to you, dufus. If I were half a man...I wouldn't be watching her.

Dickens leaps wildly from the books, sending them tumbling down onto the floor.

INT. LAURA'S KITCHEN - EVENING

Laura is eating beans and rice by candlelight. The zest seems to have gone out of the enterprise. As if in confirmation of this, the candle sputters out. Laura gets up and turns on the electric lights. She NOTICES that the dish towels are lined up a little too neatly. She carefully pulls one out of line.

INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ben reading in bed. He looks up to his window and NOTICES a light in a window across the yard.

He looks to his reading lamp. Has to think about this. Then, guiltily, he snaps off the light so his room is in darkness. SEE the opposite window more clearly now. Laura's silhouette drifts behind the curtains. Angry and ashamed, Ben puts his book down. Goes out of the bedroom.

INT. BEN'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

In the darkened kitchen, Ben pulls a beer out of the refrigerator and starts drinking it, standing in the light from the refrigerator. He LOOKS out the high kitchen window and SEES the light in Laura's bedroom go out.

INT. LAURA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Laura is balanced high on a tall ladder. Rolling gold paint onto the kitchen ceiling. Hot day. Her back door is open, and the screen door swings to and fro in a fitful breeze. From her backyard...

BEN (V.O.)

DICKENS!

Little rustling. Suddenly, the cat DASHES into her kitchen. Set of car keys in its mouth.

BEN (V.O.)

God-DAMMIT!

As Ben BURSTS into the kitchen, the cat BOLTS, slipping on the dropcloth, overturning a can of paint which begins to run neatly across the floor. Ben can't believe this. Softly...

BEN

Shit.

At which point, Dickens trots through the paint and begins footprinting the premises. Ben LUNGES after him, and as Dickens DARTS to one side, Ben STUMBLES HARD against the ladder.

...Laura's breath CATCHES, the ladder TOTTERS, and Ben instinctively reaches up to GRASP her waist.

...she flinches. He holds her steady, but she TENSES, rigid. Her hands wanting desperately to push his away, but afraid somehow to quite touch him.

And his hands come away, of their own accord. As if they've done something terribly wrong. For a moment, her body language has stunned him into forgetting his disgrace. She looks away.

BEN

I'm so...so sorry, I...

Dickens now sits calmly in front of him, having dropped the keys between his paws.

BEN

He grabbed my keys...I was late for class...

She clings to her perch. Looks down at him now. Only her shyness saves the look from outright hostility. He is clearly an intruder.

BEN

I live next door. I'm Ben Woodward.

She nods, minimally. Without a sound.

BEN

And you're Laura Pray. So... that's us.

LAURA

How do you know my name?

Her voice is quiet. But he wishes he hadn't said that.

BEN

I asked Mrs. Nepper, I...watch
you come and go, so...

Bites his lip. Really wishes he hadn't said that. She's still
above him on the ladder. Showing no signs of coming down.

BEN

I'll pay for all this mess, and...
clean it up, of course, I can't...
tell you how sorry...

LAURA

It's fine. I'll do it myself, I'd...
rather, really.

She sure means that. She's very lovely up there, in her t-shirt
and jeans. Bare feet. He can't keep from staring.

BEN

I teach drama. At the college.

Silence. The more awkward she seems, the prettier she looks to him.

BEN

Yes, it is fascinating work, now
that you ask.

He's looking for a smile. Doesn't see one.

BEN

Sorry, no, I don't like to talk about
it. Because I'm...shy? Because I...

(beat)

...have many...guilty secrets?

(beat)

...am the neighborhood dork.

Maybe she does smile at that. Just at one corner. He takes
heart.

BEN

If you answered 'C', you passed the
pop quiz.

(beat)

This entitles you to breakfast.
Next door.

Her eyes flicker involuntarily. Breakfast.

BEN

It's just bacon, sausage, eggs and
hotcakes. But at least it's fattening.

(beat)

Not that you...need...fattening.

LAURA

I've eaten. But thank you.

She looks, well, frightened up there. And angry. And very sweet. He's a little mesmerized.

BEN

You have to let me help with...

LAURA

Please. Just let me...get to it. Please.

He just nods. Feels humiliated.

BEN

Rain check. On the handshake.

Shy smile of his own. Picks up Dickens. And the keys. Gets the hell out.

HOLD on her. Staring after him.

EXT. BEN'S PORCH - DAY

Ben pauses on his porch steps and turns to LOOK back towards Laura's porch through the tangled tunnel of lilac bushes. Dickens climbs up on Ben's shoulder and looks, too, MEOWING once in perplexity. And softly...

BEN

It's OK, Dickless. Now we know the rules.

He looks at Dickens. Who just stares back at him.

BEN

Yeh. She sure is.

INT. LAURA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Laura finishes washing her hands in the sink -- goes and looks in her cabinet. The bag of rice and the bag of beans are almost empty. So is the jar of instant coffee. Laura can't quite hold back the tears...

INT. BEACH COTTAGE - 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.

INT. LAURA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Laura is up late, finishing painting her bedroom a warm yellow. She looks haggard, thin, worn out -- but she works on doggedly, as though in a trance.

INT. LAURA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Laura unlocks her bedside cabinet and takes out her diary, opens it to a page where a few small bills are hidden -- about fifteen dollars in all. Laura counts it and takes a deep breath: it might last -- long enough.

INT. LAURA'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Laura indulges in the unimaginable luxury of spreading peanut butter from a new jar onto toast. She eats it slowly, relishing every bite, washing it down with coffee. The SOUND of Whitney Houston singing "How Will I Know?" drifts across the yard from the house next door...

Laura glances out her window and SEES a silhouette moving against the drawn shades of Ben's study -- the shadow of someone moving to the music. When the shadow turns into profile, Laura SEES that it has a huge beaked nose, like a bird's. She shakes her head and smiles: there must be some sensible explanation.

INT. HAZEL CHANNING'S KITCHEN - DAY

An open refrigerator. Not much in there. Milk, cheese. Packaged cold cuts. Jar of olives. Some vegetables in the bin. Sparse assortment of other items.

PULL BACK to see Laura looking at it. Trying with everything in her to keep her glance casual. A fleshy HAND closes the fridge now. We see ELLEN GARNER, a heavy-set young woman, spreading mayo on a sandwich.

ELLEN
I hope you had lunch.

LAURA
Hmmm?

ELLEN
Well, you're expected to bring your own.

She places the sandwich on a plate. On a small tray. Gives the soup in the pot one last stir...

ELLEN
Professor Channing has an old friend from the faculty, who shops on Friday and brings your check.

Pouring from the pot into a small bowl...

ELLEN
Buys just enough for the week. The professor hates to waste. Course, she wastes everything I bring up there, unless you shove it down her throat...

The bowl goes onto the tray. Napkin, spoon are waiting. Ellen tries a half-hearted smile...

ELLEN
Can't put it off any longer. You may as well meet her.

They set off through the neat Victorian parlor. Prim, ordered furniture. Souvenirs of distant travel. Hundreds of books in deep shelves.

ELLEN
Nothing you do will ever be right for her. So don't take it personal. She can talk, but she never does. Not one single word. Just glares at you like...
(beat)
...you broke her back. Took her life.

They're climbing stairs now.

LAURA
She must be awfully lonely.

ELLEN
I started out feeling sorry, too. But ...well, you'll see.

Laura looks to her on that.

LAURA
What did she teach?

Ellen shrugs. Doesn't know or care. Laura takes a breath...

LAURA
You said the check comes on Friday...

ELLEN
And don't even think about asking
for an advance. End of the world.

A door, a KNOCK, and they enter an austere bedroom. The old WOMAN looks first to Ellen, eyes burning as though in rage. And Ellen looks down, silently. The glare turns now to Laura. She loses her voice for a moment. Then...

LAURA
My name is Laura Pray, Professor. I've
just moved to Cedar Falls, and...I hope
to enroll at the college this Fall.

(beat)
Library science.
(longer beat)
I'm grateful for the work. And I hope
I'll be able to...

Her voice trails off in the face of Hazel's icy stare. Her absolute lack of response. Finally, Hazel looks away in disgust.

ELLEN
The talk's no use. Let's get to the
feeding. I have to get home and pack.

But Laura reaches. Takes the tray firmly.

LAURA
We'll be all right. You go.

Ellen's eyes look up. At once hesitant and relieved. Laura nods reassuringly. Ellen clears her throat. Says to the back of Hazel's head...

ELLEN
Well, then. Take care. I hope you're
feeling lots better soon.

No response, of course. Ellen looks to Laura. Good luck. And leaves.

Laura sits by the bed. Puts the tray next to Hazel, who stares fixedly away.

LAURA
I'm sorry it's just this. But I
like to cook. And when I learn the
things you like...

Hazel has turned to her now. The hatred is a challenge. Laura holds her smile. Takes some soup in a spoon. Brings it gently to Hazel's slightly parted lips. But since Hazel makes no effort to drink, the soup spills down her face and throat, staining her nightgown.

The look between them holds. Laura makes no hurried move to clean the old woman. Very deliberately, she takes the napkin. Blots the soup, almost tenderly...

LAURA

My mother had a stroke in her last years. I loved her dearly, but sometimes her anger at her...destiny ...came between us. Never for long.

Hazel's glare intensifies. How dare Laura presume. But Laura doesn't look away.

LAURA

You know, if you starve, I lose this job. And I can't afford that.

Laura tries a smile. Small one.

LAURA

Negative incentive, huh?

She picks up the sandwich. Begins breaking it into bite-size pieces.

LAURA

What you want. Is to be left alone. I know that feeling, Professor.

Holds one small piece toward Hazel's lips...

LAURA

And as soon as you've eaten. You'll have your wish.

Strong and kind. Hazel's eyes move over Laura's face. Anger has been replaced by appraisal.

INT. HAZEL'S KITCHEN - DAY

Laura enters with the tray. The soup is gone. The sandwich nearly so as well. Laura sets it on the counter. Scoops up the remaining crust. Eats it quickly.

Opens the fridge. Stares in, longingly. Milk, cheese slices. Two red apples. A bell pepper. Butter. She reaches for a jar of olives. Pretty full. Opens the jar...stares in and...

...eats one. Slow and thoughtful. Like savoring beluga. Stares in once more. Pops another quickly into her mouth, so fast it doesn't count. Shuts the jar. Shuts the fridge. Shuts her eyes.

INT. LAURA'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Laura scrapes the last peanut butter from her jar and makes a very thin peanut butter sandwich. She GAZES out her window. The moonlight frames an apple tree in Ben's back yard. In her eyes we can read a flicker of criminal intent.

EXT. BEN'S BACK YARD - NIGHT

In the faint light spilling from Ben's kitchen, Laura creeps like a thief over to Ben's apple tree and begins gathering the windfall from the ground, stuffing even the half-rotted apples into a plastic bag.

When the bag is full she looks up suddenly to SEE Dickens crouched by the foot of the tree, watching her patiently, like the annoying ironical stare of her conscience.

INT. LAURA'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Laura cuts up the apples, slicing away the rotten parts, and throws the unspoiled fruit into a pot of boiling water.

LATER...she pours fresh applesauce into a bowl and gulps it down hot, starved.

INT. LAURA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Early morning. Laura wakes up, listens to the sounds of a morning RADIO SHOW drifting over from Ben's house. It's a beautiful day but Laura winces and we can read the gnawing pangs of hunger on her face.

INT. LAURA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Laura looks in her cabinet, registers the small residue of rice and beans in their bags. Maybe one more meal. She goes to the refrigerator and takes out a small saucer of applesauce -- the few bites that are left. She eats them in one swoop. The cold deliciousness makes her tremble with pleasure, then despair as she licks the saucer clean.

She pours out the few remaining grains of instant coffee into a cup, heats water for it -- at most a quarter of a cup's worth.

Dickens pushes open her screen door, walks in and deposits Ben's car keys at her feet, sits back on his haunches and studies her.

LAURA

Jesus. A trained cat.

She looks through the screen. No Ben in pursuit. Back to the cat.

LAURA

What does he pay you to do that?

Dickens isn't talking.

LAURA

You take those straight back,
young man.

Dickens isn't moving. Isn't going to.

LAURA

How is he going to get to work?

Dickens knows that one. And she does too. She sighs. Crouches
to pick up the keys.

LAURA

This is dishonest. And coercive.
And I won't have it.

Right. Having said her piece, she goes through the door.
Dickens ambling after. Finds the covered way through the lilac
bushes to Ben's back porch. As she approaches, we HEAR Whitney
Houston once more. Same song. Sledgehammer intro...

WHITNEY (V.O.)

There's a boy I know...
He's the one I'm dreamin' of..

The music slows Laura down, for some reason. She steps hesitantly
onto the porch. Through the screen Ben is at his stove, frying
bacon and eggs. Wiggling his butt to a portable tape player on
the counter...

WHITNEY (V.O.)

Well, I lose control...
Can't seem to get enough...

LAURA

Hello...?

Somehow, he hears her. Whips around. Startled.

BEN

Oh. It's you.

He stares at her blankly, embarrassed. As if caught in the act
of something worse than dancing.

WHITNEY (V.O.)

How will I know...
if he really loves me...
I say a prayer with every...

Silence. His finger has shut off the tape. Staring at each
other. Through the screen.

BEN

What, uh...brings you by? The power
of rock n' roll?

She holds up the car keys. Now he is really humiliated. Leaves
the food frying and goes to open the screen. Dickens sits by
her feet

BEN
I can't believe he did this. You
probably think I paid him.

Makes her smile. He doesn't know why, of course, but it's
welcome. He draws a breath, as...

...the fry pan FLAMES UP a good foot, the grease catching fire,
sending a BILLOW of black smoke across the room. Ben DASHES back
to turn off the flame, as Laura tentatively follows him in.

BEN
SHIT! I mean, RATS!

He's running water over his blackened breakfast...

BEN
See, these are Cajun eggs. I did
this on purpose...

...dumps the burnt food into the garbage. Laura watches with
suppressed horror. Burnt or not, it's food. He turns back.
Catches her staring at the trash...

BEN
Fix you some eggs?

She looks up to him. As if amazed he said that, considering. He
gestures proudly to the garbage...

BEN
If you play your cards right. All
this can be yours.

She doesn't want to smile. But she does. Just a little. Shy
and so lovely, he stops to watch it. His mistake.

LAURA
I've...eaten. And I'm late. For
where I'm going.

Ah. For where you're going.

BEN
Come for dinner, then. We're
having cat.

She smiles again. But shakes her head. Can't make it.

BEN
Green salad. Frozen lasagna.
Sorta-fresh rolls. Chocolate cake.
And the cat, of course. Won't take
me ten minutes to fix.

The sound of food momentarily immobilizes her.

BEN

If you say no. I'll agonize all day long. If I'd just substituted green beans for, say, the cat...

(beat)

...she would have smiled. Like that. And said yes.

Very quiet in the room now.

BEN

You want me to think about this all day?

She doesn't. She's so very hungry. And, God help her, he's a nice person. Even if he is a man.

LAURA

...if I can do the dishes.

INT. MARTIN'S OFFICE - 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. 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...

MARTIN

Yes, Mrs. Shelly, what can I do for you?

VANESSA (V.O.)

You don't know me, Mr. Burney. But I admired your wife. From the YWCA...

Martin punching up another quote on his monitor. Studying the figures...

MARTIN

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

VANESSA (V.O.)

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 (V.O.)

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 watching the monitor any more. 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 (V.O.)

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

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

VANESSA (V.O.)

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

The catching of his breath is palpable. Audible.

VANESSA (V.O.)

Mr. Burney...

But Martin's eyes, jaw, hands. Are frozen. A look we've never
seen. Even at his worst.

INT. LAURA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Laura buttoning her cuffs. Shirt and slacks. Very plain. No
jewelry at all. Nothing seductive, or even feminine. Looks in
the dresser mirror. Runs her hand through the short blonde hair.
She wears no make-up of any kind.

Automatically picks up a lipstick. Starts to apply to her lower
lip. And stops. Takes the kleenex. Rubs it off.

EXT./INT. BEN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Walking the lilac path. Music coming from Ben's house once more.
This time, a piano concerto. The notes crisp and clear. She
smiles. An improvement.

He's in his kitchen. Breaking up lettuce. He's dressed in the
best he has that could pretend not to care. He hears her coming
and turns with a smile too shy to be threatening. She opens the
screen and enters.

LAURA

Mozart, huh. Twenty-sixth?

He's more than a little surprised she knew that.

BEN

You thought I was devoted to
Whitney Houston.

But her eyes have travelled to the small table. A huge bowl of
potato chips. A bottle of wine.

BEN

Just the one song. I get hooked
like that. On a song. Play it for
a month, and...

...she's reached for a chip. Put it in her mouth. Instinctively,
her eyes flick to him. A little playful, perhaps, to cover her
guilt. But he doesn't understand that.

BEN

...drop it forever.

Something in his tone was soft. The light fades from her eyes.
She keeps chewing, tho.

BEN

Cooler in the den.

He brings the wine. She carries the chips. As she sets them
down, she sees the MASKS hanging on the wall above the table.
She touches one. White papier-mache with a long beaked nose.
She's really grinning now, which puzzles him. As he pours the
wine...

BEN

That's Punchinello. You might be
the first person to actually grin
at him since the 18th Century.

LAURA

Well, I saw his profile against a
window shade one night. He was
dancing. Devoted to Whitney Houston.

He stands next to her. Puts on the mask. Adopts a grotesque
pose from the idiom of commedia dell'arte.

BEN

Who's to know...what Punch is devoted
to? He's a creature of mysterious
feelings.

(beat)

The sort of rogue who...peeks in other
people's windows.

Ben takes the mask off.

BEN

Nice to know. We aren't the only ones.

She's embarrassed.

LAURA

Oh, God, I...

But he's smiling. In a friendly, open way. No sweat, it says. Strangely enough, she relaxes. He hands her some wine.

BEN

Good curtains. Make good neighbors.

The first smile they ever share. The glasses click. She sinks into a soft chair. Still looking at his eyes.

BEN

Small town. College town. People think they have a right to...know you. That's a rule it seems. I don't like rules.

He sits now. A comfortable distance away. Dickens appears. Crawls straight into her lap and settles in. Makes her more comfortable still. As she strokes him...

LAURA

Why?

BEN

Hmmn?

LAURA

Why isn't he Tolstoy? Or Faulkner. Or Voltaire.

BEN

Because I love Charles Dickens. He's the kind of writer we can't have anymore. Don't deserve anymore.

He sounds very serious about that. Under the easy tone, even passionate. Makes her look up. Interested.

BEN

He was excited by virtue. The little kindnesses people do each other were a big deal to him. His worst villains were dreadful because they were unkind to generous people.

She's staring at him again. All boy-girl tension forgotten.

LAURA

He's right. That is a sin. But that whole way of...seeing life. It's gone, I suspect.

BEN

Kindness is sappy now. Evil is exciting.

She's eating chips one after another, robotically. He's barely sipped his wine, but hers is empty. He leans to fill her glass.

LAURA

It's his endings, I object to. They're happy. They imply your life may have a happy ending too. If you live virtuously. And wait in hope.

He seems saddened to hear her say that. No attempt to hide it either.

LAURA

You disapprove. I like that. It's more honest not to smile sometimes.

But that makes him smile. Which makes her smile back.

LAURA

Why would a man...own a cat?

BEN

They're like...pretty women, I think. Delicate. Keeping their secrets. Always looking like they might just decide to go off...and not return.

(beat)

You can't own them. So it keeps you honest.

And straight at her eyes.

BEN

I like it. When it's more honest.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Stack of dishes. She's washing. He's drying. Almost done.

BEN

...I knew her mostly by reputation. She was the faculty's certified genius.

LAURA

What did she teach?

He's putting dishes into the cupboard. She's watching him as she finishes up.

BEN

Hazel Channing taught...Henry James, Henry James, and occasionally in summer term, Henry James.

(closes cupboard)

He was her whole life. And she was, apparently, one of three people living who could make you want to read the guy.

LAURA

James was involved in theater.

He's surprised she knows this. That shows, and amuses her. He's embarrassed.

BEN

I'm going to stop being surprised when you know stuff. It's condescending. And start being surprised when you don't.

It's a nice apology. And silently appreciated.

LAURA

Where do you keep the cleanser?

Something she doesn't know. He does a TAKE of stupefied surprise. She suppresses a giggle.

BEN

I'll clean up later. I thought maybe we'd...go to a flick?

One take over the line. He hears it in...

LAURA

I've...got to get back.

A little abrupt. She didn't mean it that way. But it's said. Hangs there. She goes to the door.

BEN

Maybe sometime I could show you the theater. Down at the college. Grand tour...from the catwalks to the greenroom. Costumes...

She's very awkward now.

BEN

A thoughtful person once said. It's a sin. To be unkind. To generous people.

She nods. She smiles. The loveliest yet. And just above a whisper...

LAURA

OK, the theater. Someday.

BEN

See how simple that was? Henry James would still be in the den with Punchinello and the potato chips.

LAURA

But you'd never forget those potato chips as long as you lived.

Silent now.

BEN

Well. Thanks for coming. Thanks for eating. Thanks for washing up. Thanks for smiling.

(beat)

Thanks for talking, huh?

She just nods. Looks down with.

LAURA

Owe you a meal.

She turns. Through the door. And gone.

INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ben lies with his arm around Dickens. Staring at the ceiling.

LAURA (V.O.)

Dinner with Ben Woodward. I'm so ashamed of my revulsion. And my fear. I think it showed.

Ben is smiling to the ceiling. Dickens watches.

BEN

Mafia wife, on the run.

(beat)

Nah. Unrepentant nun. Starting over.

LAURA (V.O.)

He likes me. He doesn't deserve rejection. I won't do that.

BEN

Coal and steel heiress. Wants to lead a simple life. Away from the cheap values of Manhattan society.

(beat)

Mmmn. I like that one.

LAURA (V.O.)

I'll be his friend. I'll handle it.

He turns to Dickens. Finally got it.

BEN

She fainted in a jewelry store. In Beverly Hills. While they called a doctor, she swallowed an emerald.

LAURA (V.O.)

I miss my mom.

INT. LAURA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Laura in bed. Continuing the above in her diary...

LAURA (V.O.)

Mom. You and I...we lose everything
close to us. We lose everything.

She looks desperately at the ceiling. Eyes brimming. Murmurs to herself.

LAURA

We don't belong in Dickens. At
least. Not yet.

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. Her tube of paste. Into the medicine chest. Cosmetics, perfume. Tylenol, band-aids. All there. Open the drawers. Each item 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. Two feet 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. HAZEL CHANNING'S HALLWAY - DAY

Laura lets herself in and her eye is drawn to an envelope on the table by the phone. In someone's neat hand: MISS PRAY. Slowly she walks over to it. Picks it up gingerly, as if it were radioactive. Opens it now. Her check. She closes her eyes in sweet relief. Puts it in her pocket. Inside a paperback book.

INT. HAZEL CHANNING'S BEDROOM - DAY

Laura feeds Hazel rice pudding -- in silence. As she finishes:

LAURA

I found my check. I want to thank you, it's...very much appreciated.

Hazel makes no response. Laura stands up and smiles at her. The old woman suddenly does a double take. A human expression flashes across her face for the first time. We SEE that she has noticed the title of the paperback in Laura's jacket: The Wings of the Dove by Henry James. Laura notices this but keeps her deadpan expression. Turns and carries the tray out of the room.

INT. SUPERMARKET - NIGHT

Laura stands before a pinched-face MANAGER behind the customer service desk. In another outfit, he could pass for a preacher. She pushes her check tentatively towards the man, who eyes her appraisingly...

LAURA

I'm new in town, and I don't have a bank account yet, and I don't have my driver's...

The manager looks at the check.

MANAGER

You're the girl who works for Hazel Channing.

LAURA

Yes, sir.

He flips the check, scribbling out an authorization. Smiles warmly.

MANAGER

Tell her Tom Kelly down at the Big G says hi.

ANGLE...a very full cart is parked at the butcher counter. Abandoned for the moment, as Laura keeps a rendezvous with beef. Eyes meticulously roving the selection. She reaches to the fattest sirloin on display. A lover's touch.

INT. LAURA'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Cabinets have been thrown open. PAN to see they are filled with bottles and cans and packages. Not one of them faces forward or lines up neatly with another.

PULL BACK to Laura, sitting down to her sizzling slab of meat. Picks up her knife and fork. Cuts...

LAURA
David Copperfield scores.

Starts to GIGGLE. Keeps cutting. Chewing. Laughing.

INT. BEN'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ben, pours himself a whiskey. Laura's slightly maniacal LAUGHTER drifts across the lilacs. Ben looks to Dickens...

BEN
Here it is. She seduced the punk
rocker across the street. Promised
him designer drugs and a good beating.
Then she sliced him up. Deep dish
punk pie.

(beat)
Don't laugh.

And Dickens doesn't.

EXT. LAURA'S FRONT YARD - DAY

On the edge of the overgrown lawn, Laura pulls a battered old manual mower. She starts rolling it across the weeds, but the blades are so dull that she only succeeds in flattening the grass.

Incredibly loud heavy metal MUSIC starts BLASTING from directly across the street. She looks up to see a blaster sitting next to a Harley, being checked over by a sixteen year-old PUNK. Studded leather and denim. A pink mohawk ruff rising out of closed-shaved hair streaked with green. As Laura stares...

...a HAND reaches from behind. To her shoulder. She STARTLES, whirling her head to see Ben's easy smile. He has to shout against the music...

BEN
I SAID. DEVOTED TO WHITESNAKE!

...but the blaster shuts OFF abruptly, leaving Ben shrieking the last. Makes them both giggle. Across the street, the punk is staring at them from the seat of the Harley. They stare back. A strange tableau. To her, quietly...

BEN
Who lives in the zoo? And
who's visiting?

The punk PEELS OUT suddenly. Down the road and gone. She turns to Ben. His eyes are waiting.

BEN
I've got a real mower. I could loan...

He stops.

BEN
I'd offer to do the mowing too, but you'd...prob'ly resent that.

LAURA
Oh, I don't know.

Her smile is fresh and warm.

LAURA
You could try begging.

She likes him. He wasn't sure til now. Hedy stuff.

BEN
I'll get started. And you can cook that meal you owe me.

Oh. That.

LAURA
My stove is down. Gas leak somewhere.

His grin.

BEN
More original than a headache.

EXT. LILAC PATH - DAY

Laura carrying an armload of food to Ben's back door. As she approaches...

WHITNEY (V.O.)
There's a boy I know,
He's the one I'm dreamin' of...

Ben in his kitchen. Dancing with unselfconscious abandon.

WHITNEY (V.O.)
Looks into my eyes,
Takes me to the clouds above...

He sees her now, and CUTS OFF the music. He has every burner of the stove turned on full flame. Every frypan he owns is set out waiting for her. Condiments, utensils. She can't believe it.

BEN
I figured if you made extra...I could freeze it.

She glares at him. And he knows she's playing. Sheepishly...

BEN

Gotta think twice. Before you owe
me something.

She sets her armload down. Starts putting pans on every burner,
like she's dealing cards.

LAURA

Where's the music?

She's peeling off a pound of bacon. Throwing it in a pan.

LAURA

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

She doesn't look at him. He's clearly intrigued by this first
small revelation. She's tying on an outsized apron. He hits
the tape button...

WHITNEY (V.O.)

Well, I lose control,
Can't seem to get enough...

She's sprinkling a pound of sausages in a second pan...

WHITNEY (V.O.)

When I wake from dreaming,
Tell me is it really love.

Picking up the eggs now. Unconsciously moving her body to the
music. Just a little.

WHITNEY (V.O.)

How will I know,
if he really loves me?

...she's breaking eggs expertly into a third pan.

WHITNEY (V.O.)

I say a prayer with
every heart-beat...

It's not even dancing. And it's certainly not meant for him.
But he's intoxicated...

WHITNEY (V.O.)

I fall in love
whenever we meet...

...comes close to Laura. Her hair, her body. She looks up to
see him right there. He tries to cover by reaching for the bacon
pan. But their eyes hold.

LAURA

It's OK. I've got it.

She steps slightly, but clearly, away. And reaches for the bacon pan as if she hasn't wounded him.

WHITNEY (V.O.)

How will I know,
if he's thinking of me...?

But he reaches out. Softly touches her hair. She turns and meets his eyes dead on. Not afraid to set things straight, if this is the moment.

WHITNEY (V.O.)

I'd try to phone,
but I'm too shy to ask him...

He takes a breath.

BEN

You looked...so pretty. Standing there.

And gently...

LAURA

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

The verdict. He takes a step back. Tries to keep some kind of smile there...

WHITNEY (V.O.)

Falling in love,
is so bittersweet...

Her look says, this had to come. Can you get past it?

LAURA

Like chili peppers? In your eggs.

And he nods. He does. He'll get past it somehow. She turns back to cook his breakfast...

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

He's washing this time. She's drying and stacking. As she reaches to a cupboard shelf...

LAURA

For a guy who can't fry eggs. That's some book.

Wonders of Indian Cookery. She takes it down, thumbs through. Clearly interested.

BEN

You can have it, if you like.
It's not mine.

Something tells her to close the book. Put it back. He's watching her. He tries a grin...

BEN

Well, yes, someone did leave it here.
Not that it's any of your affair.

She goes on drying. She doesn't smile.

BEN

Look, can't we just leave it at that?

She turns...

LAURA

Ben...

BEN

Her name was Deborah.

She doesn't know what to say.

BEN

She lived here for five days. That's
the record. If we don't count the cat.

And she waits for more. He wants to say it. So she'll listen.

BEN

I always...do it wrong. I pick wrong.
I...understand wrong.

(beat)

I want. The wrong things.

There's so much pain there. Her heart goes out to him.

LAURA

The wrong things...

BEN

I came downstairs once, after a shower.
To go to work. She was...there. Folding
laundry. And she said...when do you
want supper?

(beat)

As if she'd always be there. As if
she belonged.

LAURA

Belonged to you.

BEN

Belonged here. See, even you...it
must be the wrong thing, but...I still
don't know why.

For once, he doesn't know what to say anymore. Forces his eyes
from her. To his watch. Shit.

BEN

...late for class.

LAURA
I'll finish up. You go.

He nods. Still doesn't know what to tell her. Steps to the door. Turns back. But she's there. Right there. Reaching up to straighten his collar. The smile asks to be his friend. Just now, he can't smile back.

BEN
Thanks for breakfast.

Through the door and gone. She watches after him as he heads for his open garage. The little Toyota.

INT. BEN'S HALLWAY - LATER

Laura walking slowly up Ben's stairs. As if she's not sure why. Into...

...his room. A man's room. Dickens sits on the pillow of the rumpled bed. She smiles at the cat. Takes the sheets in hand, automatically, to make the bed for him. Has to realize. Stop. Returns the covers to their original state, as precisely as she can. As if he'd notice.

She turns now. Sees Ben's open closet. She goes to it. Stares at his things for a beat. And then...

...buries her face in his clothes. Inhaling his scent. Excited and ashamed at once.

Over this now, we hear the scratching of her pen, the words she will soon write...

LAURA (V.O.)
Keep away from Ben for awhile. He
is the enemy. Not because he's bad.
But because he's so good.

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

Two years ago. Her mother died in this place. In your care.

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

RISSNER

Two years 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 she was taking her?

RISSNER

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

EXT. PIZZA HUT - EVENING

Families file in and out of the pizza joint in the BACKGROUND. Laura stands at a phone booth on the edge of the parking lot.

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
I love you, mom. I'm OK.

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

Laura hangs up carefully, dries her eyes and starts walking away
from the Pizza Hut parking lot.

LAURA (V.O.)
I couldn't make a mistake. I
couldn't lose everything.

EXT. LAURA'S HOUSE - EVENING

Laura comes up to her own house, her own front yard, her own
walkway, all looking unreal in the twilight.

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.

INT. LAURA'S HALLWAY

Laura stands in the still, dark house.

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...

A soft KNOCKING on the door behind her. Insidiously soft. Diabolically soft. She FREEZES. The KNOCK repeats. Insistent. She...

...whirls. Straight to the door. THROWS it open...

BEN

Hey. Know what day it is?

She has to catch her breath. Shakes her head silently.

BEN

It's someday.

INT. COLLEGE THEATER - 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

This is where the snow falls from in 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 toward the stage. 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.

LAURA
Who put that there? As if I
didn't know.

BEN
(casually)
A murderous, deformed dork.

LAURA
...who likes to scare girls.

BEN
...who likes to please friends.

Touche. But he can't see that. He's unlocking the door to...

...an enormous CONTROL BOOTH. Computers, levers, switches.
Spread before plate glass like a starship cockpit. As she
watches in fascination, he raises and lowers the lights, pivots
the Super Trouper on its pedestal, sweeps the stage below with
colored beams. His finger points now. To the center of the stage.

BEN
Go stand there.

LAURA
Me?

BEN
Meryl Streep is unavailable.

ANGLE...Laura walking slowly to center stage. Sudden blackness
falls around her.

LAURA
Hey!

...then brilliantly colored lights RISE to TRANSFORM her into a
creature of fantasy. She turns slowly, arms upraised, as...

...autumn leaves begin to fall gently around her.

LAURA
Oh, no! Not Fall, not yet. Please!
You're stealing our summer...

The leaves change now to paper snow...

LAURA
Great. Thanks for listening.

The snow changes to confetti. Ben's voice ECHOES from the booth...

BEN (V.O.)
New Years Eve. That's the good part...
(beat)
We get to start over.

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.

Laura runs from one gorgeous 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 do that. I'd feel so foolish...

BEN (V.O.)
Maybe you're right. Takes someone... breathtaking. To wear this.

She turns to see him holding...

BEN
Desdemona's first change. From Othello.

Her eyes. Devouring the gown.

BEN
There's a great sound system. If you need changing music.

He hands her the dress. Goes to the tape deck, sorting through cassettes to find...

BEN
Ah. Just the thing.

Right. She smiles good-naturedly...

LAURA
Don't tell me. Our skeleton is devoted to Whitney.

But he turns to her. And he isn't smiling.

BEN
No. He doesn't play that anymore.

Their eyes hold. He punches up the melody. Strauss. Elegant waltz.

ANGLE...Ben waiting. Hearing RUSTLING. 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, overwhelmed, and then...

...she disappears once more among the racks. He waits again, seeing a GLIMPSE of her bare flesh between the rows of clothes. Looks away, embarrassed.

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. There's nothing coy in her smile. She's his pal, after all. 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. Unconsciously, he takes a small step back.

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 Cajun eggs.

She's not flirting. But 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, mesmerized, 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...

LAURA

HAR! Me proud beauty...

BEN

That's a pirate pick-up line.
You're a country squire.

She thinks that over. Makes a face at the man in the mirror.

LAURA

And what do squires say? In singles pubs.

BEN

Wench here much?

He's made her smile. She stands. Trying to pose like a guy.
Mutters to herself...

LAURA
...wench is not a verb.

BEN
...unless you do it right.

She's calumphing around in a vain attempt to be manly.

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
...men 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 in 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?

BEN

You looking to change identities?

She turns to him on that. Real slow.

BEN

It's a joke. Not a question.

She knows that. Sends him a look that is very straight...

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
Can't deny you're...kind of dashing
as a squire. But I think...
(beat)
...I prefer Desdemona.

Without turning...

LAURA
As I recall, so did Othello. Didn't
keep him from killing her.

BEN
'I kissed thee...ere I killed thee...'

And she turns. He's right there.

BEN
'...no way but this...'

He's very close to her now. Past the line, and he knows it.

LAURA
Ben, I...we have to talk.

He moves closer still.

LAURA
I don't want to see you. For awhile.

He touches her hair. So lovingly. Almost reverently. She twists slightly away. But it's clear she feels the heat.

LAURA
It isn't...about you.

Her eyes move over his face. So near to hers. She seems close to tears.

LAURA

I don't want to feel. What I'm
feeling. Because...

...but he's kissed her. Beautifully, gently. With more
tenderness than she knew was in him. Her hands go to his
shoulders, but they don't push away. The kiss lingers, deepens.
They sink to the sofa, and...

...his hands move beneath her shirt, pushing upward to her
breasts. She STIFFENS, as if betrayed. Tries to pull away. But
his body covers hers now. As her mouth comes free...

LAURA

Ben, no! Please...

But his mouth is on hers again. Smothering. Strong hands moving
across her body as she writhes, and...

...JERKS her knees up between them, SHOVING against him with all
her strength. She WHIRLS away, burying her face in the sofa's
deep pillow...

LAURA

NO-O-O-O!

For an instant, his frustration becomes nearly rage. His arm
flying back as if to strike her, the wall, anything, but...

...her SOBBING begins. Soft and low and from deep within her.
And he melts. In pity. And in shame for having caused this.
His hand reaches to her shoulder, but she TWITCHES free in
revulsion. It is a knife straight through him.

LAURA

Oh, God, I'm so...sorry, so...

He leans to her ear. Murmurs...

BEN

You didn't do. Anything wrong.
Don't you dare think you did.

She SHAKES her head violently. Moaning deep and raw. From her
soul. He pulls away...

BEN

You were clear. You were fair.
I just...didn't want to hear.

No response. Only her small body convulsing in misery. He
stands slowly. Doesn't know what to do...

BEN

Look, I don't want to stay...but I
can't...leave you like this...

(softly)

So...should I...

LAURA
God, go AWAAAAAY!

An animal sound. Backs him through the doorway. Hear his steps cross the kitchen. The screen door SLAM in helpless fury.

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

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 the woman?

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
No, that's my client. Late...client.
The woman I'm seeking...if she's still
alive...would be her twin sister.

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

MARTIN
Separated at birth. Each adopted
separately. No records available.
And believe me, we've tried.

(beat)
Under the terms of my client's will
...we're going to have a devil of a
time settling the estate, unless we
find the sister.

LOCKE
What makes you so sure she even...

MARTIN
One witness. Who died last year.
Claimed to have seen the sister in
a nursing home. Blind, partially
paralyzed. And 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 five thousand
bonus to the man who does. In cash.

(beat)

...and another five to you.

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

LOCKE

Very. Seriously. Indeed.

INT. HAZEL CHANNING'S BEDROOM - DAY

Laura moves the tray away from Hazel, whose face is blank. Laura
takes out her copy of The Wings of the Dove.

LAURA

You know, when I get some time to
myself downstairs, waiting for the
food to cook or something, I read
this. I don't understand all of it --

Hazel's eyes flash for the tiniest moment.

LAURA

-- but I think it's amazing. I was wondering if you'd like me to read out loud from it. Just to pass the time maybe.

Hazel looks at her for a long time. Then, miraculously, she nods. Yes. Laura isn't quite prepared for this. She gets nervous, takes a deep breath, sits down and opens to her place. Stares at the page...reads...

LAURA

"Certainly it came from the sweet taste of solitude, caught again and cherished for the hour; always a need of her nature, moreover, when things spoke to her with penetration. It was mostly in stillness that they spoke to her best; amid voices she lost the sense..."

Close on Hazel now. The shadows of thought flicker.

LAURA (V.O.)

And just for a little while the sign was down. Not for me, but for Henry James. A voice she knew and loved so deeply...

INT. LAURA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Laura sitting on her bed, finishes writing the above. Her thoughts change now. Her eyes move to the window. Ben's lights across the way. She writes...

LAURA (V.O.)

It's been a week of silence. Please, God. Don't let Ben Woodward forgive me. It would start again...

...and from downstairs, the DOORBELL. It rings once. And no more.

Everything has stopped. Her writing. Her eyes. Her breath. More sadness now than fear. Will it always be like this when a doorbell rings? She climbs off her bed.

Down the silent staircase. Through the silent hall. To the door. The bell that hasn't rung again. She listens. No sound comes...

LAURA

Yes, who's there...?

No answer. Squint through the peephole. A narrow field of vision shows an empty slice of porch and lawn and street. She steels herself...opens the door slowly, to reveal...

...nothing. Sounds of night. A dog saunters the white line in the center of the street. Across the way, the Punk neighbor's

Harley purrs softly in a driveway. Unattended. The boom box is running at its side. Devoted to Van Halen. But not too loud.

She looks up and down the street. No one. And...

...the DOORBELL once more. She WHEELS around. Staring down her own hallway. Murmurs...

LAURA

...back door.

Holds a beat. Then strides through the house before she can lose courage. The hall, living room, and...

...stop. Just at the kitchen. SCRATCHING sound against the door. Furious. But small, somehow. She realizes. Runs, throws the door open...

LAURA

Christ! You ring doorbells, too?

Dickens doesn't answer. He just stares up, satisfied to see her. Near him on the stoop is a small bunch of roses. Tied together with a note. She sinks to sit on her heels. As she unties the flowers...

LAURA

You pick these? They're from his garden, you know. The best ones.

Unfolds the note to read...

LAURA

Angel woman. I dream of your milky thighs. Your perfect breasts. Will you ever be my lover? My lips are on you when you go by.

She stares. Dumbfounded. And slowly, in spite of herself, the twist of a smile...

LAURA

What say, Dickens? Am I being made sport of, here? Being told I...take myself a little seriously...?

Dickens ain't talkin'. Stares pretty good, tho.

LAURA

Are you as interesting as he is?

Dickens lies down.

LAURA

No. Just more mysterious.

HEAR the Harley's engine REV now. She glances down the path between the houses. Across the street, the Punk is squatting by his bike, tuning the engine. She stares at him absently. Then, an idea forms. She stands slowly.

INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ben at his desk in the silence. Work spread out before him. But his mind is elsewhere. A long moment before...

...a door SLAMS. Downstairs. He straightens. Listens.

LAURA (V.O.)
Any-body HOME??

Up like a shot. Through the door. Scramble down the staircase. Whip through the hall and...

...stop dead in the kitchen doorway. She's holding the cat in one arm. Flowers in the other. Her smile is shy. But there is a sweetness to it that thrills him. And very softly...

LAURA
So. Haven't seen you around.
The first clean breath he's drawn in a week.

BEN
Coincidence.
Quiet. But for a change, as he watches her face, the silence gets more comfortable.

LAURA
How come you knew...just the right way to...
His slightly quizzical look. She sniffs a flower.

LAURA
...thanks for the roses.

BEN
Uh, yeh. Help yourself, anytime.
She sets Dickens free. Sits down at the kitchen table. Staring at him.

LAURA
It's bad enough being crazy...
(grins)
...it's really stupid to be dumb.

He digests the wisdom of this.

BEN
I'll try to remember that.

LAURA
I'm talking about me, dufus.

Straight look.

LAURA
Ben. I need a friend.

The look holds. He turns away now. Goes to the fridge. Takes out a bowl of peaches. Brings them to the table. Sits next to her. Staring at her eyes...

BEN

I swear...on this piece of fruit...

Hands her a peach.

BEN

If I ever...jump your bones again...

...she can't keep her face straight.

BEN

...I'll let you see my high school yearbook.

(beat)

Believe me, you're safe.

She leans. Kisses his cheek. Grinning at him now, she takes a humungus BITE from the peach. The juice runs down her chin.

BEN

Now what do you want to use me for?

LAURA

Why Ben, how unlike you.

He's not ashamed.

LAURA

Women are devious, huh?

BEN

Women play men. Like a concert violin. I envy women.

She looks down. Smile fades, just a little.

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. Staring so intently.

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 you loving him...more than he loves you.

BEN

We're all alike.

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?

Guess not. He has to grin.

LAURA

Now. Ready for how I want to use you?

He is.

LAURA

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

BEN
I'll expect gratitude.

She smiles. Really likes him.

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
...sort of.

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 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-face 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...

EXT. CORRIDOR - DAY

JULIE, a junior nurse, struggles with a tray of half-filled water pitchers. She is dark and pretty and very young. Just as her off-balance load seems to be getting the best of her...

...a HAND reaches to steady the tray. A man gently takes the burden from her, and she looks up gratefully to see...

MARTIN

Goodness, they don't drink very much, do they?

He is very handsome. Julie smiles her best.

JULIE

...but we have to give them fresh. All the time.

He nods sympathetically. Just holding her tray.

MARTIN

Listen, I was in to see Mrs. Williams in 14. She was sound asleep, poor thing. I was wondering if you knew...
(beat)

...has she had any visitors. Recently.

His warm smile still has most of her attention.

JULIE

You know, I'm not really sure. You should ask Edna. She keeps the log...

ANGLE...Nurse's station near the entrance. EDNA, the Head Nurse, is a stout lady in her early forties. Her eyes are small and intelligent, as she turns a false smile up to...

MARTIN

Excuse me. I was hoping you could tell me if one of your residents has had any visitors lately...

She studies him for half a beat...

EDNA

This would be concerning...

MARTIN

...Chloe Williams.

Two professional smiles face each other.

EDNA

And you are...family?

MARTIN

No, ma'am. My name is Brian Randall, and I'm...a friend of a friend.

Ah. Another half a beat. Edna is a slightly tougher case than Julie. Turns a visitors book around to face him...

EDNA

If you'd care to sign in. Chloe is in number 14.

MARTIN

Gee, that won't be necessary. I don't actually know Mrs. Williams herself.

Edna's small eyes narrow slightly. As if in benign confusion.

MARTIN

My kid brother was in her history class, back when she was teaching.

(beat)

He asked me to look up this classmate he used to know. Says she visits Mrs. Williams all the time.

EDNA

Classmate.

MARTIN

She's in...well, I guess her late twenties now. Blonde, or used to be...

(grins at that)

Slender. Attractive.

Whether Edna's buying, we can't say.

EDNA

Well, you might have the wrong Mrs. Williams, sir. Chloe hasn't had any visitors...in the two years she's been with us...

(beat)

...nary a one.

INT. BATHROOM - DAWN

E.C.U. on Laura's face. Her eyes are looking up into the light. Blinking just a little. She wears no make-up, but 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 sand-colored 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, not unlike the Punk across the street. Carefully now, Ben fits the wig in place. Pink, green and just a spike of orange. 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.

BEN
More sullen. Wasted.
Even better. The lids drop a bit. The mouth curls. A teenage
boy from any mother's nightmare.

BEN
Course you'll blow it with the wheels.
He pulls out the Toyota keys.

LAURA
...so rent me a Porsche.
She nabs the keys. Sends him a smile.

LAURA
I can't tell you where. I can't
tell you who.

BEN
I didn't hear anyone ask.
She touches his arm. She's so glad he's in the world.

LAURA
It's three hours each way. So I
can't be back til tonight.

BEN
Maybe a late flick...

LAURA
My treat.

She 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 - EARLY MORNING

Punk Laura tooling along the Iowa highway. Early morning light
across the fields. She's lost in thought as she drives, seeing
none of this. Reaches without looking to the tape deck...

...fumbles to click it on. Shoves in whatever cassette is
jutting from the slot. There's a beat before a SLEDGEHAMMER
INTRO brings on...

WHITNEY (V.O.)
There's a boy I know,
He's the one I'm dreaming of...

Her lips form a tiny smile. There is no one to see.

WHITNEY (V.O.)
Looks into my eyes,
Takes me to the clouds above...

She can only murmur...

LAURA
...thanks.

...and TURN UP the volume, as we CUT TO...

EXT. HIGHWAY

..Whitney BLASTING down the open road at seventy-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. An older NURSE. Impossibly thin, with a pinched face and pulled-back hair. 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 bristly hair. Recoil slightly.

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?

(beat)

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, wonderous 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.

EXT. CORRIDOR

Outside Chloe's room, BOBBY, a black orderly, is wheeling his rack of lunch trays. 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.
Young, pretty...

BOBBY
Ain't we all.

Martin's smile of camaraderie comes a beat slow and a shade hard.

MARTIN
She has long black hair. Wears it
tied in back.

BOBBY
Julie. I think she's giving some old
fella a sponge bath down in 23 or 25...

He points down the corridor. Martin heads straight off, jostling the cart as he goes. Beverages slosh neatly over the rims of glasses. Bobby glowers at the mess. Looks back at Martin, who is heading toward the end of the hall.

Martin stops. Sees what he's looking for. Waits patiently at a doorway. Bobby turns back. Begins to blot up the spilled mess. As he works...

...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 weirdo. 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. ENTRANCE - DAY

Nurse's station. Edna speaking earnestly into the phone. A figure approaches from down the corridor. SNAP focus to see it is Laura. She 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 punk. 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 at 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 punk 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. Chloe Williams not having one visitor for two years. And now today...

Every nerve in his body springs to full alert.

MARTIN

...a lady?

EDNA

Well, I don't rightly know what it was. But it had pink hair, and it 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. STREET, CEDAR FALLS - NIGHT

Toyota pulling down the street. Turns into Ben's open garage. Punk Laura climbs out. As she reaches the lawn, she looks across the street to...

...our Punk in his accustomed spot. Tuning his Harley. He's staring at Laura. A fellow alien of his species. Laura stands her ground, staring back. Then...

...pulls off her wig. Shakes the blonde hair free. The Punk actually grins. Calls out...

PUNK

Hey, fox!!

She grins back.

LAURA

Hey, dude.

And dashes off like a jubilant kid. Down the path. Ben comes running from the kitchen door to meet her, and she has to just hop over Dickens to fall into Ben's arms.

She hugs him tight. When she pulls back, her face is shining, joyous.

BEN

So it went OK.

Yeh. Gulping for air. It went all-world.

BEN

Whoever you saw. You must really...
like. A lot.

And for the first time she realizes what he thinks this is. His face is trying so hard to be happy for her.

LAURA

It isn't like that. It's not a
boyfriend.

BEN

(softly)
...course it isn't.

For half a beat, she almost tells him. But, no. She just squeezes his hand...

LAURA

C'mon. Movies or beer?

BEN

Slow dancing.

He's kidding. He's all right. 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 cloth 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. She's trembling slightly.

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.
And 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.

MAN (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)

...tiny little ass. And she rolls it...so...slow...

Garber swallows hard.

GARBER

Mister...you have the wrong...

The head SLAMS VICIOUSLY 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. Closes gently.
Footsteps walk away.

INT. HAZEL CHANNING'S BEDROOM - DAY

Laura is reading from The Wings of the Dove:

LAURA
"She had already turned to the fire,
nearer to which she had moved, and,
with a quick gesture, had jerked the
thing into the flame..."

She looks up at Hazel.

LAURA
I knew she'd burn that letter.
Without ever letting us know what
was in it. That's just like Henry
James. He always leaves out the most
important things.

Hazel's eyes flash fire. Without thinking...

HAZEL
You know what was in that letter!

Laura was hoping for this, of course, but the shock of it still
takes her breath away. She looks almost frightened.

HAZEL
James couldn't put it into words. If
he had, he would have violated Milly.
(beat)
You know what it said! You don't want
to read it, either!

Laura stares at Hazel for a long time. At last, a small slow
grin...

LAURA
I love it. When you talk to me.
Caught. Hazel swallows. Stares at this clever girl.

LAURA
I thought your voice...would be like
my mother's. But it isn't.
(beat)
I like it, though.

Hazel's eyes are impenetrable. Is there rage? Humiliation?
Laura's fingers touch the page...

LAURA

These are very great words. They
need a knowing voice...

(beat)

Will you read to me, now? Sometimes.

Hazel's face doesn't move. But there is the slightest moisture
at the eyes. And with measured dignity...

HAZEL

If you'll be kind enough. To let me.

EXT. FRONT YARD - NIGHT

Laura crossing her lawn to the path beside her house. She's
still holding her copy of Henry James. Still thinking about
Hazel.

She comes to her back door. Pulling out her key. As she opens
the door...

...under the porchlight. Roses from Ben's garden. Tied with a
note. She kneels. Carefully pulls the note free. Reads...

LAURA

Angel woman. I know who you are.
I will never let you go.

A faint smile. But a sadness with it. She turns and looks
across the lilac path. At Ben's house. Stares for a long
moment.

Turns back. Into her home. The door closes softly.

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 classrom. A straw-haired
boy standing. Ben hiked up on his desk.

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
And he took them down in the cellar.
And burned them up in the furnace.

In his face now...

BEN
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...

BEN
...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...

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. Laura follows others off a bus. In the sunlight, her new dress is striking. Her yellow hair shines above bare shoulders. There is a soft red mouth. Shadow and liner have made her eyes larger, brighter. It is the first time in a long while that Laura has tried to be pretty. She seems excited. A little nervous.

At the ticket booth, she is clearly looking around. Faceless crowds. Kiddie rides. Food stalls. As she pays for her ticket, male eyes watch. If she knows, she doesn't care.

ANGLE...Laura walking dusty aisles between booths and exhibits. French Fried Eggplant. Hand-blown Glass. Cow Precognostic: Tells If Your Animal Is In The Family Way.

...picking her way through the hot, happy crowd. She's still searching. Help Prevent Child Abuse. Caramel Apples and Elephant Ears. Rows of stacked cages with pigeons fluttering. She's looking, looking, and...

...stops dead. Her eyes travel straight down. A four-year-old girl is squinting up at her. Shining hair of white gold. Best party dress. And a corn dog covered with mustard. Held against Laura's thigh.

GIRL

Hello.

Laura reaches down. Gently removes the greasy corn dog from her sundress. A horrific MUSTARD STAIN remains as a gift.

GIRL

...do you know Katie? She's my cousin.

Laura sinks to sit on her heels. Same height now...

LAURA

Is Katie here with you?

GIRL
Katie is twelve.

And gestures suddenly with the corn dog, requiring Laura to CATCH the child's hand. An inch from Laura's chest. Delicately, Laura removes the dog from the girl's fingers.

LAURA
Can I hold this? While we find Katie.

A beat before...

GIRL
NO! That's MINE!!!

Heads turn. More than a few. And...

KATIE (V.O.)
Is that hers...?

Katie is twelve. Braces, trashy make-up. Attitude.

KATIE
I mean, is that hers or what?

LAURA
(to girl)
This is Katie?

Positive identification. Laura hands Katie the weapon. Katie takes the dog in one hand, the little girl in the other, and departs with a nasty look. Some people. The little girl turns back over her shoulder...

GIRL
...thank you.

And as Laura watches them go...

...a man's HAND grasps her shoulder. She WHEELS suddenly...

BEN
You want a corn dog, I'll buy you
your own.

LAURA
So where the...

She stops. Realizes she sounds angry.

BEN
...hell was I. God, you look
different.
(smiles)
...painted lady.

She nearly blushes.

LAURA
...too much, huh?

Not exactly. Now she's really awkward.

LAURA
I wanted to look...

Tosses her head self-consciously...

LAURA
...it's a lovely day, and...I
wanted to look...

She stops at his eyes.

BEN
...lovely for it. Well. The day
is grateful.

The moment holds. She breaks it by showing him her skirt. The mustard stain. She grins ruefully. He grins back. The tension gone for now...

BEN
Do you want to change?

Her smile turns soft.

LAURA
Yeh. But not my dress.

INT. EXHIBITION HALL - DAY

Laura and Ben strolling the exhibits in a large hall. Crowd buzz and polka music fills the air. Laura stops. A sign says: Multiplan Combination Bar-Fireplace. And there it is.

BOY
Keeps you warm, serves you drinks,
and plays music!

The boy is seventeen and full of hopeful energy. A much older man, perhaps his granddad, watches his sales technique warily.

BEN
...all at the same time?

The boy nods. Yep. A live one. He presses a button and a little gas flame LEAPS UP behind the grating. Ben shakes his head, impressed.

BEN
What else can you make it do...?

The old man glowers. Certain that the boy is being had. But the kid is oblivious. Another button brings the emptying sound of an ice tray. And another...

BILL MONROE (V.O.)
Blue moon of Ken-tucky,
Keep on shining...

As the Bluegrass wails, Ben keeps staring. Transfixed. The kid is writing figures down on a slip of paper...

BOY
And we offer our own financing...not
one red cent down...

GRANDAD
Boy...

Laura is touching Ben's arm, afraid he's about to blow this kid away.

BEN
Sold.

Three stunned faces. Grandad and Laura worst of all. Laura YANKS on Ben's sleeve.

LAURA
Harold, that thing is...
(looks at figures)
...nine hundred dollars. Now
Rachel Ann needs piano lessons and
Skippy has the dentist coming up...

Ben looks sadly at the wonderful machine. Knows she's right.

LAURA
You get one smile from a smooth-
talking salesman, and it's always
the same...

Ben looks at the crestfallen kid. Smiles warmly. And the boy smiles back.

BEN
Well, it is a nice smile. Maybe
next time, son.

They shake hands. Laura leads Ben away. And under his breath...

BEN
Skippy...?

EXT. FAIRGROUNDS - DAY

LONG ANGLE...through the milling crowd. Far away, as the crowd parts, we see Laura and Ben near a hot dog stand. We HOLD on them, small figures in the distance, talking MOS. A mother with her stroller cuts off our view and...

...we seem to SHIFT, ever so slightly, to see them again. SNAP now to...

CLOSE ANGLE...Ben bellying up to the hot dog stand. Confiding...

BEN

I want two of your foot-long hot dogs.
Hold the ketchup, mayo, relish, onion,
chili and cheese. Double mustard.

The girl behind the counter stares blankly.

BEN

That's how my woman likes 'em. And
I'm a fool for love.

His woman touches his shoulder...

LAURA

Double mustard?

BEN

Gives us a chance to complete
your ensemble.

Oh. The girl serves them up. He hands one to Laura. Lifts his
just to his lips...

BEN

Ready...go!

She's caught unaware as he begins to gobble, but she soon catches
on and catches up. Speed competition. Mustard dribbling down
hands and chin. Choking. Laughing. Spitting out bits of bun.
The girl behind the counter sort of stupefied. And...

...Laura finishes. First by plenty. Laughing, she wipes the
mustard from his face with her bare fingers. He doggedly keeps
going. And when the last morsel is stuffed in, he mumbles around
it...

BEN

I win!

She can't believe his audacity.

LAURA

How you figure that?

He points down proudly to his jeans. A gigantic mustard BLOB
stares back.

EXT. FERRIS WHEEL - DAY

VIEW at the bottom of a ferris wheel. Gondolas with kids,
couples, slide slowly past our POV through a haze of dust and
carnival music.

The wheel stops. But our view HOLDS steady. A daddy carries his two-year-old into the gondola. The wheel starts once more. Teenage lovers in the next car. Two old women next. And then...

...Laura and Ben. But as they slide by, our view SHIFTS to follow them. Watches them rise slowly toward the sky. Slowly, slowly, and...the wheel STOPS once more. They hang suspended above us. At the very top.

CLOSE ANGLE...Laura and Ben in the gondola. It's small. Their shoulders barely touch. She looks across at the sweep of the fair. But her eyes are clouded, concerned.

BEN

Up too high...?

She turns to him. Quiet, direct. Studying his eyes...

LAURA

Ben. The last note...

His easy smile...

BEN

Note. What note...?

Her eyes move across his face. And then she smiles.

LAURA

You're right. It never happened.

She looks down over the side. A mass of humanity directly below the wheel. Too far down to pick out any faces.

Her head falls back against the seat. She closes her eyes to the sky above. Deep breath, and...

LAURA

Whatever this is. Wherever it goes...

(beat)

...you make me happy. When I'm with you.

Her eyes are still lightly closed. She's never looked quite so lovely.

LAURA

I couldn't...not...let you know that.

Her eyes never open. So she can't see him staring. Too full to speak. And as the gondola gently bumps into motion, they begin to swoop down toward earth. In silence.

ORIGINAL VIEW...at the bottom of the wheel. The daddy slides past our view. The teenagers. The old ladies. And the wheel...

...stops. Laura and Ben climb off. She takes his hand. He helps her down the ramp. She keeps his hand. And our view SHIFTS to watch them go. Suddenly, we SNAP to REVERSE ANGLE to see...

...the blonde LITTLE GIRL. Holding Katie with one hand. Cotton candy in the other. Watching the pretty lady. In the white dress. Walking away.

EXT. PHOTO BOOTH - DAY

The sign says: Old Times Portrait Studio - Your Picture In Five Minutes. Ben and Sara, 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.

A few WHISTLES this time. The kind of LAUGHTER that men call good-natured.

LAURA
I'm OK like this. Just take it.

PHOTOGRAPHER
Don't be shy. It'll make the
picture work.

Ben looks up at her. She smiles down.

LAURA
I'm a little...modest. About
my body.

He wants to be sure she's OK. She doesn't look too rattled.

BEN
...always been?

LAURA
...even when I wasn't...allowed
to be.

A message from the past. He takes that more seriously than even
she does. Turns to the photographer...

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 cheerfully 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...

LAURA
It's for Dickens. A side of me
he's never seen.

PHOTOGRAPHER
This way, kids. 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. She's wearing his jacket. There's a chill tonight. Our POV is stationary, as they walk slowly away from us. Down the path between their houses.

They stop at her back door. Talk for a moment, MOS. Small figures now, in the distance. She slips off Ben's jacket. Hands it to him, and goes alone through her kitchen door. When she's safe inside, he heads down the lilac path toward his own.

INT. LAURA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Darkened room. Light flickers on. Laura stands for a moment in the silence. Hugs herself absently. Still feeling the chill.

Into her bathroom now. Stare at her face in the mirror. Her look is far away. Thinking of Ben. She turns. Runs water in the tub. Reaches behind her back, beginning to unzip her dress, and...

...stop. Very still. Three towels on the rack. Two of them have their edges precisely aligned. But only two. She stares. Water is pouring into the tub. Laura reaches to the towel rack. Absently tugs the center towel out of line.

Still looking at the rack. Leaves the bathroom now. Down the staircase. Through the hall. At the kitchen doorway, she stops dead...

...five handtowels on a long rack. Two have edges perfectly aligned. Two in the center. She stares. And stares. Her arms involuntarily hugging herself. And suddenly, she...

...BOLTS to the overhead cabinets. THROWS open the doors...

...dozens of cans, bottles, packages. All stacked haphazardly. In careless disarray. The air comes slowly out of Laura. Reassured. She stands in her kitchen. Only a clock breaks the absolute silence. Uneasy, she heads out the screen door...

...down the lilac path. To Ben's porch. Through the screen, she sees him at the kitchen counter. Measuring coffee spoons into a Melitta filter.

LAURA

Hi.

He turns. A little surprised to see her. Smiles as she comes through the door. She stands now, uneasy still. He thinks it's him.

BEN

What's up?

LAURA

It's just...real quiet over there.

She does seem spooked. That registers now.

BEN

You never bought that radio, huh?

Guess not.

LAURA

I got some tapes last week, but...
still saving up for a player...

Staring at each other. He knows something's wrong. But not how to ask. He goes to his counter. Gets his portable tape player. Brings it to her.

She takes it. Smiles. A little shaky.

BEN

Wanna...hang out here?

LAURA

Well. Thought I'd...catch up on my journal. Take a long, hot...

She realizes...

LAURA

Oh, SHIT!

...BOLTS off. Through the door...

LAURA

I left the tub running...

Still clutching his tape player, she RACES down the lilac path. Her screen door is slightly ajar. Through it, fast...

...tosses the tape player on the kitchen table. RUNNING through the living room. Up the staircase. But by the time she hits the bedroom she...

...stops short. Because there's no water running in the bathroom. And that is very strange indeed. As she stands in the silence, she HEARS a...

...drip. Drip. From the bathroom.

Takes a beat to make herself move. She enters the bathroom slowly. Sees...

...the tub is off. But nearly half full. A slow, slow, drip from its faucet. She's mesmerized. Could she possibly have...? Suddenly, her head JERKS to the towel rack...

...all uneven. Just the way she left them. Drip. Drip. And...

...YAAAOOOWL! She WHIPS around to the doorway, in terror. Silence. Did it come from downstairs? Listening. Listening.

A scratching sound. Small and distant. Drip.

...the THUMP of something falling over. Laura STARTLES, but...

...a MEE-OWW! follows, and Laura DASHES through the doorway, through the bedroom. Down the stairs...

...Dickens sits by a small overturned planter. Inscrutable and innocent. She smiles to see him. Goes to the cat. Kneels, and scoops him in her arms. The silence is broken now by his motorboat purring...

LAURA

When did you get here? Huh,
big guy?

Sitting on the floor now. Cuddling her friend.

LAURA

Turned off the tub, did you?

Dickens meows politely. She nods.

LAURA

Even if I am crazy, I've still got
great legs. Have to show you this
photo...

EXT. YARD - NIGHT

VIEW through a tangle of bushes that grow up against the back of the house. The night is completely still.

We MOVE now. Through the bushes. Creeping slowly along the house. We look across to Ben's. A single light on the second floor. Shade down. Our view SWINGS now to Laura's back porch. The dim light burns. The screen door is still slightly ajar. But as we reach it...

...on the step. Roses. From Ben's garden. Tied with a note. Our HAND comes into frame. Picks up the bouquet, as we HEAR...a RUSTLING...

...WHEEL toward the sound. Searching wildly. Silence. Then...someone RUNNING through the bushes. We LURCH after the sound, sprinting, GASPING for breath...

...up ahead a figure BREAKS INTO THE CLEAR, as our arm swings into frame, our PISTOL obscuring the figure fleeing across Ben's lawn, and...

...CRASH. A single shot. The figure falls. We RACE to it, GULPING air, stop at the still form of...

...the PUNK. His shoulder and side are bathed in blood. Face down, he looks just like the creature Martin saw at the rest home. And we...

...KICK his side VIOLENTLY. The Punk GASPS, rolls onto his back, blinking up at us. We stumble back. And back. And RUN, as...

REVERSE ANGLE...from ground level. The Punk's view of the fleeing assailant. The houses. HEAR a screen door open and SLAM...

LAURA

BEN!!

Laura bursts through the foliage. Down the path. Racing to us across Ben's lawn, running with everything she's got. Falling to her knees beside us, as Ben comes running behind her...

CLOSE on them now. Laura fighting back tears and horror. The Punk trying to somehow smile up at her...

PUNK

Hiya, fox.

He's not a punk now. Just a boy. He looks so young and white. Her hand tenderly smooths back his hair. She can barely say...

LAURA

It's OK, dude. It's gonna be...

As Ben arrives. She's squeezing the boy's hand.

INT BEN'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ben at the coffee maker. Waiting for the last dribble into a freshly-made pot.

1st OFFICER (V.O.)

You can visit him tomorrow, Miss.
Eight to five.

Ben takes the pot from its resting place...

2nd OFFICER (V.O.)

He'll only be in the hospital two,
three days...

...brings the coffee to the table. Laura sits with the uniformed officers.

2nd OFFICER

...are you...particularly close to
the boy?

LAURA

We're neighbors.

Ben is pouring for everyone. The 2nd officer is watching Laura pretty closely.

1st OFFICER
You have any...enemies, Mr. Woodward?
Anyone who might...be after you with
a gun?

Is he kidding?

BEN
Haven't flunked anyone in awhile.

2nd OFFICER
How 'bout you, Miss?

Laura's just staring straight ahead. There's an enveloping
sadness that almost immobilizes her.

LAURA
I'm new here.

1st OFFICER
Well, it's pretty clear that the
kid surprised a burglar. I can
promise you he won't be back.

The 2nd officer tries to reassure Laura...

2nd OFFICER
I'll have a patrol out all night.
Be swinging down your block nice
and regular. And I'll give you a
number to call if you get worried.

He starts to jot down the number. Laura looks slowly from one to
the other. As if she can't remember what they're doing here.

INT. BEN'S LIVING ROOM - LATER

Laura sits alone beneath Punchinello. There's a brandy snifter
cradled in her lap. She's just staring through the wall.

Ben appears with a fresh bottle and his own glass. Kneels by the
arm of her chair. Lifts her hand and its glass gently to her
lips.

BEN
Please. It'll help.

She takes an obligatory sip. Staring at him now. Across the rim.

BEN
You're sleeping here tonight. You
take my room. I'll crash on the
couch.

But she's just staring so intently. It's almost eerie.

LAURA
What's my story, Ben? Where do
I come from?

He thinks about that.

BEN
The moon. You're my friend from
the moon.

She's still staring. It's very quiet now. He tries...

BEN
You belong to a Mafia capo. He sent
his button man...who thought our punk
was...you. In disguise.

Not bad, she nods.

LAURA
Then I wouldn't be...much of a
friend...to stay here tonight.
Would I.

(beat)
Wouldn't be so safe. For you.

He grins. Just a little. But she's not grinning back.

LAURA
I want to know. What you've been
thinking. All this time.

She seems to need that. His look gets very straight. He keeps
his voice as soft as he can with...

BEN
There's somebody, somewhere. You
love very much. And...for some
insane reason...that I could never
understand...

(beat)
...you can't have him.

And somehow the words bring her to tears. She touches his
hair. A look as loving as it is sad. For a moment, it takes
his breath away. He recovers with a whispered...

BEN
C'mon. You need some sleep.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALL - NIGHT

Ben carrying pillows, blankets, sheets...

BEN
Fine. You won't take my room...
the study's nicer anyway. It's
almost clean.

She follows him into the study. He puts the bedding on the sofa. When he turns to her, there is something in his hand...

BEN

...you ever hold one of these?

...a PISTOL. Dull gray. It looks large and clumsy and somehow from another era.

LAURA

Us Mafia chicks. We all carry heat.

He studies her. She seems OK. Not frightened. Not crying.

BEN

It'll just be in the drawer here. If you hear a noise... shoot anything but me.

Staring at each other. He smiles first. She smiles back.

BEN

Well. G'night.

INT. STUDY - NIGHT

Laura sitting on the arm of Ben's sofa. In the dark. The bedding is piled where Ben left it. But not the pistol. That sits on a table. Just at her side.

She stares. And stares. Then, turns her eyes to the gun. Rises slowly. Takes it with her. Silently down the corridor. The stairs.

Moving through the blackened house. To the kitchen. And soundlessly through the door. Into the night.

She walks the lilac path slowly. Holding the gun in both hands. Eyes sweeping the area before her. At her porch now. She's locked the house, and needs to fumble for her key. But it's there.

Into the darkened kitchen. Locking the door behind her. Crosses through to the living room, where she sat with Dickens. Empty now. One lamp still lit. Spilling dim light into the front hallway.

Up the staircase now. The gun in both hands. Not a sound in the house but her own breathing. The bedroom. Flick on the light. Nothing seems disturbed.

She stares at her closet door. Stares. And goes to it. FLINGS it open. Clothes. Shoes. No monsters are hiding. Drip...

...a single drip. No more. She turns slowly toward the bathroom. Walks to it. With measured steps. Flicks on the light...

...drip. The tub as it was. The towels as well. She goes to the mirror. Runs the tap. Sets the pistol on the counter. Splashes cold water onto her face, and looks up SUDDENLY...

...to the mirror. Only her own reflection. The doorway behind her is empty. She dries her face. Takes the gun slowly from the counter...

...back downstairs now. Gun in one hand, dangling at her side. Through the living room. She stops. Bends to set Dickens' overturned planter upright. It is quiet. She feels that.

She crosses into the front hallway. There's a small buffet against the wall. On it, sits a telephone. On the wall above, a mirror. Laura opens a drawer. Puts the pistol inside. Slides it closed. She stares at her face for a beat. More weary than anything.

Back into the kitchen. Flick on the light, 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. She steps into frame now. Hands reach to the knobs. Steady. And...TEARS 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 kitchen door. Silent. Ominous.

She WHIRLS away. Into the hall. Running for her front door and...

...stops dead. Eyes wide in horror. There is a note. Pinned to the door. Large, perfect letters...

...WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR? IT'S PERFECTLY SAFE.

She just stands there. At her own door. Too terrified to scream. Or move. Helpless. As the door...

...SLAMS OPEN. Martin fills the frame. Even in the darkness. We can see his smile.

MARTIN

...hello, princess.

The voice so soft. Yet the words etch so clearly. Her breath is caught in her throat. She steps back. Stumbles. He shuts the door. Comes slowly toward her...

MARTIN
...what's for supper?

We see the PISTOL now in his hand. He looks down at it curiously. As if he'd never seen it before.

MARTIN
Would you like to hear. Some poetry...?

Silken voice. Dead eyes asking gentle questions.

MARTIN
Well. Would you...?

No answer. Pity. He pulls from his pocket. The rose. The note. Her breath CATCHES, and he twists a smile at that. It fades, as he reads...

MARTIN
Angel woman. Every half hour.
All night long. And you...will
love it.
(whispers)
You...will...beg for it.

He looks up with a smile of simple amusement.

MARTIN
He's dead now. I killed him.

It is a stake straight through her. Her tears are frozen in her eyes. His smile drops slightly. In mock compassion.

MARTIN
Personally. I preferred your
riverboat gambler. From the fair.

Holding up the note...

MARTIN
After all, what sort of...profound
relationship could you expect...
with a fifteen-year-old boy?

On her complete confusion...

MARTIN
The child with the green hair.
I saw him leave this.

She can't believe it. All the notes. She reaches out. Takes the paper in her hands. Silent tears are coming now. She sinks slowly to the floor. Murmurs...

LAURA

How could you...shoot him, he's
only...

And as Martin leans close, Laura...

...LASHES OUT, her fists crashing solidly against the pistol,
which FLIES across the hall. It skids to silent rest against the
far wall.

Still kneeling at Martin's feet. She looks up straight to his
eyes. Fearless now. As he...

...CRASHES his closed hand across her face, sending her spinning
to the floor. He KICKS her thigh. Her back. And again.
Mercilessly.

MARTIN

...get up.

A low growl. He leans and grasps her hair, YANKING her head from
the floor. She somehow staggers halfway to her feet, and he...

...THROWS her against the wall with frightening force. Pins her
throat now. With his open hand. Stares at her battered face...

MARTIN

Well, now. You've stopped crying.

His hand slides up to her hair. Grasps it and FLINGS her across
the hall, CRASHING into the buffet. Her head SNAPS against the
mirror, and she crumples to the floor.

All is quiet now. Martin staring down across the distance.

MARTIN

I'm glad. You've learned. Not
to cry.

...and turns his back. He walks slowly, purposefully, toward the
black pistol. As he bends to retrieve it...

...a SHOT rings out, and the wood SPLINTERS near his hand. He
WHEELS to see...

...Laura with Ben's pistol. From the drawer. Held out in both
her hands. Her eyes are a sight Martin has never seen.

LAURA

Walk this way, Martin. Come to me.

...and he smiles.

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.

Her body throbs. Aches. She struggles to hold the gun steady.

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 dips to the floor. Gun pointed dead at his chest. She hangs up the phone. And on his 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.

INT. LAURA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Through an upstairs window, we see the black and white. The covered body being loaded into the van. The vehicles driving away.

PULL BACK to see Laura at the window. Still in her sundress. Bruised and staring with eyes as blank as Martin's own.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Laura in the kitchen doorway. Looking across the room at a rack of towels. Three of five still perfectly in line. Her eyes drift now...

...to the table. Ben's tape player. She goes to it. Stares down. Her finger reaches slowly. Presses the button...

...HEAR the last notes of the familiar INTRO, and...

WHITNEY (V.O.)

There's a boy I know,
He's the one I'm dreamin' of...
Looks into my...

...silence. Her hand has stabbed out to stop the song. Tears are flowing now. Silent and free. She lets them come.

INT. BEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Ben sleeping. From somewhere, a small sound. A shuffling on the stairs. He stirs slightly. But doesn't waken. The sound grows closer.

Laura's silhouette comes into the room. Stands by his bed. Looking down.

She reaches back. Undoes her dress. Slips out of her clothes in the darkness. Slowly. Silently. As in a ritual of great importance.

...and into Ben's bed. As he blinks awake, she is burrowing into his arms. Hungrily seeking his warmth. His lips part, but she covers them with her own. A kiss deep and loving and starving to be part of him.

They are children and lovers in each other's arms. And when the kiss ends at last, his lips come close against her ear...

BEN

When I tell Laura...what I dreamed
tonight...she'll be blushing.

And Laura laughs. Soft and low. Her hands find his hair, his face. Whispers...

LAURA

...she already is.

She wraps him in her arms, as we...

FADE TO BLACK. ROLL END CREDITS.