

T H E C R U S H

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T H E C R U S H

Over BLACK, an AMBULANCE SIREN....

CUT TO:

THE AMBULANCE

BLASTING over a rugged dirt road, urgently streaking through a sun dappled forest.

INT. CAMP CABIN - DAY

Rest period. We MOVE past bunks of girls, 12-14, reading, napping, quietly playing cards, then land on...

CLOSE -- RICK'S SHRINE

A rag-tag collection of cut & pasted photos of a handsome 28-year-old counselor glued to the wall between the 2X4's, surrounded by amorous notes, doodles, including "D.F. & R.J." framed in a heart, lanyards, and other treasured objects only it's creator would understand. A girl's HAND is in the process of dismantling it all, tearing off a photo, scraping the remainder with a fingernail.

EXT. CAMP GROUNDS - DAY

The back of a GIRL running desperately up a pebbled path to the cabin ahead. Her feet splash through a puddle, not caring.

INT. CABIN -- CONTINUING

Door bursts open. Fast PUSH IN on the GIRL, her face wracked with tears.

GIRL

Rick's dead! He's dead! He ate
something poison and died!

Various girls react, stunned, some starting to cry. CHEY-
ENNE, 12, turns to the bunk's rear, eyes welling.

CHEYENNE

Darian? Darian didn't you hear?

CLOSE ON DARIAN

We get only the briefest of glances as she turns away from us. She is 13, long brown hair, stoic and calm.

DARIAN

I heard.

Cheyenne stares at her, astonished at her lack of emotion.

CUT TO:

BEGIN OPENING CREDIT SEQUENCE:

EXTREME CLOSEUP: A GRASSHOPPER

It stares at us, still, unmoving. As our angle inspects, we pickup the shiny PIN impaled through it's armor, realizing it is a carefully mounted exhibit in an INSECT COLLECTION.

CREDITS continue over other entomological wonders -- JAPANESE BEETLE... MONARCH BUTTERFLY...VESPOID WASP...Each with their Latin genus and English names handwritten underneath in a child's pen....

EXT. FREEWAY - DAY

Morning rush hour. The city skyline looms in the distance.

CLOSE ON A LICENSE PLATE

"You've Got a Friend in Pennsylvania".

INT. '64 PLYMOUTH VALIANT CONVERTIBLE

NICK ANDERSON, late 20's, wears round wire-frame glasses which contribute to his appealing touch of prep. But right now he's downright grungy, sporting a 4-day growth.

The windshield is dirty and bug-spattered after a long trip. The car is whole, no rust, but spots of bondo and raw primer obscure most of the original finish.

Nick sings to the radio as he squints in the glare, checking his map. Behind him, over-stuffed suitcases, boxes.

A "post-it" note on dash has directions. Nick sees his exit and begins the edging towards the exit ramp.

EXT. CITY STREET -- DAY

Blocks of dense apartment buildings.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY -- DAY

Nick is standing next to a SUPER, a bleached blonde woman of indeterminate age. She swings open an apartment door.

INT. APARTMENT -- DAY

It's horrific. Tiny, cramped. Like a nursing home with bars. Nick stares. Horrified.

EXT. UPSCALE DEVELOPMENT - DAY

A brand new high rise. A large billboard advertises "The Riviera Towers", with an impressive list of amenities, security, pool, health spa, etc. Below that, "As little as \$5,000 moves you in!"

Nick's Valiant rolls by the sign, Nick reads with an astonished look on his face.

EXT. MIDDLE INCOME APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Nick opens a sliding glass door, steps out of apartment onto a balcony and squints down to the taco stand below. A MADONNA song intermingles with thumping RAP from a passing low-rider.

INT. NICK'S VALIANT - DAY

A frustrated, tired, Nick drives down a lush, tree-lined street sipping on coffee from a take-out stand. He refers to a circled newspaper ad and tries to pin-point his location on a tattered map.

He squints at the map, takes his hand off the wheel.

A LOW ANGLE

A pair of Rollerblades RUMBLE determinedly across a sidewalk, cutting smoothly down onto the macadam roadbed.

NICK fumbles with his map.

THE ROLLERBLADES stride right into the path of Nick's bumper.

NICK suddenly looks up and SLAMS ON the brakes as we JERK into:

NICK'S POV

The rollerblader is a girl with long hair that for the moment obscures her face.

NICK stares at the besmudged image of the girl, momentarily at a loss.

THE GIRL stares back at Nick, then leans on the fender and pushes off. She cuts gracefully across the street and turns up a driveway, hair flying, wheels skidding into a perfect hockey turn.

Her form is lithe, appealingly trim in black bicycle tights.

END CREDIT SEQUENCE.

NICK watches her skate up to a large well tended clapboard home. Three stores, gables, a beauty.

Nick sighs, when something else catches his eye....

A SIGN

is almost invisible in the brush near the edge of the drive. It reads, "GUEST HOUSE FOR RENT", phone number underneath.

EXT. PHONE BOOTH - DAY

Nick punches a number scribbled on his map.

EXT. THE SIDE OF THE HOUSE -- DAY

Nick follows a refined woman in her 40's. She is LIV FORRESTER. She and Nick step through the car-port, sort of a tunnel through an over-hanging part of the house, where a pair of shiny his and hers Mercedes are parked.

Nick slows to a stop as we MOVE IN on his expression of wonderment.

NICK'S POV

He has emerged into a virtual garden of Eden. An immense, seemingly endless lot, overflowing with flowers and vines, an orchard of fruit trees, birds chirping and flitting to and fro....

And there, nestled in this loveliness, is the GUEST HOUSE. New England clapboard, baby-blue with white trim, couched in splashes of blazing red roses. It's a goddamn MGM musical.

LIV

Nick?

He turns and snaps from his reverie.

NICK

I'll take it.

INT. GUEST HOUSE -- DAY

It's small, but comfortable. There's one main room, a bathroom, a kitchenette.

INT THE KITCHEN

Nick looks out the window over the sink to the guest house's private yard.

From the house, someone can be heard practicing PIANO: a beautiful, lilting sonata.

NICK

I'm afraid to ask about the rent.

LIV

Well... how does five hundred sound?

NICK

A week?

LIV

A month...my husband and I aren't concerned with the money, but we like the idea of having some one around. I'm afraid I'm in court a lot these days and Cliff's travels so much... He's away now. We'd just feel better if someone was around.

NICK

I'm not looking for a job.

LIV

And I'm not offering one. Up til a year ago, our Nanny lived out here. Darian would raise a fury if she thought we'd hired someone else to watch her.

The PIANO suddenly turns darker. They look towards the house.

LIV
That's her... Darian.

NICK
I think we've met.

Liv glances warily at Nick.

NICK
Out in front, on the street. She seemed very...assertive.

LIV (smiling)
Headstrong is what I call it. She's very talented. Very bright. Too bright sometimes.

EXT. FAIRFIELD PUBLICATIONS BUILDING - DAY

A 4-story architectural landmark, i.e. Hearst headquarters, New York.

INT. LOBBY, *TONE* MAGAZINE -- DAY

Nick steps off an elevator into the ultra-sleek waiting room. A gorgeous woman, SAMANTHA, steps through a door behind the receptionist. She is breathless, harried.

SAMANTHA
Nick Anderson? You're late.

NICK
It's not even eight-thirty. I--

SAMANTHA
--Monday meeting starts at eight-fifteen....

INT. *TONE* OFFICES - DAY

Samantha leads Nick down a long hall...

SAMANTHA
Please hurry.

Samantha moves into a clumsy trot, hampered by her tight skirt. They turn into a huge open room filled with seemingly hundreds of cubicles. She stops before an empty one.

SAMANTHA

You can leave your things here.
After the meeting Sandy will set you
up with supplies.

Nick looks at the bare little cubicle disappointedly.

NICK

Well I love this but I thought maybe... something with a view--

SAMANTHA

Please... you're late.

She leads him through the maze of desks and across the huge room. They turn a corner and stop outside a big grey door.

SAMANTHA

In here.

Nick nods. Hesitates for a second.

NICK

Not going in with me?

--Samantha glares. Nick pushes open the door.

NICK

Thanks for your compassion.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM -- DAY

Maybe twenty people at a huge table. WRITERS, EDITORS etc.
A heated ARGUMENT is taking place at one end of the table.

No one pays any attention to Nick who looks for a chair.

Near Nick, a woman, AMY MADDIK, leans back, her feet dangling over the arm of the chair next to her. She wears black workboots, jeans, a sweater. She is pretty, with short dark hair.

Nick looks at her, gestures to the chair her feet are on. She reluctantly picks up her feet, lets Nick sit. Nick smiles at her.

NICK

New here.

AMY

I can tell.

At the other end of the table the debate continues... editors and writers ARGUE with great passion. Text, photographs, ad copy slide back and forth.

A WOMAN is standing near the head of the table, looking down at a paper, shaking her head. A MAN is kneeling on a chair backwards, ARGUING passionately. They block our view of the end of the table, the center of the maelstrom.

Suddenly a VOICE cuts through the sound storm. It is stern, dry, deep, totally in control.

VOICE

That's enough.

The room goes quiet. The standing staff members slide into their chairs. All heads turn to the man at the head of the table, the owner of the voice: He is a fifty-one years old. He wears a white shirt, rolled up sleeves, a tie. He has a lantern jaw and a large bald head. He is MICHAEL LITTLE.

He stares down at the material spread out before him. He lifts some stapled pages, uncaps a pen and strikes out half a page of text. His voice is cold, imperious, utterly sure.

MICHAEL

Sexiest woman alive is our cover. I want pictures, skin, keep the text under a thousand words. The interview with the Milken toupee guy runs third, blurb on the cover. I want before and after photos. If they don't exist, you guys in the art department better get creative. The senate arms thing is dead. No one cares and the weeklies are beating it to death. The Vidal piece we cut in half, throw in a graphic, bury it in back.

He continues to flip through pages slashing here and there at text. He flips through a stack of photos.

MICHAEL

Who's this guy?

A PHOTO EDITOR clears her throat.

EDITOR

Congressman, first district of Chicago. Innovative, being touted as a vice-presidential candidate next election.

He tosses the photo down.

MICHAEL

Not in my magazine. Politicians are the death.

He stacks papers neatly in front of him, lifts his pen, then looks up directly at Nick.

MICHAEL

Monday staff meetings start precisely at eight-fifteen. I expect everyone to be here.

Nick shifts in his chair. Leans forward.

NICK

I'm Nicholas--

MICHAEL

--Do you really think I don't know who you are...Mister Anderson?

NICK

We've never met.

MICHAEL

Your name is Nicholas Richard Anderson. You graduated from a mediocre New England college. Your record there was unexceptional. You've worked at three different newspapers, first as a researcher, later as a feature writer. The last two years were at the Scranton Times, a solid local rag, where despite your questionable educational background, you distinguished yourself as a field reporter. Last May your articles on a sudden breakout of Tuberculosis in rural New York brought you a nomination from the Pulitzer committee. Your former superiors describe you as an excellent researcher with only fair writing skills. One of them described you as a pit-bull when you're on the scent. That is precisely why I hired you.

He stares at Nick. Nick stares back.

MICHAEL

Now Mister Anderson, are you and I on level ground?

Nick nods.

MICHAEL
Excellent. Tell me what you know
about Robert Levansky?

NICK
Just got outta jail. Refuses to
talk to the press.

MICHAEL
He embezzled almost 2 billion dol-
lars, 500 million of which remains
unaccounted for. I want you to dig
up everything you can.

NICK (aghast)
Come on, a thousand reporters have
been on this for months. It's a
black hole....

MICHAEL
I'd like to see something by Friday.

His gaze shifts to Amy.

MICHAEL
Ms. Maddik...track Anderson, he
finds anything, I want pictures.

Amy frowns, nods her head.

Little looks down, brusquely draws a single line across his
notepad.

MICHAEL
Mister Hurley, what's on the wires
this morning....

ANGLE ON NICK

He glances at Amy, speaks softly.

NICK
He always like this?

Amy shrugs, smiles....

AMY
Sometimes he's in a bad mood.

EXT. GUEST HOUSE - DAY

A bright, sunny day. Nick carries a heavy box up the steps and inside.

INT. GUEST HOUSE -- DAY

Nick enters. A PHONE MAN is working.

PHONE GUY
Where you want the phone?

Nick puts the boxes down, shrugs, steps back to look.

NICK
Desk'll be here.

Nick indicates the side window with the orchard view.

EXT. ORCHARD -- SAME

Darian's friend Cheyenne is walking slowly up the Orchard.

DARIAN
Pssst! Over here!

Cheyenne looks up, sees Darian lying in the grass, spying on the goings-on at Nick's house. Darian tugs Cheyenne down next to her in the grass.

DARIAN
Get down!

CHEYENNE
What's the big deal?

DARIAN
Destination: The guest house. Infiltrate, observe, gather evidence. Under no circumstances are you to use your weapon. If you don't return in five minutes... I'll radio for air support....

Cheyenne giggles and takes off.

INT. GUEST HOUSE - DAY

Cheyenne peers around Nick's doorway. Nick is SINGING to himself. He passes through foreground of shot. Cheyenne ventures in. Waits for Nick to notice. He doesn't.

CHEYENNE

Ahem.

Nick stops, toilet brush in hand, wearing rubber gloves.

NICK

Friend or foe?

CHEYENNE

What?

NICK

Identify yourself. Friend or foe?

Cheyenne'd eyes go wide.

CHEYENNE

Depends.

NICK

Got a name?

CHEYENNE

Cheyenne.

NICK

Indian huh?

CHEYENNE

Hippie parents.

NICK

Ah.

(smiles)

But it is a beautiful name.

Cheyenne stares at Nick, then suddenly turns and runs out the door.

CHEYENNE

Later.

Nick leans over and peers out the orchard window.

POV - THROUGH WINDOW

Darian ducks when she sees Nick. Cheyenne plops down next to her.

EXT. NICK'S GARDEN - SUNSET

Nick sits at his picnic table and cracks a Rolling Rock. He drinks, looks out and savors the whole spread.

He notices there is someone standing very still, hiding within the fences of ivy.

NICK

Hello?

No response. Nick cranes his neck to get a better look, when--

DARIAN (vo)

You're in my yard.

NICK

Darian?

Again, no response. Nick now stands, prompting a sudden RUSTLE and FOOTSTEPS.

Beyond the fence, Nick catches a glimpse of Darian's fleeing back before she disappears into the orchard.

EXT. STREET IN FRONT OF HOUSE -- MORNING

We're CLOSE on the grill of the old Valiant. the SOUND of SANDING draws us to Nick, dressed for work, meticulously sanding a spot.

Nick looks up over the hood of the car at....

Darian looking fetching in riding jodhpurs, boots, jacket, a helmet and crop in her hand.

DARIAN

You call that a car?

Nick goes on sanding.

NICK

I thought you and I weren't speaking.

Darian frowns.

DARIAN

My mother says I'm stuck with you.

Nick goes on sanding.

DARIAN

Did you know about the lady who used to live in the guest house.

NICK

Your nanny....

DARIAN
She wasn't my nanny... she was just
an old lady who died.

Nick stops, breathes a sigh.

NICK
I'm sorry.

DARIAN
She was old.

Darian looks at the ground, then watches Nick work.

DARIAN
Why are you doing that?

NICK
Well...I'm gonna have her painted.
I can finally afford it.

He looks up at her, scans Darian's outfit.

NICK
Fox hunt? Polo? What?

DARIAN
I'm schooling jumpers. I'm the
youngest in my class.

NICK
Sounds ambitious.

DARIAN
If my ride would show maybe I could
get some practice in today....

NICK
Where're the stables?

DARIAN
Outer Bay. Temple and University.

Nick eyes go wide, he tosses his sanding tools into the back seat.

NICK
Think I'm goin' right by there.

EXT. STREET -- DAY

The Valiant hugs the curb, Nick and Darian inside.

INT. NICK'S CAR -- DAY

Nick squints in the bright sun.

DARIAN

So I guess you don't you believe in sunglasses.

NICK

Well I had a pair, but I broke 'em on the drive out here. Sat on 'em actually.

DARIAN

Where'd you drive from?

NICK

The Keystone State.

DARIAN

You drove all the way from Pennsylvania in this bomb?

NICK

Hold it! Wait a second!

He gently pats the dashboard.

NICK

She didn't say that...You didn't hear it baby, it's okay....

(to Darian)

This bomb is a Nineteen-sixty-four Plymouth Valiant. Esprit edition. One of only eight hundred Valiant convertibles manufactured... and one of the finest pieces of iron ever came out of Detroit. Take a look! Pushbutton hydramatic transmission! Chrysler wrote the book on automatic transmissions by the way. Eighteen gauge vinyl interior, original stuff, take a chain saw to get through it. Slant six under the hood you couldn't stop with an army. I bought this car for a hundred dollars when I was eighteen and it has never, ever let me down.

Nick glances at Darian. She stifles a grin.

NICK

So remember, Darian, This is not a car. This is a Valiant. This is a goddamn rolling hunk of American History.

EXT. STABLES -- DAY

A wide open space surrounded by trees. In one of the rings, a group of GIRLS including CHEYENNE stand with an INSTRUCTOR and some horses.

Nick's car pulls up, drawing their attention. They watch as Darian steps out of the car driven by the older guy. Nick pulls out with a wave and a cloud of dust.

As Darian walks past the silent, gaping girls:

DARIAN

For god's sake haven't you ever seen a Valiant before?

INT. TONE OFFICES - DAY

The huge room full of cubicles is abuzz with activity.

NICK'S CUBICLE

Nick is surrounded by reams of paper. Sheets of phone numbers and scribbling are pinned to the walls.

Nick CLACKS at his word processor with a phone jammed up under his ear.

NICK

Hello, Mario Rinaldi?

(pause)

Mister Rinaldi, you used to work for the Levansky family, is that right?

Nick spins in his chair when he spots Amy passing by. He SNAPS his finger at her, covers the mouthpiece.

NICK (to Amy)

I got something.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET - DAY

Nick and Amy press quickly through the mid-day crowd. Nick carries a backpack, Amy, a camera bag.

NICK

Levansky fired him a year before the

indictment, his name never came up
in the investigations.

AMY
What about tax records?

NICK
Paid him in cash. No check stubs,
no payroll, nothing.

AMY
Then how'd you find him.

Nick wiggles his eyebrows.

AMY
Oh Mister big secret huh?

NICK
Nah... it was the babysitter.
Rinaldi used to pick up Levansky's
babysitter. The housekeeper remem-
bered her. She remembered him.

AMY
Where's this going? I mean what
could this guy know?

NICK (shrugs)
Don't know... but all we need is one
thing, just one little detail no one
got before.

INT. GUEST HOUSE -- NIGHT

All the windows are wide open to encourage what little
breeze there is. Nick sits at his computer in checked boxer
shorts, bare chested, bare feet, smoking a cigar as he
contemplates the computer screen.

His eyes drift out the window to the next-door-neighbor's
eerily lit-up SWIMMING POOL. It looks cool and inviting.
Nick stares at it, sweat beading on his brow.

A KNOCK on his screen door. Nick turns. Darian stands
behind the screen. She stares a beat, grinning.

DARIAN
Very attractive.

Nick self-consciously takes the cigar from his mouth.

NICK
Helps me think.
(puts down cigar)
Come on in....

Darian opens the door, comes inside, sits on the couch.

DARIAN
What are you working on?

NICK
Ahhh... pretty dry stuff.

DARIAN
Like what?

NICK
Ever hear of Robert Levansky?

DARIAN
Sure... the Wall Street guy that
stole a lot of money.

NICK
Right. Well I found his chauffeur,
and this guy tells me he regularly
drove Levansky to a house up in
Norwood. Seems Levansky had... a
friend...

DARIAN (with a smile)
You mean a lover.

Nick stares at Darian a second.

NICK
Well... yeah... and turns out this
woman flew to Geneva three times
last year.

DARIAN
Swiss bank accounts! Loaded with
with the missing cash!

NICK
Maybe.
(a pause)
You sure you're only fourteen?

Darian smiles.

NICK
And isn't it past your bedtime?

DARIAN
Too hot to sleep.

NICK
I hear that.

He turns back to the keyboard, looks out the window towards the pool.

NICK (quietly)
Who's pool?

DARIAN
Oh that's the Rockford's. They're in Maine. I guess they keep it lit up for burglars.

Nick turns back to Darian.

NICK
Now who would steal a pool.

EXT. NEIGHBOR'S POOL -- NIGHT

Darian, in a two-piece, SPRINGS from the diving board, doing a gorgeous swan dive.

Nick, in boxer shorts, charges after her, a clumsy jackknife.

ON THE WATER

Darian surfaces. Looks around for Nick. The pool is all shadows and underwater light.

Suddenly Darian is pulled briefly under water. Nick rises a few feet away...

NICK
Shark attack!

He dives again, swims under and rams her. Darian SQUEALS delightedly. Nick comes up, hoisting her into the air and tossing her FLAILING in mock terror. She dives for him, he grabs her, suddenly--

LIV'S VOICE
Darian! Where are you?

They freeze. Nick looks at Darian. She smiles. He lets her go and they paddle to the edge of the pool. Darian smiles and puts a finger to her lips.

LIV'S VOICE
Darian! Get in here now!

Darian giggles and hoists herself up over the edge of the pool. Her body is sleek and smooth as a seal's. She turns and smiles over her shoulder.

DARIAN (a whisper)
Our secret.

INT. GUEST HOUSE - CRACK OF DAWN

Nick, dead asleep, is jolted awake by the RINGING telephone. The clock radio says 5:40 AM.

Nick fumbles for the phone.

NICK
H'lo.

DARIAN (vo)
Am I your first call?

NICK
Who is this?

DARIAN (vo)
It's me.

NICK
Darian...it's too early.

Nick hangs up, falls back into his pillow.

EXT. FRONT DRIVEWAY -- MORNING

A sweat soaked Nick slows from his morning run. He bends, hands on his knees and catches his breath, then turns up the drive towards the guest house.

INT. NICK'S BATHROOM - MORNING

Nick turns off the shower, shakes out his hair and opens the curtain. Suddenly there's a SOUND from the other room.

NICK
Hello...?

DARIAN'S VOICE
Hi!

Nick pulls the curtain shut with a look of consternation.

NICK

You know most people knock before
they come in another person's home.

DARIAN (vo)

I did, you didn't hear.

INT. NICK'S BATHROOM - LATER

Nick's at the sink, shaving, bare chested, a towel around
his waist.

A FRAMED PICTURE,

resting on Nick's desk is picked up and brought into CLOSE-
UP. A grinning five-year-old Nick in a baseball cap is held
aloft by a strong-looking black man in a Pittsburgh Pirate
uniform. There's an almost illegible scrawl, an autograph
at the bottom.

DARIAN

Is this you in this picture?

NICK

Now be careful with that. That is
me and Roberto Clemente.

DARIAN

Who?

NICK

Roberto Clemente. The greatest
rightfielder in the history of the
game.

DARIAN

You were so cute! Can I have it?

NICK

It's irreplaceable, Darian.

DARIAN

Please?

NICK

No.

Darian replaces it disappointedly. She moves to Nick's desk,
touches the computer keyboard.

DARIAN

You always write on a computer?

NICK
I'd be lost without it.

Darian moves to the doorway behind Nick, watches him.

DARIAN
Makes you wonder how people like
Chekhov or Joyce got along. Then
again they weren't writing for
trendy magazines, were they?

Nick gives her a look and wipes his face.

NICK
Okay...would you permit me some pri-
vacy please?

Darian grins and shuts the door...almost.

She turns around and peeks through the crack.

HER POV

The towel drops, revealing Nick's butt as he reaches for his
underwear.

DARIAN

smiles and turns back into the main room.

DARIAN
Hey, I almost forgot, I got some-
thing for you.

Nick emerges, buttoning his shirt.

NICK
Oh yeah?

Darian puts a gift-wrapped box on the table.

NICK
What's this?

DARIAN
Open it and find out.

He does. Inside are a pair of high quality clip-on shades.

NICK
Heyy!

He fastens them on his glasses, flips them up and down.

NICK

Coo-ool!

He stands, leans over to her, kisses her on the cheek. She smiles shyly.

NICK

Thank you Darian, just what I needed.

Nick leans over and ejects the DISK from his computer.

NICK

But now I'm late.

DARIAN

Are you gonna come to my parents party on Saturday?

NICK

I don't know.

DARIAN

My mother invited you didn't she?

NICK

Yeah but I gotta lotta work and--

DARIAN

Oh please! It's gonna be all my parents boring old friends...

NICK

I'll try.

DARIAN

Please?

NICK

I said I'll try! Now lemme go.

INT. NICK'S *TONE* CUBICLE - DAY

Nick is on the phone, when Amy moves up behind him with a stack of photos.

AMY

Got 'em....

Nick turns and clears a spot on his already overflowing desk. He begins to lay out Amy's photographs.

CLOSE

on VARIOUS BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPHS of a blonde woman, late thirties.

They're stacked in rough chronological order: the Blonde Woman stepping out of the doorway of a house, walking down steps to a driveway, climbing in a car. Then suddenly she's looking up, right into the camera.

AMY

She spotted me there. I figured what the hell and moved in for the money shot.

Nick flips the next photo, a full frame closeup of the woman. It's sharp, well defined. There's a look of incredulity on the woman's face.

NICK

Jeez. You could count her pores.

He looks up at Amy. Amy smiles, wiggles her brows.

There's a long pause as they gaze at one another.

NICK

I think you and I make a good team.

Amy looks at Nick and smiles warmly, then shakes her head.

AMY

You ever hear the expression, "Don't get your meat where you make your bread."?

NICK

That's a crude way to put it.

AMY

Words I live by. Okay?

NICK

You called me out before I even took a swing.

A man comes up behind them, TEX MURPHY. He nods at Amy and Nick, drops a sheaf of typewritten proofs on Nick's desk.

AMY

That the article?

He looks down at the article, studies it a second, as Amy restacks her photographs.

Nick's face turns dark, he flips ahead a few pages.

NICK

Wait a second... there's something wrong here--

Suddenly Samantha appears....

SAMANTHA

--Michael wants you both in his office right now.

MICHAEL LITTLE'S OFFICE - DAY

Michael flips over the last page of the Nick's story. He has duplicate pictures of Amy's photographs spread out over his desk.

NICK

Michael I'd like a chance to go over this before you read it, I think maybe one of the copy editors--

MICHAEL

The editors haven't touched it. And the article's fine as it stands.

(to Amy)

You got a cover Maddik and I think you owe it to your friend here.

AMY

A cover...damn!

She raises her hand and turns expectantly to Nick. He's a little stunned but has the presence of mind to return her high five.

MICHAEL

Samantha! Get this to the art department, we're resetting the whole issue.

Samantha scoops up the papers and disappears. Michael scowls at Nick and Amy, picks up the phone.

Amy's psyched, she moves for the door, Nick a few steps behind.

MICHAEL

Anderson... I think your former employers were wrong about you.

Nick stops, looks puzzled.

LITTLE

Not only was your research excellent, but your text was clean, concise, even had some style. You can write for me anyday.

EXT. DARIAN'S HOUSE -- DAY

Party GUESTS arrive in expensive cars, handed a rose by VALETS as they drop their cars.

Nick heads up the driveway past the house. Lovely PIANO music blends with the DIN of the brimming party.

INT. GUEST HOUSE -- NIGHT

Nick drops a pile of papers as he pops a bottle of beer and takes a long swig. He peers out his window towards the house, undoing his collar.

NICK

What the hell.

INT. THE HOUSE -- NIGHT

The front entrance overflows with GUESTS and WAITERS offering silver platters of hors d'oeuvres.

NICK, dressed nattily in jacket and tie, squeezes through, excusing himself, knowing no one. He looks around. The old place has been lavishly restored with lots of dark wood, a flowing staircase, tasteful art. He is spotted by Liv.

LIV

Nick! I'm so glad you made it.

NICK

Thanks for having me.

LIV

Honey, this is Nick. Nick this is my husband Cliff Forrester.

CLIFF is 45, an imposing barrel-chested man. He turns to Nick and extends his hand good-naturedly.

DOCTOR

My wife speaks very highly of you.
Everything okay back there?

NICK
It's great, sir. You've a beautiful place.

LIV (to Cliff)
Oh look the Morton's. I think she's had her eyes done!

CLIFF
Morty Segal did 'em five years ago. It's her breasts I'm wondering about.

He winks at Nick.

LIV
Excuse us Nick.

Cliff and Liv go off.

A WAITER passes with a tray of champagne. Nick flags him down and takes a glass, continuing to weave through the crowd towards the MUSIC.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Nick emerges through the crowd sipping his champagne and stops, struck by what he sees:

DARIAN

in flowing gown at the candelabra-accented grand piano, performing a magnificent SCHUBERT impromptu with an adroitness and mastery beyond her age.

NICK

watches, amazed, as Darian holds the audience captive. She seems older, more alluring, eerily woman-like.

She catches Nick's eye, and with a Mona Lisa smile, percussively concludes the piece, drawing lusty APPLAUSE.

Nick puts his glass down and applauds. Darian smiles, thanking the room, and edges her way through.

IN THE FOYER

Darian joins Nick away from the crowd.

DARIAN
I knew you'd come.

Stunned by her beauty and talent, Nick shakes his head.

NICK

I find myself wishing you were ten years older.

Darian smiles enigmatically and looks out to the swelling crowd.

DARIAN

How'd your boss like the article?

Nick suddenly realizes....

NICK

It was you... you rewrote it.

Darian greets a passing guest.

DARIAN

Hi Mister Vogel....

NICK

How'd you get in the guest house?

DARIAN

It ain't Fort Knox.

NICK

Darian, you can't do that.

DARIAN

Worked though didn't it? Poor Nick, you have such a terrible time with the objective case... and your split infinitives put so much stress on the adverb.

NICK

Darian you can't do this kind of stuff...it isn't right.

DARIAN

I just wanted you to like me.

NICK

I like you Darian.

DARIAN (brightening)

Then take me for a ride in the Valiant.

NICK

Now?

DARIAN
Just for a little while. There's a
place I wanna show you.

NICK
Darian--

DARIAN
Please?

EXT. NICK'S CAR -- NIGHT - MOVING

Darian is kneeling in the passenger seat, fist thrown forward as Nick drives.

DARIAN
On Valiant! On Nicholas!

NICK (grinning)
Where to, my liege?

Darian accelerates up a lonely canyon road.

DARIAN
Hither!

NICK
Thither!

DARIAN
Onward! To the verdant hills!

EXT. SCENIC LOOKOUT -- NIGHT

Nick pulls up to a spot with a dramatic view of the twinkling city lights.

INT. SAME

Nick turns off the engine, made a little uncomfortable by this romantic setting.

DARIAN
Beautiful isn't it?

NICK
Yes, it is.

DARIAN
I'm sorry about the article. I
won't do it again.

NICK

Darian, I know I'm not the world's greatest writer, but believe me, it's hard to take being bettered by a fourteen-year-old kid.

Darian looks down, suddenly sad.

NICK

Look, it's okay.

DARIAN

No it's not.

Nick notices a suddenly tear rolling down Darian's cheek.

DARIAN

You don't know how hard it is for me to make friends...I skipped two grades in school...Everybody in my class is older than me. The only friend I've got is Cheyenne and that's only cause my mother and hers went to college together and she has to be.

She looks up at Nick. The tears continue.

DARIAN

Even my parents... it's like people are afraid of me. It's like I'm some kinda freak.

Nick looks at her. He reaches out to wipe away the tears, but Darian roughly pushes him away.

DARIAN

Don't!

NICK

I'm sorry. I'll be your friend.

DARIAN

You don't have to.

NICK

Course I don't have to. I know I don't have to...it's not a have-to kinda thing.

Darian sniffles back a tear. She looks up and out through the windshield. Her frown disappears.

Suddenly she stands and jumps from the car. She runs to the edge of the precipice, spreads her arms like Tevya, and

spins around, beaming, laughing.

DARIAN
Come on! I wanna show you....

Darian darts off into the bushes.

Half-reluctant, Nick climbs out of the car, looks around to see if anyone's watching.

NICK
Darian! Hey!!

DARIAN (vo)
Rick! Over here!

We FOLLOW as Nick climbs through some brush to an isolated spot, hidden from view of the road. There's soft grass, a continuation of the spectacular view.

Darian grabs Nick's hand, plops down on the ground, tugs Nick down next to her.

DARIAN
Here...isn't it great!

NICK
You called me Rick.

DARIAN
No. Nick.

NICK
Who's Rick?

DARIAN
No one. A friend. Used to be.

Nick shakes off his confusion, lays back on the carpet of grass, stares at the sky, points....

NICK
Big Dipper, Little Dipper, Orion.

Darian lays back next to him, smiles, points.

DARIAN
Cassiopeia, Andromeda, Gemini.

Darian GIGGLES. Nick turns his head to look at her. He smiles.

NICK
You are amazing.

Darian stares at Nick, smiles softly. Slowly she reaches for his hand.

DARIAN
Lemme read your palm.

NICK
Anything you can't do?

Darian smiles again and stares at his palm, then pulls his hand gently to her mouth, softly kisses it.

DARIAN
Please don't be afraid of me.

Nick's smile disappears. Darian slides gently in to him and touches his cheek. She lifts his glasses from the bridge of his nose and kisses him softly, tenderly on the lips.

Nick lets her. Darian's tongue touches his lips. He opens his mouth.

Darian's hand move down his cheek to his chest. Her voice is soft and light....

DARIAN
Oh Nick....

Suddenly Nick sits bolt upright, swallowing hard, fumbling for his glasses, climbing to his feet.

NICK
We gotta go.

Darian laughs.

DARIAN
Nick....

NICK
We gotta go.

He walks quickly towards the car. Darian LAUGHING behind him.

INT. GUEST HOUSE -- NIGHT

Nick opens the freezer, pulls out a frozen bottle of vodka, twists off the cap, fills a shot glass, throws it back. He shivers. Pours another. The same.

INT. DARIAN'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Darian lies in bed holding a teddy bear. Liv kisses her forehead and tucks her in.

LIV
Night darling.

DARIAN
Love you Momma.

Liv shuts the light and leaves. We LINGER on Darian, staring out dreamily, then smiling. A secret, mysterious smile....

CUT TO:

Pop MUSIC: Bouncy blue-eyed soul: a budding girl's anthem.

INT. DARIAN'S ROOM -- DAY

We're close on a slab of brown linoleum. A gouge digs out a design. A roller is rolled in red ink, then rolled over the linoleum.

Darian takes the now-inked linoleum and presses it to colored paper, removes it to reveal the print -- "NICK AND DARIAN 4-EVER" inside a heart.

EXT. STABLES -- DAY

Darian, in full regalia, bareback on a WHITE ARABIAN (Sinbad), with long flowing tail and arched neck. She faces the hurdles before her with a fearless focus, cracks the reins and takes off.

INT. GUEST HOUSE -- DAY

Nick is at his computer, clacking away. He notices something out the window. He parts the blinds.

NICK'S POV

Darian is out in the orchard, wearing an alluring two-piece, spreading a beach towel, laying out to sun.

Nick angles the blinds more, peeks again.

Darian unhooks her top straps for unwanted tan lines.

Nicks shuts the blinds completely.

EXT. STABLES -- CONTINUING

Darian in full gallop, fast approaching the hurdle, whipping the white Arabian's rump with her crop....

EXT. HOUSE -- DAY

Nick sands the Valiant, wearing shorts and a T-shirt.

Darian and Cheyenne appear, skating up the street on roller-blades. Darian is dressed in bicycles tights, hair tied back, looking incredibly luscious... she smiles at Nick enticingly as they pass Nick's car.

Cheyenne GIGGLES.

EXT. STABLES -- CONTINUING

Darian, barely a blur. The hurdle upon her. The POUNDING of the galloping Sinbad overpowering the soundtrack. She squeezes with her legs, grits her teeth, the whole thing swelling in crescendo as the great beast leaps, sailing through the air, clearing an impossible hurdle, then --

REAL TIME

-- landing with a JOLT to Darian, but she hangs on expertly and lets the horse run down to a walk.

In the distance, a group of ONLOOKERS APPLAUD.

Darian catches her breath, savoring her triumph. She KICKS Sinbad and gallops excitedly back towards the stables.

INT. GUEST HOUSE -- DAY

A bowl of saran-wrapped potato salad is forced into Nick's brimming fridge. Amy closes the door, wipes her hands.

AMY

All set, Anderson.

NICK

Thanks for helping.

Amy smiles.

AMY

First week on the job and you get the cover story. Maybe this'll keep the jealousy factor in check.

EXT. ORCHARD -- DAY

Darian is gathering apples in her skirt, when she hears Nick's GATE CLOSE. She drops all the apples and begins racing joyously through the field, calling out --

DARIAN
Nick, Nicholas, darling!

-- until she pulls up to an abrupt stop.

NICK & AMY

walking from the guest house. Darian just stands there, frozen. Nick looks up to see her.

NICK
Darian, this is my friend Amy.

AMY
Hi.

DARIAN
Hello.

Nick and Amy continue past, down the drive. Out of earshot, Amy leans over to Nick, grinning.

AMY
Nicholas? My darling?

NICK
Some women find me irresistable.

AMY
That girl is not a woman.

DARIAN

watches after them. Her face is dark. This is a most unwelcome development.

INT. GUEST HOUSE -- NIGHT

Nick is asleep. Quiet. Crickets. Now, from outside, crazed CRIES of exertion accompanied by loud THUMPING. Nick bolts upright, grabs his pants from the floor.

EXT. HOUSE -- NIGHT

Nick races out from the guest house, buttoning his shirt. The POUNDING punctuates GUTTURAL SHOUTS.

NICK'S POV

The carport is empty. WHIP TO rear kitchen window, where a SILHOUETTE is seen thrashing about wildly.

Nick runs to the back door -- and rushes in.

INT. KITCHEN -- NIGHT -- CONTINUING

Nick bursts in, head banging into an over-hanging light. Stops dead.

On the island counter, a cleaver's been driven into the cutting board top. All around are the messy wet pulp and skins of a dozen lemons. The fruit hasn't been squeezed so much as murdered.

Suddenly there's a FOOTSTEP. Nick turns.

ANGLE ON DARIAN...

as she steps out of the shadows. Her eyes are red, her mouth is crimped into a tight frown. She stares at the cutting board, the cleaver.

NICK

Darian... are you alright? What are you doing?

Darian glances at Nick.

DARIAN

(with a distant shrug)
Making lemonade.

EXT. NICK'S HOUSE - LATE DAY

Burgers and hot dogs SIZZLE on a grill to MUSIC from a boom box. There's a couple of big coolers full of ice and beer.

Nick plays host, serving a line of people from the magazine: writers, editors, Samantha, Tex, etc.

Everyone's dressed in jeans, shorts, tennis shoes, t-shirts.

Amy appears from around the corner of the guest house.

AMY

Nick! You won't believe who's he--

--Suddenly Michael Little swings around the corner of the guest house. He's dressed in a dark blue suit. A tie. He carries a bottle of French wine.

The party falls silent, everyone staring at Michael.

Nick moves up to Michael.

NICK

Gee Michael, I thought you knew it was a barbeque. Can I... uh...lemme me take your jacket.

MICHAEL

Don't worry Anderson, I'm not staying.

NICK (phonily)

Don't be silly...I'm... just so glad you came--

MICHAEL

--Anderson, I wanted to tell you personally...I've been on the phone all morning with the lawyers...Robert Levansky wants to speak with you.

NICK

What?!

AMY

Jeez....

The others at the party begin to drift over to them, trying not to be obvious. We hear a building MURMUR, the repeated name, Levansky, Levansky.

MICHAEL

We're setting up a meeting. It'll be an exclusive and he's making you part of the deal.

NICK

But why?

MICHAEL

I don't know, frankly I don't care. I suppose he saw something in your article that impressed him. We'll know more on Monday.

Michael looks down at the wine bottle in his hand. He awkwardly holds it out.

MICHAEL

Oh. Here. A gift.

Michael Little turns around and strides toward the side of the house. He hesitates, turns back. By now the entire party is simply staring, speechless.

MICHAEL

That's a very fine bottle of wine,
I'd let it breath at least an hour.

He looks at the crowd. He hesitates.

MICHAEL

As you were.

He strides off.

AMY (quietly)

As you were?

EXT. NICK'S YARD - DUSK

Amy is talking with a group of people near the edge of the barbeque. The party's loud and relaxed and boisterous, a happy loose crowd.

Nick appears with a huge plastic bag of marshmallows. Amy spots him and grins.

AMY

Marshmallows...oh man, this is a
party.

Nick grins.

NICK

Need some sticks.

AMY

You fire up the grill. I'll scout
the orchard.

INT. THE ORCHARD - DUSK

Amy wanders between gnarled apple trees. The setting sun casts deep shadows in the thick lanes between trees that have stood sentinel in this field for a generation or more.

Amy is studying the ground, gathering sticks. She's moved far from Nick's cottage, the VOICES of the partygoers blend into distant ghost-like LAUGHTER AND echoic MURMURINGS.

As Amy moves an insistent BUZZING grows in intensity. Amy looks up.

She spots a big WASP'S NEXT hanging in the yoke of a tree.
Suddenly a voice...

DARIAN

Hi.

Amy turns with a start, to see Darian standing near her, in a long dress, looking like a part of the orchard.

AMY

Wheww... you scared me.

DARIAN

What are you doing?

AMY

Sticks for marshmallows... but those bees....

DARIAN

Wasps. Yellowjackets. Genus Vespula.

AMY

They all sting.

DARIAN

Bees won't bother you unless you bother them. Wasps are different. They're territorial, and they're social.

AMY

Social... like they wanna be friends.

DARIAN

Like they attack in groups.

Amy looks nervously at Darian.

AMY

We should leave.

Darian nods.

DARIAN

Slowly.

EXT. THE ORCHARD - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Darian and Amy walk and talk softly, approach the outskirts of the party. Darian looks up....

DARIAN
Gee... looks like Nick made a
friend.

Nick and the gorgeous Samantha are standing off to the side.
Although we can't hear their conversation, we do see them
GIGGLE and TITTER.

Amy looks a little wounded. This is not lost on Darian.

DARIAN
God, she's like a model, she's so
pretty.

AMY
If you like that kinda thing.
(approaching)
Hey Nick, look who I found out in
the orchard.

Nick turns to see Darian and Amy, falters for only a
fraction of a second.

NICK
Hey Darian.
(to Samantha)
My landlord's kid.
(to Darian and Amy)
This is Samantha. Amy you know
Samantha.

AMY
We work together.

Nick nods stupidly.

NICK
Right....

INT. THE GUEST HOUSE BATHROOM - SAME

Amy's in the bathroom at the sink, water running, her back
to Darian just outside on the bed. Darian peeks into Amy's
bag, spots the camera.

DARIAN
So I guess you're a photographer.

AMY
Yup.

DARIAN
How long you been doing it?

AMY

I got into it in school. I thought
I wanted to be a painter, but...I
couldn't stand being alone so much.

Darian lifts out the camera, turns it over, examining.

DARIAN

You develop your own pictures?

AMY

The black and white stuff yeah. My
landlord let me turn half the garage
behind my apartment into a darkroom.

DARIAN

Cool.

Darian checks the focus, twists the shutter speed dial.

DARIAN

You really like Nick don't you?

Amy considers a moment, then shrugs.

AMY

We work together.

Darian extends her arms, points the camera at herself.

DARIAN

You shouldn't worry. Some guys re-
ally like girls with small breasts.

Darian CLICKS the shutter.

INT. NICK'S KITCHEN -- LATER

Nick's doing dishes. Everyone's gone. Amy comes in carry-
ing the last of the stuff in from the yard.

NICK

Think it went okay?

AMY

You bought yourself some time, un-
less of course you keep racking up
points with the boss.

Nick shakes his head.

NICK

I got lucky.

AMY

I'll say.

Amy is putting things away by Nick's desk.

AMY

Phone machine's blinking.

NICK

Thanks.

Nick is drying his hands.

AMY

What's with your friend, Darian?

NICK

Whattya mean? I thought you two were getting along.

AMY

Yeah... but I don't know... she gives me the creeps.

NICK (dismissive)

She's a kid.

AMY

She's got a crush on you.

Nick shakes his head, avoids Amy's eyes.

NICK

Don't be silly....

Nick hits the PLAYBACK on the phone machine.

DARIAN'S VOICE

Hi, it's me. Just called to say thanks for letting me crash your party. Call me when you get a sec.

Amy stares balefully at Nick.

AMY

Look Nick...I've been there. You have to be the adult, you can't blur the line.

NICK

Are you saying I did something to provoke this?

AMY

Well... did you?

Nick crosses back to the kitchen.

NICK

No.

Amy eyes him suspiciously, moves back, picks up her bag.

AMY

I gotta go.

Amy moves for the door.

NICK

Amy... Amy, wait!

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

A big black limousine pulls up outside a security gate. An armed guard talks to the driver.

INT. THE LIMO - DAY

Michael Little faces Nick, who's dressed in a suit.

MICHAEL

It'll be the two of you alone, but we've a very clear menu of questions he won't or can't answer, you understand? You've gone through--

NICK

--I've got your list and I've got your lawyers list and I've got Levansky's lawyers list and I've got the Fed's list and I've got it all cross-checked against my list which leaves me about four possible questions two of which concern his preference in pasta shapes.

Michael stares at Nick, then does something we haven't seen him do before...he smiles.

EXT. THE LIMO

pulls up to a large, rambling ranch house. Two men in dark suits move toward the car.

INT. THE LIMO

Michael pushes open the door for Nick.

MICHAEL

We'll need something by the end of
the week if we're gonna make the
next issue, understand?

INT. THE GUEST HOUSE - DAY

Nick is working at the computer. Next to him is his micro-cassette recorder. He snaps it on. We hear NICK'S VOICE, then the heavy worn-down VOICE of an OLDER MAN (Levansky).

Nick snaps off the recorder, CLACKS AWAY at the computer.

The phone RINGS. Nick reaches to pick it up.

NICK

Hello?

EXT. ORCHARD - DAY

Darian is sunning with her shades, talking on a portable phone.

DARIAN

Miss me?

INTERCUT NICK

He resumes his typing, cradling the phone on his shoulder.

NICK

Hello Darian.

DARIAN

What're you doing?

NICK

What do you think I'm doing, what am
always doing?

DARIAN

Aw, Nick, can't you come out and
play?

NICK

No, Darian, I'm under deadline.

DARIAN

Guess what?

NICK (exasperated)

What?

DARIAN
Got my period.

Nick stops typing.

DARIAN
I'm definitely not pregnant.
(beat)
Not that I had any reason to be....

Nick sighs, grimaces, suddenly notices that his Roberto Clemente picture is no longer on his desk.

NICK
Darian...did you take my picture?

DARIAN
No.

There's a long pause.

NICK
I'll talk to you later.

INT. NICK'S HOUSE - LATER

He's pacing behind his desk, biting a finger. Suddenly he stops, sighs. He stares again at the spot where the photo used to be. He sighs again.

EXT. HOUSE, FRONT DOOR -- DAY

Nick knocks on the front door, listens for anyone inside. He notices the cars gone from the car port, then stands on his tiptoes and peeks through the glass fan at the top of the door. He spots something.

NICK'S POV

On the foyer table. There's a small picture frame, looks something like his, but it's turned away so we can't see the face.

He tries the doorknob. The door is unlocked. He pushes it open, steps inside.

NICK
Hello?

INT. HOUSE, FOYER -- DAY

Nick waits for a reply. None comes. He reaches for the picture frame, turns it around.

THE PHOTO: Darian and her parents, not his photograph.

Nick puts the photo back and looks up the stairs.

INT. 2ND FLOOR HALLWAY -- DAY

Nick steps into the upstairs hallway and looks around. Crosses to a partially closed door, peeks in. Parents bedroom, double bed, etc.

He returns the door to it's exact place, crosses to the next, opens it and looks ahead.

INT. DARIAN'S BEDROOM -- DAY

Nick slips inside. A young girl's room. Soft furnishings, pillows. Bookshelves laden with classical literature, Greek myths, complete works of Shakespeare, Wuthering Heights, nothing really out of the ordinary.

But Nick bends down and finds a stack of pricey clothing catalogs spread over one side of the bed. Nick looks....

CLOSER

The catalogs are Men's clothing catalogs. Various items have been circled.

Suddenly a door opens and the sound of a BATHTUB RUNNING mixes up.

NICK

wheels around. Someone's just down the hall. He moves to the bedroom door, peeks.

NICK'S POV OF BATHROOM

Darian is running the bath. She pulls down a bath mat onto the floor.

Nick panics -- sees the closet -- quietly pulls out the door and shuts himself inside.

INT. CLOSET -- CONTINUING

Nick keeps still as can be, retaining a partial VIEW into the room through the door's horizontal slats.

INT. DARIAN'S ROOM -- SAME

Darian saunters in, bathtub still running in b.g., braiding her hair back, biting an elastic hair tie.

NICK

leans back, causing a wire hanger to lightly DING into another. He freezes, mortified.

DARIAN

glances to the closed closet doors. Stares a beat. The end of a SHOELACE from Nick's sneaker sticks out. But her expression gives nothing away. Darian turns around to face the bed and begins to disrobe.

NICK

barely breathes. A beat of SWEAT rolls down his temple. His eyes glance to Darian's now exposed back, then avert.

DARIAN

steps out from her underwear, lays them on the bed. A beat. She turns around to face the closet.

NICK

looks up -- a FLASH of his POV -- he can't bear to watch, but can't turn away. Does she know?!

CLOSE -- DARIAN

She looks straight ahead, her face a cipher -- then saunters back out to her bath.

INT. SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY -- SAME

The bathroom door closes behind her.

EXT. HOUSE -- SAME

One of the Mercedes pulls into the drive and parks in the car port. CLIFF shuts off the engine.

INT. DARIAN'S ROOM -- CONTINUING

Nick opens the closet, listens, and stealthily creeps out.

INT. 2ND FLOOR HALLWAY -- CONTINUING

Nick tip-toes past the closed bathroom door. He hear the water SPLASH from the tub.

EXT. HOUSE -- SAME

Cliff opens the Mercedes trunk. It's crammed with boxes of paint supplies and assorted bags.

INT. HOUSE -- DAY

Nick comes off the stairs into the foyer and pulls open the front door -- to reveal CLIFF, as shocked as Nick, perhaps less pale. The boxes are at his feet.

NICK
Cliff, hi.

CLIFF
Nick. What are you doing?

Nick desperately scrambles.

NICK
Oh you mean in here? I just returned a book Darian lent me. She's upstairs.

A pause. Cliff stares at Nick.

CLIFF
Oh.

NICK
Anyway, I should go.

Nick starts forward.

CLIFF
Nick?

NICK
Yeah?

CLIFF
Mind giving me a hand with this stuff up to the attic? I don't know if my back's going to make it.

Nick freezes.

NICK
Well, I really should get back for this phone call.....

CLIFF
Just take a minute. Sure appreciate it.

Nick's phony smile is hurting.

NICK
Okay. Sure.

Nick hoists one of the boxes up on his shoulder.

INT. 2ND FLOOR HALLWAY -- DAY

Nick trudges up the steps. Cliff has grabbed a long brass pole with a hook at one end, reaching up to pull down the attic's fold-down stairs.

Nick eyes the closed bathroom door. Then follows Cliff up the stairs.

INT. ATTIC -- DAY

Nick steps off the stairs and sets the heavy box down. In the middle of the sprawling, dusty, unfinished space sits a substantial antique CAROUSEL. Six horses in all. Empty paint cans, brushes, and tools are strewn about.

CLIFF

My little restoration project.

Cliff puts his hands on his hips, appraises the carousel.

CLIFF

Had it shipped from a carnival in
Kansas when Darian was first born.
Been rebuilding it up here ever
since.

(shakes his head, amused)

Now I can't get it down and Darian
never really took to it. I don't
know...maybe I'll finish it someday.

NICK

It's really something.

CLIFF

That it is.

(beat)

You know Nick, Darian's a special
girl.

NICK

I see that.

CLIFF

Well...in more ways than you might think...she's smart, that's obvious, been breaking the scale on intelligence tests since she was a toddler. But there's more... She seems to be... always on edge, always a little at odds with the world... but I suppose she's at a difficult age.

(sighs, looking hard at Nick)
She seems to have taken a liking to you, Nick.

NICK

Mnnn.

CLIFF

You know I swear not a night goes by I don't lay awake dreading that knock on the door.

(eyeing Nick)
You know what I'm talking about, don't you?

Nick swallows to keep his throat from closing.

CLIFF

Some friggin' kid'll be standing there with his hard-on coming right through his pants.

(shakes his head)
Hope I don't go breaking it off.

Cliff LAUGHS heartily. Nick feels compelled to join him in one of the phoniest displays ever seen. Suddenly --

DARIAN

Hi, daddy.

Cliff and Nick turn to see Darian in a bathrobe, hair combed back, barefoot, at the top of the stairs.

CLIFF

Hi sugar, we were just talking about you.

NICK

Hope it wasn't anything bad.

She looks to Nick. Nick forces a big smile.

CLIFF

Not a chance. Hey, what book did you lend Nick?

DARIAN

Book?

She turns again to Nick. Nick smiles, his eyes faintly pleading, totally at her mercy.

DARIAN

Oh, that must have been, "Wuthering Heights". Did you enjoy it Nick?

NICK

Yes! Very much! Great book. A favorite. Musta lost my copy in the move... well better be heading back.

CLIFF

Hey thanks, Nick... and good talking to you.

NICK

Not at all. 'Bye.

DARIAN

'Bye, Nick. Thanks for bringing back the book.

She smiles. A parting look between them. Nick descends.

EXT. THE HOUSE -- DAY

The house and orchard appear idyllic as ever. But through the birds and bees, we pickup another sound -- like pellets RATTLING in plastic.

CUT TO:

DARIAN,

hips thrusting and gyrating at us, wearing her shades and twirling a HULA HOOP in her two-piece as she listens to a walkman. The sound of the hula-hoop's plastic pellets RATTLE.

INT. GUEST HOUSE -- DAY

Nick is staring paralyzed at a blank computer screen. An empty pad and a perfectly sharpened pencil rests alongside.

Finally unnerved by the RATTLE, he peers through the blinds to see Darian shaking and baking.

EXT. THE ORCHARD -- DAY

Nick approaches Darian, hands dug in his pockets. he smiles. She smiles.

NICK
Talk to you a sec?

She pulls her headphones down around her neck, though continues twirling the hoop.

DARIAN
Sorry?

NICK
I was wondering if we could talk.

DARIAN
What do you want to talk about?

NICK
Well, I don't know, to tell the truth it's a little awkward. Would you mind stopping that?

DARIAN
Why?

Her hips continue unabated.

NICK
All right. I'm not sure how to begin. I guess what I want to say is -- I really like you.

DARIAN
I like you, too.

NICK
No, I mean as a friend. Let's face it -- You're fourteen, I'm twenty-six. That's a big difference.

DARIAN
Technically.

NICK
Seriously Darian....

He grabs the Hula-hoop, stops her twisting.

NICK
I just want you to know, you can count on me, we'll always be friends.

DARIAN
Like that night up at the lookout.
When we kissed.

Nick stares at Darian. A long pause.

NICK
That was a mistake.

DARIAN
Was sneaking in the house to watch
me a mistake too?

Nick, red-faced, stares at Darian, shakes his head. Frustrated, he turns, starts to walk away.

DARIAN
Nick?

Nick stops.

NICK
Yes?

DARIAN
How many times have you had sex?

NICK
What?

DARIAN
Ever fuck a virgin?

NICK
Darian.

DARIAN
Just a question.

Nick, angered, moves back to Darian.

NICK
Look. Let's avoid any confusion
here. I'm going to make it real
simple for you. You are too young
for me. There is nothing between
us. Nothing.

She stares at him, then smiles, goes back to twirling the hula-hoop, hips swaying evocatively.

INT. BODY AND PAINT SHOP -- DAY

To a deafening SOUND, Nick's Valiant is blasted with high-pressured spray paint by PAINTERS wearing body suits and respirators.

Nick watches through a window like at a car wash. We move in towards him, noticing the stress now visible in his face.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

Amidst the sea of cars, one stands out, covered with a protective tarp.

We BOOM down to the back of the car. Nick and Amy approach in the foreground, so we can't see the front of the car.

Nick is beside himself with excitement.

NICK

Wait...till you see this.

AMY

I can't believe you bought me a car.

NICK

I didn't.

AMY

You know, this isn't gonna make me feel any different about you.

NICK

I didn't buy you a car.

AMY

Then what's the surprise?

NICK

Wait. Here.

He excitedly runs around the back of the car (into our foreground), grabs the end of the tarp....

NICK

You ready?

AMY

I...have never been so ready.

...and YANKS on the tarp to reveal the Valiant, with a pristine blue paint job.

Nick grins and LAUGHS giddily.

NICK
Incredible isn't it....

He starts around to the side of the car, not noticing Amy's shocked expression as she stares at the car's hood, which we (and Nick) can't see.

NICK
...one of the finest pieces of iron
ever came out of Detroit, a goddamn
rolling hunk of American--

--But suddenly Nick sees it.

POV

Gouged deeply into the hood, filling the entire space, big block letters scrawl "COCKSUCKER".

INT. BREAKFAST ROOM -- DAY

A china cup of coffee is filled and handed to Nick, who stands in a bright, cheery room.

Cliff sits at the breakfast table before him, staring expectantly. Liv joins him.

NICK
I don't know for sure--

LIV
So you didn't actually see her.

NICK
No...I just feel very strongly--

LIV
I don't think my daughter is capable
of such a thing.

Suddenly Darian strides in the room. She kisses her parents, grabs an apple from the fruit bowl. She's a picture of sweetness.

DARIAN
Hi Nick!

NICK
Hi.

DARIAN
I'm going riding with Cheyenne.

CLIFF

Darian, I have a question for you.

Darian stops, looks curiously at her father.

CLIFF

Did you uh... scratch up Nick's car?

Darian wrinkles her brow, shakes her head in wonder.

DARIAN (puzzled)

Why would I do that?

She glances at Nick, smiles sweetly, then turns....

DARIAN

I gotta go!

She dashes out leaving Cliff and Liv staring at Nick.

NICK (uncomfortably)

Thanks for the coffee.

EXT. THE HOUSE -- DAY

A section of cardboard is taped over the Valiant's defiled hood.

VOICE

Pssst!

Nick looks up to see Cheyenne with riding gear under an arm.

NICK

Cheyenne....

POV FROM DARIAN'S ROOM

as Nick crosses around to Cheyenne, concerned.

BACK TO SCENE

CHEYENNE

I need to talk. Bad. It's about Darian.

Nick looks around. Coast clear.

NICK

Okay.

CHEYENNE

Not now. Meet me back of the orchard. When the streetlights come on.

Cheyenne runs back towards the house.

NICK
Cheyenne, wait!

But Cheyenne's quickly gone. Nick looks up.

Thought he saw Darian's WINDOW CURTAIN fall shut.

EXT. STABLES -- DAY

The INSTRUCTOR signals a GIRL to begin the jumping course. Waiting behind her, a string of GIRLS walk their horses along in line.

INT. STABLES -- DAY

Cheyenne stands on a stool beside her horse, (Buttercup), struggling to strap on her saddle. She still wears her street clothes, her outfit lays on the ground. Darian walks over, fully dressed.

DARIAN
Hey Cheyenne? Jeez, why are you so slow?

CHEYENNE
Everybody asks me that.

Both their heads turn at the sound of a VOICE.

VOICE
Darian, Cheyenne, we're waiting for you!

CHEYENNE
Shit.

DARIAN
You get dressed, I'll tack up Buttercup.

CHEYENNE
Thanks.

Darian takes the saddle so it doesn't fall. Cheyenne grabs her outfit and hurries to the changing rooms.

Darian pulls the girth around Buttercup's belly. She looks to make sure Cheyenne's out of sight, then takes the thick strap and begins to do something out of our view.

INT. NICK'S HOUSE -- DAY

Nick is still struggling over the computer. He has a pencil in his mouth, he runs his hands through his hair.

EXT. JUMPING RING -- DAY

Cheyenne and Buttercup wait in line to jump. Darian and Sinbad are first. Darian gets her signal and takes off, making all three hurdles cleanly.

Cheyenne is next. She pats Buttercup's neck, gets the signal, kicks, and takes off.

Building speed, Buttercup leaps the first hurdle cleanly. Under her belly, we see the GIRTH has been FRAYED, now TEARS FURTHER.

Cheyenne CLEARS the 2nd hurdle. Buttercup's landing TEARS all but a few threads.

DARIAN joins the crowd and watches atop Sinbad.

CHEYENNE kicks Buttercup, accelerating her gallop towards the final hurdle.

THE GIRTH hangs by a lone thread.

CHEYENNE grits her teeth, hunkers down. Buttercup POUNDS the dust. The HURDLE is upon her. Buttercup PUSHES OFF.

The girth SNAPS -- Cheyenne TUMBLES beneath the huge horse's belly and is immediately TRAMPLED by it's rear legs and left in a crumpled heap.

THE CROWD gasps and rushes out. Cheyenne is hurt, still conscious.

In the melee of onrushing people, Cheyenne looks up to see DARIAN run over.

DARIAN
Cheyenne, are you okay?

She catches Darian's eye. She knows. And then she's swarmed by the crowd.

EXT. THE STREET - DUSK

A streetlight HUMS and fades up to full brightness.

EXT. THE ORCHARD -- DUSK

Nick waits, alone. It's quiet, beautiful, creepy. He hears something RUSTLE, and turns to the thick grove of apple trees.

NICK

Cheyenne?

Nothing. He checks his watch. Then gives up, turns to go, and practically LEAPS out of his skin.

NICK

Darian -- Christ, you scared the hell out of me.

Darian stands hands on hips, scrutinizing him. Her demeanor is dark, sinister.

DARIAN

Out for stroll?

NICK

Actually, I thought you were Cheyenne.

DARIAN

Now you're dumping me for Cheyenne.

NICK

Don't be ridiculous, Darian.

DARIAN

Maybe you'd like to go visit her in the hospital.

NICK

What are you talking about?

DARIAN

Cheyenne took a spill at the stables today.

Nick stares at Darian. He can't believe what he's suspecting.

NICK

Is she all right?

Darian looks at Nick.

DARIAN

Yeah.

(beat)

You can never be too careful, Nick.

CUT TO:

EXT. GUEST HOUSE -- DAY

A gorgeous sunny day. Amy turns the corner into Nick's yard, suddenly--

DARIAN'S VOICE

Hi Amy.

Amy spins around. Darian's sitting at a picnic table on the opposite side of the fence, working on her insect collection.

AMY

Hello Darian.

Amy turns to Nick's door.

DARIAN

I was wondering Amy, have you ever been up to the lookout?

AMY

You mean up the canyon road?

DARIAN

The make out place.

AMY

(shaking her head)

Not since High School.

DARIAN

It's nice, you should go sometime.

Amy stares at him, then....

DARIAN

Nick took me up there... maybe he'd take you.

Nick opens the door.

INT. GUEST HOUSE -- CONTINUING

NICK

Hi. What a nice surprise.

Amy stares at him, brushes by....

AMY
What's the deal with that little
girl, Nick?

NICK
Darian.

Amy sits on the edge of the couch, looks at Nick seriously.

AMY
She just told me that you took her
up to the Cold Canyon overlook. Is
that true?

Nick looks away, sighs.

AMY
Nick! How could you do that! She's
a kid!

NICK
It's not what it looks like. We
just went for a ride!

AMY
Well what did you do with her up
there Nick?

NICK
Nothing! Don't be silly!

AMY
Nick...!

NICK
Nothing happened!

AMY
Did you touch her?

NICK
I... she... kissed me. It was
innocent. I stopped it right away--

Amy stares....

AMY
That was a mistake, Nick.

NICK
Well I know that now!

Amy shakes her head. Considers.

EXT. GUEST HOUSE -- LATER THAT NIGHT

The lights are out, spare an oscillating blue glow.

INT. GUEST HOUSE -- NIGHT

The computer is atop Nick's desk. the clutter of papers appears more ordered. We PAN off the desk to find --

NICK passed out on the couch, still dressed. We move in on him, half-expecting something to STARTLE us from the still, but nothing does.

INT TONE COPY ROOM -- DAY

Nick pulls up at the front counter as TEX spins from a computer, copy machines churning in the b.g. Nick hands him the disk.

NICK
A printout?

TEX (nodding)
When?

NICK (guiltily)
Morning meeting?

TEX
Ouch.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM -- DAY

The entire group is seated around the conference table. Nick takes a seat opposite Amy. She stares daggers at him.

Michael clears his throat.

MICHAEL
First, let me remind you about the benefit this Thursday. Mandatory attendance. It's for a good cause and I want to soak everyone in the room for all they're worth. Okay. Anderson... what have you got?

Nick throws a look at the door.

NICK
Actually, I was hop--

--Tex shows up in the doorway with the disk in his hand.

NICK (up on his feet)
Here we go....

TEX
It's blank.

NICK (stops)
What?

TEX
The disk is blank.

NICK
That's impossible.

TEX
It's blank. There's nothing on it.

INT. NICK'S HOUSE - DAY

Nick at his computer, simultaneously playing his now silent micro-cassettes and frantically shoving in and ejecting disks, each one coming up "DISK EMPTY" or "0 FILES ON DISK"... as our ANGLE MOVES CLOSER on his expression of growing panic.

Suddenly his eyes see something off to the side.

A KEY CHAIN

with a car-alarm sort of box with 3 buttons on it lodged in his clip board.

NICK plucks it off: clearly he has not seen it before. He presses one of the buttons, cueing a surprisingly loud computer voice:

VOICE
Fuck you asshole.

Nick stares at the box, then catches something out of the corner of his eye.

HIS POV

An edge of the carpet is lifted in a corner of the room.

NICK

moves across the room, reaches down, pulls up the carpet, lifting it away to reveal:

A TRAP DOOR sunk in the flooring. Nick clears away the carpet, swings up the trap door. Below, a crude set of wooden steps lead into the darkness.

INT. A DARK ROOM - DAY

Nick climbs down the wooden stairs, a flashlight his only illumination.

He finds himself in a tiny windowless room. He searches around for a light, bumps into a swinging lamp, reaches up, turns it on.

It FLARES and jitters in the dark. And Nick is horrified at what he sees:

One wall is a shrine to Nick Anderson. -- print variations of "Nick & Darian 4-ever", poems, drawings. Nick surveys with a look of disbelief and fright. There's a blanket and an old set of couch cushions. Heart-shaped pillows are needle-pointed with "NICK". There are candles, halfburned down on a table. Paper valentines rim the shrine.

Nick is frightened and disgusted all at once. He turns, there's a door. He opens it.

EXT. CAR PORT - DAY

Nick emerges from a door hidden at one side of the carport. He sighs.

INT. GUEST HOUSE - DAY

With a GRINDING, SQUEALING sound, Nick uses a screwgun to toenail long sheetmetal screws into the trapdoor.

He falls back, out of breath. The door is history.

EXT. GUEST HOUSE -- DAY

From inside, the SOUND of computer keys rapidly CLACKING. We PAN across to the HOUSE, and MOVE IN to the gabled 2nd story window. We hear the sound of a TOUCH TONE PHONE.

INT. DARIAN'S ROOM -- DAY

Darian sits on the floor, back against the wall, pushing a number on her princess phone, as something akin to a STRAUSS WALTZ plays from her stereo.

INT. GUEST HOUSE -- DAY

Nick is hunched over, consumed, shuffling papers, clacking computer keys with a fiery intensity. Phone RINGS. He grabs it.

NIC

Yeah.

DARIAN

I think we should talk....

Nick immediately HANGS UP the phone.

INT. DARIAN'S ROOM -- DAY

She has almost no reaction, sighs, presses the "REDIAL" button. We hear the number automatically dialed.

INT. GUEST HOUSE -- DAY

The phone RINGS again. Nick clicks off the ringer. But the phone machine CLICKS on.

DARIAN'S VOICE

I know you can hear me....

Nick reaches over and lowers the volume to silence.

INT. DARIAN'S ROOM -- DAY

Again Darian presses "REDIAL". The Strauss provides a lilting counterpoint to her brittle but controlled fury.

INT. GUEST HOUSE -- DAY

The phone machine's red LED message counter shifts from "1" to "2".

Nick stares to his computer, totally focused, muttering dialogue as if possessed.

HIS FINGERS

CLACK away at lightning speed.

PHONE MACHINE

The red LED message light shifts from "4" to "5".

EXT. GUEST HOUSE -- LATE EVENING

A locksmith's van is now parked in the drive.

INT. GUEST HOUSE -- DAY

Nick is still jamming. Coffee, opened pizza carton, other delivery food fully evident.

In the b.g., a LOCKSMITH removes the cylinder from Nick's front door.

LOCKSMITH
Sure you want the kryptonite? It's
forty bucks extra.

Nick looks up, then over to his phone machine.

PHONE MACHINE

the red LED shifts form "98" to "99".

NICK
Gimme the kryptonite.

INT. NICK'S CAR -- DAY

The engine REVS. Nick drives, all business.

INT. TONE COPY ROOM -- DAY

The LASER PRINTER RUMBLES. Nick and Tex stare at it as it spits out collated copies of the interview.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM -- DAY

The staff and Michael are assembling at the table. Nick moves inside, carrying a stack of copies, makes eye contact with Amy, smiles. Amy doesn't smile, but doesn't scowl either.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET -- DAY

Nick's Valiant pulls up before a small house, circa 1920, on a pleasant block of similar understated homes.

INT. NICK'S CAR -- DAY

He checks the address with his circled classified section and gets out.

INT. GARAGE APARTMENT -- DAY

This place is smaller and far less spectacular. We find Nick in the cramped kitchen with a plump older woman, MRS. GARR. He is writing a check.

MRS. GARR

It's just me and my grandson. You say you're a writer?

Nick tears off the check, hands it to her.

NICK

I'm very quiet.

MRS. GARR

(examining check)

Well I gotta get a plumber in to fix the shower and have Steve give you a fresh coat of paint. First of the month alright?

Nick restrains himself from visibly reacting.

NICK

I'm really in kind of a hurry. Like to get in this week if I could.

MRS. GARR

Well, why don't let this check clear and get that shower fixed. I'll let you know early next week.

EXT. THE HOUSE -- LATE AFTERNOON

Nick shuts his car off early, gliding silently to a stop. He looks up to the house. The Mercedes are gone.

EXT. THE DRIVEWAY -- SAME

Nick walks softly, glancing up to the gabled attic window. Passes through the carport into the rear.

As he approaches the guest house, a CRY OF PAIN strikes out, followed by SOBBING -- Darian's.

Nick pauses, starts up again, when there's another wounded CRY. He runs to the back door.

INT. HOUSE -- DAY

Nick runs into the living room.

NICK

Darian?

Another cry -- upstairs. He swings around the sculpted oak bannister and bounds up the staircase.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY -- CONTINUING

Nick runs up and hears Darian behind the closed bathroom door. He grabs the handle -- locked.

NICK

Darian!

Nick steps back and powers the door open, SMASHING it back on its hinges.

INT. BATHROOM -- CONTINUING

Nick stares ahead. Darian sits on the edge of the tub in her bathing suit, clutching her linoleum gouge in a hand, face streaked with tears.

DARIAN

Why wouldn't you answer me?

Nick looks down. On her thigh, she has etched a zig-zagged line. Suddenly, the line flushes with blood.

NICK

Oh Christ.

Nick grabs a hand towel off the rack and presses it against her leg.

NICK

Hold that.

He flings open the medicine cabinet, pulling out gauze, tape, other first-aid supplies.

DARIAN

I was writing your name...I wanted to hurt you... I'm sorry, Nick....

Nick glances to her and gets work.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY -- LATER

It's quiet and still. Darian sits on an antique church pew which lines the wall, back-lit by a stained glass window in the landing. Her thigh is bandaged: she stares silently at the floor. Nick leans against the wall.

DARIAN
I hate myself.

He looks at her, then away.

NICK
Stop it.

DARIAN
I don't know why I did all that stuff. Now you do hate me.

NICK
I don't hate you... but I think you should try and ... talk to someone.

A beat. Darian looks to him, fearfully.

DARIAN
Will you come and see me ride at the championship?

Nick looks up, into her eyes. He softens.

NICK
Sure sure I will.

Darian's eyes light up with a hesitant smile. Almost inaudibly, she says --

DARIAN
Thank you.

EXT. GUEST HOUSE -- TWILIGHT

Nick comes up the steps carrying a big bag of groceries and fumbling for his new keys, then stops and looks down.

Left on his doorstep, a bunch of fresh-picked FLOWERS with a handwritten note attached. He picks them up.

THE NOTE
"Please forgive me."

INT. GUEST HOUSE - SAME

Nick moves into the kitchen, tosses the flowers into the garbage.

INT/EXT. POV FROM DARIAN'S WINDOW - DUSK

Amy pulls up in her Honda, climbs out, moves up the driveway towards Nick's house. She carries a small potted cactus.

INT. NICK'S HOUSE - DUSK

Nick opens the door to Amy. The stereo plays NAT KING COLE. All around the room, are packing boxes, half-full, the room in disarray.

NICK

Hey!

AMY

Brought you a peace offering.

She looks around sees the boxes.

AMY

Moving?

NICK

I gotta get outta here.

AMY

Darian.

NICK

Hard to believe a little girl could make so much trouble.

Nick smiles, he moves to the fridge, fishes out a bottle of wine. Shows it to Amy. She smiles, nods.

AMY

If it's worth anything I'm glad your moving.

He hands her a glass, slides into the chair opposite.

AMY

Hey Anderson. I wanna ask you a question.

NICK

What?

AMY
Next week. Michael's benefit.
You're going?

NICK
Have to... right?

Amy hesitates, look off, out the window.

AMY
I want you to go with me.

NICK
Together? Like on a date?

AMY
Okay nevermind. I should know better....

NICK (laughs)
Wait a second, wait! What happened
to the don't get your meat where you
lay your eggs thing.

AMY
Bread. Where you make your bread.

NICK (grinning)
Yeah well what happened to that?
Words you live by.

Amy looks at her shoes.

AMY
I just don't wanna see you slow-
dancing with Samantha. Or maybe
some thirteen year old.

NICK
Fourteen.

AMY
I wouldn't like it.

Nick moves up on his knees, slides between her legs, moves
his lips close to hers. Amy wraps her arms around her neck,
pulls him to her. They kiss passionately, longingly.

EXT. GUEST HOUSE -- SAME

The SOFT MUSIC wafts gently in the breeze. OUR ANGLE drifts
up from Nick's house to Darian's gabled bedroom window....

INT. DARIAN'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Darian sits, back to the wall, staring transfixed at a solitary candle, listening to music float up from Nick's place, tears rolling freely down her face.

INT/EXT. POV OF STREET FROM DARIAN'S WINDOW - NIGHT

Amy's car is illuminated by the pool of light from an overhead streetlight. CRICKETS. The wind RIPPLES lightly through the trees.

EXT. GUEST HOUSE -- NIGHT

Much later. Lights are off; everything is quiet and still. Just crickets.

INT. GUEST HOUSE -- NIGHT

The windows are open, the curtains blow gently in the night breeze. We find NICK and AMY curled together under the covers, sleeping soundly. We move in closer... closer...

REVERSE ANGLE -- DARIAN

stands over them, silent, solemn. Slowly, carefully, she reaches down and pulls back the covers, exposing them.

She gazes down at their bodies. Calmly scrutinizes them.

NICK

turns, as though made restless by her presence, then suddenly opens his eyes and BOLTS upright.

He looks around... no one in the house. He regards the drawn-back covers. Amy stirs, but doesn't wake. He pulls the covers up, lays back uneasily.

INT. GUEST HOUSE -- MORNING

Nick dressed, hair still wet, KNOCKS on the partially closed bathroom door.

NICK

Room service, lady. Whattya havin'?

Amy pokes her face out. Smiles.

AMY

Muffin. Coffee.

Nick smiles, kisses her.

NICK
Back in a minute.

EXT. HOUSE -- DAY

Nick heads down the drive, a spring in his step, he barely glances towards Darian's window.

INT. GUEST HOUSE -- DAY

The bathroom door is mostly open. Amy is in the shower, half-singing. She shuts off the water.

A MYSTERY POV

approaches the door. Amy opens the shower curtain. Still HUMMING, she steps into view, towel around her, takes another towel and wraps it around her hair.

IN THE FOGGED MIRROR

A BLURRED FIGURE approaches. Amy lifts her head to face the mirror, WIPES the mirror's mist to reveal --

NICK standing with a cardboard cup of coffee.

NICK
Coffee for the lady?

Amy grabs her heart.

AMY
Whew... okay....

INT. GUEST HOUSE -- LATER

Nick and Amy are at the little table finishing coffee and muffins. Amy is rummaging through her handbag, looking for something.

NICK
Plans today?

AMY
Sunday's darkroom day... there it is.

She rescues a roll of film from the bottom of the bag.

NICK
Why don't you spend the day helping
me move?

AMY
Get real Anderson.

Nick smiles.

NICK
You're blowing an excellent opportunity.

AMY
For what?

NICK
A male-female kinda bonding kinda
thing.

Amy moves for the door.

AMY
Call you later.

EXT. HOUSE -- MORNING

Amy approaches her Honda, practically skipping, there's a curious sound, the RUMBLE of rollerblades, and Darian appears, stops by Amy's car.

Amy looks to her warily: she seems sweet-faced.

AMY
Hello, Darian. How are you today?

DARIAN
Fine.

Darian looks to her toes. Amy digs for her keys.

AMY
That's good.

DARIAN
Hey, Amy?

AMY
Yeah?

DARIAN
What'd you do last night?

AMY

What do you mean?

DARIAN

I mean you spent the night at Nick's house, didn't you?

AMY

Darian--

DARIAN

--I mean, you didn't, you know--

AMY

--What?

Darian smiles conspiratorially.

DARIAN

You didn't fuck him did you?

Amy stares at her unsmiling.

AMY

Darian, lemme explain a little something... One day, when you're all grown up and you have a real relationship, you'll look back and realize your feelings for Nick were just a thing... just a crush.... In fact, I'd bet by the time school starts, you'll have forgotten all about him.

DARIAN

God Amy, I hope when I grow up I'm as smart as you.

Amy is sickened by Darian's dripping patronizing.

AMY

Darian, go play.

Amy climbs into her car, starts up and pulls away. Darian watches after her, her face turning to stone.

EXT. AMY'S HOUSE -- DAY

A small, rented house in a low-end neighborhood. Amy's Honda is parked in the drive.

EXT. GARAGE -- DAY

In the back of the house. Weather-beaten wood, just this side of dilapidated. Amy walks up, big bag slung over her shoulder. She opens the combination lock and swings back the latch. She enters, pulling the door shut behind her. Above the door, a red bulb illuminates.

INT. DARKROOM

The garage facade disguises a well-sealed, light-tight darkroom. Like most darkrooms, it is rather confined -- not for the claustrophobic.

CUTTING:

Amy stands at the enlarger, bathed in the dull red light. A radio plays softly. She sets the timer, flips a switch, and the white light of the enlarger replaces the red for the 5 second exposure. Then the red returns.

Amy moves about adroitly, pulling the 8 X 10 from the easel and storing it in a paper safe, then shifting the enlarger's negative and setting up for a new print.

EXT. SHED DOOR -- DAY

Angle moves in on the opened latch. Someone's HAND gently swings the latch closed and squeezes the lock. It CLICKS.

INT. DARKROOM -- CONTINUING

Red light still on, Amy pours chemicals from brown gallon jugs into the 16 X 20 trays in the long work basin. She crinkles her nose from the noxious fumes and steps over to a wall switch.

CLOSE -- WALL SWITCH

Labeled "FAN". She flips it on.

CLOSE -- VENT ON WALL

It comes on with a low WHIRR, forcing air and causing the little attached STRINGS to flutter.

EXT. SHED -- DAY

We're CLOSE on the INTAKE VENT, an 8 X 8 square metal grill. A square of CARDBOARD is placed over, blocking it off, held in place by a strip of masking tape applied by the HANDS.

INT. DARKROOM

Although the WHIRRING SOUND continues unabated, the fluttering strings go suddenly LIMP.

Amy, unaware, stands rocking the developer tray. She smiles as an 8 X 10 of Nick's BBQ group appears. She pulls it out with tongs, slips it into the stop bath tray.

EXT. SHED -- DAY

Now, a sealed extra-large ZIP-LOCK FREEZER BAG with strips of masking tape at its mouth is brought to the cardboard pad on the vent and, in one lightning movement, pulled open and pressed against the pad.

The HANDS press the masking tape to form a seal -- and now we move in to see what the bulbous, paper mache looking gray object is -- a WASPS NEST, at this point only a few drones venturing out.

INT. DARKROOM

Amy pulls another undeveloped 8 X 10 from the storage bin, drops it in the developer tray, rocks it back and forth. An IMAGE begins to appear. Can't quite make it out, seems a portrait.

ANGLE ON VENT

The strips still hanging limp.

AMY

continues to rock the tray. The IMAGE growing more pronounced. Amy looks perplexed.

EXT. SHED -- DAY

The HANDS now violently SQUEEZE the bag and nest, causing a frantic BUZZING SOUND as the nest breaks apart like a busted pinata, spilling literally hundreds of pissed-off WASPS.

INT. DARKROOM

Amy looks on with disbelief as now a giant closeup of Darian's devilishly grinning mug appears....

Amy reacts, horrified, reflexively stepping back as --

EXT. SHED

--the CARDBOARD is YANKED up, exposing the intake, causing the swarm to be SUCKED up like Mom's Electrolux.

INT. DARKROOM -- CONTINUING

-- as the strings suddenly FLUTTER to life, immediately followed by a BLIZZARD of wasps BLASTING OUT the vent with a DEAFENING BUZZ!

Amy whips around, is instantly attacked by insects. She SCREAMS, stumbling to the door, desperately turning, pushing, kicking, as --

DARIAN'S PHOTO

seems to grin with evil delight...

AMY

collapses onto the floor, covered with wasps, struggles across the room. She grabs at something under the sink, pulls out a heavy stainless-steel developing tank.

She struggles to the edge of the counter, looks up...

POV

A window above the counter is completely painted over. The wasps BUZZ angrily.

Amy hurls the cylinder... it BASHES against the molding, CRACKS the window, but fails to break through.

Amy GROANS in anguish. Heaves herself up on the lip of the counter, stretches forward to retrieve the cylinder.

The WASPS cling to her face, leaving her with growing lumps and welts...

She cocks her arm and throws again... the cylinder CRASHES into the window and SHATTERS moldings and all.

The room is FLOODED with daylight... the wasps immediately head for freedom.

Amy is slumped against the counter, slides to the floor.

DARIAN'S PHOTO

goes completely BLACK.

EXT. GUEST HOUSE -- MAGIC HOUR

End of the day light sparkles through the gently RUSTLING orchard as we slowly move towards the guest house, hearing Nick's phone RINGS.

NICK'S VOICE

Hello?

INT. GUEST HOUSE -- CONTINUING

Nick sits at his desk cradling the phone. Our angle creeps towards him from behind....

NICK

Hi, Michael. No, I'm just messing around with a few things. No... no, it's fine....

A KNOCK at the screen door. Nick turns in his chair.

Darian mimes, "Can I come in?" -- Nick doesn't respond. Darian takes that as an okay and steps inside, thoughtfully closing the door gently behind her.

DARIAN

Don't want to bug you, just brought you the info about the competition.

Darian holds a "post-it" note stuck to her forefinger.

Nick glares at Darian, turns away.

NICK (into phone)

What's wrong?

Nick's face slowly grows slack.

NICK

When? No. I'll... I'll be right over. Yes.

Nick hangs up the phone and stares forward, shell-shocked.

NICK

It's Amy... she's in the hospital. Some kind of accident....

Darian gasps, covers her mouth.

DARIAN

Oh Nick.

She moves to him, cradles his head in her arms.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. STABLES -- DAY

The parking lot is chockablock with cars. Day-glo vested PARKING HELPERS direct traffic onto a lawn area.

THE JUMPING COURSE

is lightly hosed down to inhibit dust. Chalk lines are freshly laid.

VIEWING STANDS

Colorful flags highlight the festive feel. A healthy crowd of PARENTS and others file in.

INT. STABLES -- DAY

Cheyenne sits on a bench at her locker in street clothes, her right arm in a cast. She looks down lamentably to her helmet and outfit and begins to gather it all in a bag.

Darian is leaning into the little mirror on the inside of her locker door, flossing her teeth, making sure everything's perfect.

DARIAN

He literally cried on my shoulder.
Poor baby. Practically broke my
heart.

Cheyenne regards her disdainfully.

CHEYENNE

Well how is she?

Darian shrugs.

DARIAN

They think she'll live, but....

Darian licks her teeth, closes the door.

DARIAN

These things change people. Anyway,
if anything good can come of it, I
feel like it's really brought Nick
and I closer.

Cheyenne stares at Darian. Suspicion becoming certainty. Darian grabs her helmet and crop and starts out.

DARIAN

You'll sit with him won't you?

CHEYENNE

If I see him. If he comes.

DARIAN

He'll be here. Aren't you going to tell me to break a leg?

But Darian disappears without waiting for a response. Cheyenne looks after her, turns back, upset.

CHEYENNE

Break 'em both.

INT. GUEST HOUSE -- DAY

In Nick's date book the "post-it" reminder, "Darian's Championship Day!" flutters lightly from a breeze. Nick's HAND pulls it off, revealing underneath, a glossy TICKET for "TONE CELEBRATES" at a downtown club on the same date.

Nick sits back in his desk chair and gazes pensively out the window when a BUZZ causes him to look down to see a lone WASP flitting between the screen and half-opened window.

Nick allows the wasp to come to rest at the window's bottom. He slowly grasps the window's top and SLAMS it down.

EXT. STABLES -- DAY

A young GIRL steers her horse over the course's hurdles, but KNOCKS off the last bar.

The CROWD politely applauds. An ANNOUNCER repeats the young girl and her horse's name.

A panel of JUDGES jot notes.

DARIAN

sits atop Sinbad, helmet on, next in the orderly line of GIRLS ON HORSES. She searches the crowd.

DARIAN'S POV -- GRAND STANDS

PANNING the faces... a WOMAN holding binoculars... ANOTHER with a sun umbrella... a CHILD with PARENTS... no Nick.

ANGLE begins shifting quicker, landing, then lurching to another shot, back and forth.

P.A. ANNOUNCER

Miss Darian Forrester, Darian Forrester.

Darian is oblivious to her cue, consumed with the realization that Nick is a no-show. She jerks on the reins and kicks her horse hard.

EXT. CHIC DOWNTOWN CLUB -- LATE DAY

The ultra-trendy CROWD sips champagne and huddles in cliques. 75-YEAR-OLD face-lifted WOMEN chat alongside sunglassed HEAVY METAL TYPES. DANCERS in go-go cages writhe to the thumping MUSIC.

NICK, in a somber grey suit, makes his way through the crowd, approaching....

A group of partygoers, including Tex, an unlikely Italian suit, and Samantha, looking typically blonde and beautiful.

SAMANTHA

Did you get in to see her?

TEX

Nah, they wouldn't let me. But, Simpson said she looked terrible. It's gonna take a while before she gets out of the hospital.

SAMANTHA

The police said the nests can build up anywhere.

TEX

But in a vent? I mean... Amy used her darkroom.

Nick walks up, Samantha doesn't see him.

SAMANTHA

Fortunately, I'm on a first name basis with my exterminator....

Nick stares at her.

NICK

Excuse me....

He walks away.

EXT. CHIC CLUB -- LATE DAY

A dented taxi pulls up. The door is opened by a VALET for Darian to step out, arriving regally, still in her riding attire.

INT. CHIC CLUB -- LATE DAY

The room is now hushed. Michael Little stands on a portable stage with several society types.

MICHAEL

...and I think it's important, in our busy lives to remember those less fortunate. I'd like to thank you all for your generosity and hope you'll continue to support our cause. And with that, I'd like to introduce you to the American President of NANDEC, Mrs Abigail Spaulding....

Michael hangs a hand out to a lean, fifty year old woman (ABIGAIL SPAULDING), glittering with diamonds....

APPLAUSE from all.

AT THE FRONT ENTRANCE

Darian steps inside, searching the crowd, spotting Nick, making a bee-line....

NICK

casually glances across the room as the applause settles and sees Darian approaching. He glances back to see Michael approaching from the other side. He ducks Michael, moves to intercept Darian... she arrives at his side and greets him with a kiss, as if he was her husband.

DARIAN

Hi sweetheart.

A SUIT glances over, raising an eyebrow. Nick looks furtively around. Then tautly, through his teeth --

NICK (to Darian)

What are you doing?

DARIAN

Missed you at the show. Something come up?

A bejeweled SOCIETY WOMAN looks over disdainfully. Nick sees and, again, tries to keep it under wraps.

NICK
Get out of here.

Darian SLAPS Nick hard in the face.

DARIAN
I guess you're too busy licking ass
to care about me!

A collective GASP. The people around Nick turn, not believing what just came from this little girl.

Nick takes Darian firmly by the elbow and walks her out towards the front entrance. Darian turns back over her shoulder to the crowd and smiles apologetically.

DARIAN
Forgive us... I'll have him back in
a jiffy.

INT. VESTIBULE -- DAY

Nick SLAMS his hand against the wall beside Darian, who is effectively cornered by him.

NICK
I want you to get out of here, go
home, and stay the fuck away from
me.

DARIAN
I thought we were--

NICK
--We're nothing! You're a child!

DARIAN
But I love you Nick. And you love
me.

NICK
Don't say that! You don't love any-
thing! You're sick! You need help!

Darian stares at Nick, the anger building behind her eyes.

DARIAN
Don't talk to me that way!

She lashes out with her hand. SMACKS Nick hard across the face. He grabs her arm, twists....

Darian SCREAMS, red-faced, FLAILS at Nick.

INT. CLUB -- SAME

Fringe Party-goers turn and stare at the NOISES coming from the vestibule door.

Michael notices, WHISPERS to an assistant, clearly displeased.

Abigail Spaulding continues her earnest SPEECH.

INT. VESTIBULE -- CONTINUING

Darian is convulsing in a furious spasm of violent hysteria, SCREAMING ANGRILY.

Nick throws an arm around her, trying to control her. He slaps his palm across her mouth, she suddenly quiets, wrapping her arms around him, kissing him passionately, sliding her legs sensuously up his thighs.

Revulsed, Nick PUSHES her off him, sending her SMACKING into the wall. She stares at him. Smiles salaciously.

NICK
You're pathetic.

Nick spins and pulls open the door, goes back into the club.

INT. CLUB -- CONTINUING

Nick steps out, door closing behind. He looks around the room. The party-goers stare. He straightens his tie, runs his fingers through his hair.

Michael Little moves up to Nick, jaw clenched, face tight, gestures at Nick to follow him.

INT. MEN'S ROOM -- DAY

Michael and Nick BANG through the door.

Nick leans against the tile wall opposite the urinals.
Michael turns to him and stares.

MICHAEL

Look Anderson, I am very concerned
that your personal life not inter-
fere with an extremely demanding
job. There's plenty of good writers
in line behind you.

NICK

I realize that.

Michael clamps his hands behind his back.

MICHAEL

If I find out you're involved in
something unseemly, I'll see to it
you are no longer employed in the
magazine business. Is that clear?

INT. NICK'S VALIANT -- LATE DAY

Nick is staring straight ahead, mind racing.

He signals a lane change, starts over -- a CAR HONKS -- he
jerks back. As the car guns around him, the DRIVER sticks
his arm out the window, giving Nick the finger.

EXT. SANTA MONICA HOUSE -- LATE DAY

Nick KNOCKS firmly on Mrs. Garr's front door. No response.
He knocks more insistently.

NICK

Mrs. Garr, it's Nick Anderson. Can
I speak with you please?

He can see her peering through the peep hole.

MRS. GARR

Go away! It's taken!

NICK

What? Mrs. Garr!

He KNOCKS harder than every.

MRS. GARR

You stop or I'll call the police! I don't rent to drug dealers!

NICK

What?

MRS. GARR

That's right, the girl you rent from told me.

Nick's horrified.

NICK

Mrs. Garr, she's lying!

The door suddenly opens. A hulking no-nonsense STEVEN.

STEVEN

I'll give you three to get out of here.

EXT. MOTEL -- LATE DAY -- POV FROM CAR

MOVING past a respectable looking place with neon "Vacancy" sign lit and "Kitchenettes Available".

INT. MOTEL OFFICE -- DAY

The MANAGER comes out of a back room wiping his mouth.

MANAGER

Can I help you?

NICK

I need a room.

The manager nods, stares at Nick calmly....

MANAGER

I got rooms.

NICK

I'd like one with a kitchen.

MANAGER

Could give you a weekly rate.

NICK
I need to move tonight. Otherwise
I'm not interested.

The Manager looks at him a little warily, nods.

INT. NICK'S VALIANT -- DAY

Nick driving again. A surge of relief courses through him as he stops at a red light.

He notices some CHILDREN playing on a lawn. Normal children. He smiles, drifts.

The car behind him HONKS. Nick looks up -- the light has changed. He waves sorry and moves on.

EXT STREET NEAR HOUSE -- DAY

Nick's car approaches from down the block.

INT. NICK'S CAR -- SAME

Nick reacts to what he sees up ahead.

HIS POV -- THE HOUSE

Swarming with police cars.

Nick suddenly looks up in his rear-view mirror.

A POLICE CAR is flashing it's lights, ordering him over.

Confused, Nick complies, slowing to a stop before the house. He turns the engine off and starts to get out. The air is a nightmare of FLASHING lights, RADIO HISS.

COP OVER P.A.
Stay in the car!

Nick recoils. All around him a posse of police officers take position. A COP comes to his window.

COP
Nicholas Anderson?

NICK

Yeah?

COP

Put your hands on your head and step slowly from the car.

The cop opens Nick's door. Nick climbs out awkwardly. The cop shoves his legs apart, frisks him roughly.

NICK

What's going on!

The cop slaps a cuff on one hand, jerks Nick's other arm around, cuffs the two hands around his back.

COP

You're under arrest for sexual assault of a minor.

NICK

What!! No way!! Hold it!!

Despite his protests, Nick is firmly ushered to the rear of a cruiser. He looks up to the activity in the driveway.

DARIAN

is being gingerly escorted by a POLICE WOMAN to an unmarked car. She has a black eye, assorted bruises and abrasions. She's wrapped with a blanket like a traumatized rape victim, disappearing into the back of the car.

NICK

is pushed into the cruiser. The car quickly takes off....

In the REAR WINDOW, Nick twists around, his face wracked with horror.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- DAY

A SERIES OF TIGHT SHOTS:

The room is crowded with COPS, a FEMALE CASE WORKER takes notes, Liv is sitting on the edge of the bed, Cliff standing nearby, and Darian lying in bed, looking every bit bewildered, teary, terribly shook up.

DARIAN

...We went swimming, hung out a few times -- it was nothing. He just wouldn't take no for an answer. He threw me down... and he hit me... I started crying... he kept hitting me and yelling...

(breaking down)

I was so scared.

Cliff stares at his daughter, anger written all over....

TWO COPS stand at the back of the room. Whisper....

COP

Oughtta leave the guy alone with Dad for an hour, be done with him.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM -- DAY

Drab green, acoustical tile. Nick sits opposite two DETECTIVES.

NICK

She kept calling me, hanging around, she scratched up my car, I tried to tell her parents, they wouldn't listen....

DETECTIVE ONE

Did you ever have sexual contact of any kind with this girl?

NICK

No.

DETECTIVE ONE

Did you ever at any time put your penis inside her vagina?

NICK

No! I never did anything to her. She's crazy... she's the one you oughta lock up!

DETECTIVE TWO

You think this is some kinda game Nick? You rape a girl, you act like--

NICK
I didn't rape anyone!

DETECTIVE TWO
Well we gotta a big problem Nick. A
big fucking problem!

Nick looks to them dreadfully.

DETECTIVE ONE
We found semen inside her, Nick.

Nick is shocked, unable to speak.

INT. POLICE HOLDING CELL -- LATE DAY

Hunched on a bench, Nick looks up at the sound of unlocking.

GUARD
Anderson?

INT. POLICE PARKING GARAGE -- DUSK

Nick walks with his head down, on either side of him are
Michael and an ATTORNEY.

NICK
I figured it out -- she got hold of
a condom. That's how she did it,
she came in and stole a condom from
the trash.

The lawyer shakes his head.

ATTORNEY
It's original anyway.

NICK
I never touched her!

He spins to Michael.

MICHAEL
Michael I swear I never touched
her!! You gotta believe me! She
made it up! She's crazy!

The three of them near a big black car.

MICHAEL

Nick, no one wants to believe you more than me. But right now, I'm going to have to suspend you from your position at the magazine. Until we see what the court decides.

NICK

Michael... please....

ATTORNEY

The parents are taking the girl away tonight, down the coast somewhere. Until that time, you're not permitted within a hundred feet of the house. Once they're gone, you have the right to gather your possessions and move out, I don't care where, just away.

NICK

She's sick, understand? Understand Michael?

MICHAEL

She's also a little girl, Nick. A fourteen year old girl.

Michael stares hard at Nick.

MICHAEL

You be the jury.

EXT. THE HOUSE -- TWILIGHT

The Mercedes trunk is open. Cliff loads in the last suitcase and SLAMS it shut.

EXT. STREET -- TWILIGHT

Nick's car is parked slightly down the block and wedged between two cars.

INT. NICK'S CAR -- TWILIGHT

Nick is slumped down in the driver's seat, peering into his side-view mirror.

NICK'S POV IN MIRROR

Liv escorts DARIAN from the house to the car. Darian teeters, wiped out and pale. As she's about to get in the Mercedes' rear, she LOOKS up towards Nick's car.

NICK

sinks down in his seat. Hears the ENGINE start up. Then carefully dares a peek into the mirror again.

THE MERCEDES rolls down the drive, onto the street, and pulls away.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE HOUSE -- NIGHT

Except for the porch light, the big house sits dark. Behind it, the GUEST HOUSE is lit up inside. Nick has parked his car by the car port.

INT. GUEST HOUSE -- NIGHT

Nick is packing everything up. He empties a drawer into a box, looks around at a bunch of other boxes already packed, grabs one, hefts it onto his shoulder and heads out, gently kicking open the screen door.

EXT. GUEST HOUSE -- CONTINUING

Nick comes down the steps, walking around to his car. He sets the box down and opens the door, crams it inside.

NEW ANGLE -- MYSTERY POV

From further away, someone is watching. Nick closes the door and heads back up the steps, pulls back the door. After a moment, we SEE him through the upstairs window....

The ANGLE moves forward.

INT. GUEST HOUSE -- NIGHT

Nick debates what's next. Phone machine, computer, etc.

EXT. GUEST HOUSE -- NIGHT

The MYSTERY POV looks up the steps towards the screen door and begins to ascend.

INT. GUEST HOUSE -- NIGHT

Nick yanks the computer's plugs and cords, carefully wrapping them.

ANGLE -- FRONT DOOR

a SHADOW from the porch light falls over the landing --

NICK

has no idea, continuing his effort.

THE DOOR HANDLE

begins to turn slowly....

NICK

goes into the closet, digs around, then turns and DROPS the box with a SHOUT!!

REVERSE

Cheyenne jumps....

NICK

Cheyenne! Jesus, don't do that!
(catching his breath)
What are you doing here?

CHEYENNE

I had to talk to you....

NICK

You shouldn't be here Cheyenne, I
got enough trouble....

CHEYENNE

You didn't do the things they say
you did, did you Nick? To Darian.
You didn't do those thing....

NICK

No.

CHEYENNE

I knew she made it up! I knew it!

NICK

You better go Cheyenne....

CHEYENNE

Did Darian ever tell you about a guy named Rick?

NICK

Yeah... something... she said he was a friend.

CHEYENNE

He was our camp counselor. He was 28 years old. Darian had a crush on him.

NICK

Where is he now?

CHEYENNE

He's dead. He ate some poison leaves and died. Everyone thought it was an accident. But... Darian knows stuff... stuff that other kids don't know....

(carefully)

She knows about wasps too....

Nick stares at Darian, sighs.

NICK

The police say the wasps were an accident.

CHEYENNE

But I think there might be proof. Darian kept a diary, Nick. She thinks no one knows about it, but I've seen it, she couldn't hide it from me. I think it must be up in her room somewhere. I think we should go and find it.

Nick thinks hard, sighs again, squats down to Cheyenne, takes her hand.

NICK

Cheyenne, I want you to listen to me. There's no diary. There was no poison, the wasps were an accident. None of this stuff is gonna make Amy better, and no one can bring Rick back. I think you and I have gotta forget all about Darian. She's sick, and sooner or later, she's gonna hurt you, you understand?

CHEYENNE

She's a liar! She lying about you!

NICK

But I'll be okay. I can take care of myself. I just want her out of my life forever. Unnerstand?

He takes her by the hand, stands.

NICK

Come on. You gotta go home.

EXT. DARIAN'S HOUSE - DAY

Nick walks Cheyenne to the street.

NICK

I'll walk you....

CHEYENNE

I'll be alright.

(responding to his look)

I done it a million times....

Cheyenne tugs on Nick's arm until he bends over, kisses him on the cheek.

CHEYENNE

Later!

She takes off, running down the street.

EXT. THE GUEST HOUSE -- NIGHT

Nick appears in the window, continues packing.

EXT. BACK OF HOUSE -- NIGHT

Cheyenne slips back up the driveway, glancing towards Nick's cottage, squirreling through the bushes and up onto the back porch of the house. She drags a milk crate to the door. She stands tip-toed, reaching above the top of the door frame.

CLOSE -- TOP OF FRAME

On a bent finishing nail, a KEY is hooked. Her hand finds it, pulls it off.

CHEYENNE steps down, opens the door and slips inside.

INT. KITCHEN -- NIGHT

The yellow porch bug light cuts geometric shapes into the room. Cheyenne looks around, steps through the entryway and disappears into the dark.

INT. GUEST HOUSE -- NIGHT

Nick finishes taping up a box, grabs it, lifts, turns and kicks open the door.

EXT. CARPORT -- NIGHT

Nick carries the box out, heaves it inside the car. Suddenly he freezes. We hear the soft strains of MUSIC. Nat King Cole.

Nick filled with dread, turns towards the dark house. He stares a moment, then moves towards the back of the house.

EXT BACK OF HOUSE -- CONTINUING

Nick turns the corner to see the back door wide open. He moves up the stairs to the door, sticks his head inside.

NICK (calling)
Cheyenne?

INT. BREAKFAST ROOMM -- NIGHT

Nick walks slowly through, pushing past the dining room service door.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Nick moves slowly around the bannister, the MUSIC is coming from upstairs.

NICK
Cheyenne? Is that you?

He starts slowly up the stairs.

NICK
I thought we made a deal?

INT. 2ND FLOOR HALLWAY -- NIGHT

Nick steps up on the landing to face --

DARIAN'S DOORWAY

Closed. The MUSIC emanating clearly from within. At door's bottom, the flickering light of candles. Nick cautiously approaches, heart pounding so loud he can hear it. He gently tries the handle -- locked.

Nick steps back, then RUSHES the door, leading with his shoulder, and SMASHING it off the lock, swinging the door wide OPEN.

NICK'S POV -- DARIAN'S ROOM

The shrine to all things Nick has been relocated and startlingly transformed into a grotesque temple of hatred. Every "Darian & Nick 4-Ever" valentine is shredded or splattered with blood-like red paint, and in the center of it all, framed by the bunch of dead flowers, is a make-shift altar, consisting of an ancient "KEN" doll with Darian's insect collection PINS impaled through it's genitals like a cupie doll -- and a PHOTOGRAPH.

Nick steps forward, picks up the photo.

It's the picture with Roberto Clemente. But young Nick's eyes have been gouged out. Suddenly, the MUSIC SCRATCHES, STOPS. Nick spins....

DARIAN is standing near the door of the room. She has the brass pull-down rod for the attic stairs.

DARIAN
I didn't want it to be this way
Nick. I only wanted to love you.

NICK
Darian, where's Cheyen--

DARIAN
--Shuttup! You wanna fuck her too?
Is that it?

NICK
Where's Cheyenne?

~~DARIAN~~
I came back for you Nick. My par-
ents wanted to take me away, but I
fooled them. I came back for you.

Nick tries to take a step around Darian.

Darian's face contorts, she swings the brass rod hard into
Nick's knee cap with a horrible CRAAACK!! Nick stumbles,
grabbing his leg.

She swings again, the rod WHOOSHES through the air, Nick
reels backwards ducking away....

Darian swings again, this time SMACKING Nick hard on the
back. He dives, circumvents her, makes the door. Darian
hits him hard on the neck with a sickening THUNK!

Nick desperately scrambles to the top of the stairs...
Darian stalks him, suddenly there's a VOICE....

CHEYENNE'S VOICE
Help! Nick! Help me!!

Nick looks up, realizing the voice comes from the open
stairs to the attic. Darian steps forward, swinging with
all her might. The brass rod WHOOSHES, catches Nick in the
brow with a horrible CRACK....

Nick falls backwards, hands grabbing uselessly for the
bannister. He tumbles down the stairs, CRASHES to a slid-
ing stop on the hard tile floor of the foyer.

He slowly raises his head, his eyes flutter.

NICK'S POV

He sees the slowly descending shape of Darian, silhouetted in the light from above.

DARIAN
Accidents happen, Nick. You can
never be too careful.

Darian raises the brass rod over the still stunned Nick when suddenly she is swiped by HEADLIGHT BEAMS. She looks up.

EXT. HOUSE -- NIGHT

The Mercedes SQUEALS into the drive.

INT. FOYER -- CONTINUING

Darian turns and darts back up the stairs. Nick struggles to get up.

Nick drags himself, agonizingly ascends the stairs as fast as he can.

INT. 2ND FLOOR -- NIGHT

Attic stairs are pulled down. Nick looks around -- no Darian -- and starts up.

EXT. HOUSE -- NIGHT

Cliff glances at Nick's car parked under the carport, races to front door. He tries the handle, locked, pounds on door.

CLIFF
Darian!

INT. ATTIC -- NIGHT

Nick emerges to find Cheyenne tied up on one of the carousel horses.

NICK
Cheyenne....

Nick drags himself onto the carousel, clearly in agony, begins to untie Cheyenne.

INT. FRONT DOOR -- NIGHT

The door slams open -- stopped by the CHAIN pulled across.

CLIFF
Open up, goddammit!!

Cliff suddenly powers the door open, snapping the chain.

INT. ATTIC -- CONTINUING

As Nick frees Cheyenne's hands, there's a sudden BANG -- he wheels around to see the attic trap door/stairs snapped up into place -- but no Darian.

Frozen, Nick scans the room. He hears Cliff's MUFFLED SHOUTS from downstairs when the carousel STARTS UP.

Nick reaches to hold on, but loses balance and falls. Cheyenne SCREAMS as the carousel quickly gathers speed, faster and faster, now accompanied by CALLIOPE MUSIC.

NICK
Cheyenne, hold on!

INT. STAIRWAY -- NIGHT

Cliff rushes up towards the sound to find the ceiling attic door shut tight. He turns to grab the brass pole -- but it's gone.

INT. ATTIC -- CONTINUING

ON the now WHIRLING carousel, Nick struggles to stand against excruciating pain.

As the light and shadows play off the horses going up and down, Darian can be seen, one hand steadying herself, the other clutching the heavy brass rod.

CHEYENNE
Behind you!!!

Nick turns to see Darian in mid-swing. WHOOOSH!!!

INT. 2ND FLOOR HALLWAY -- NIGHT

Cliff is standing on a little side table, hand straining frantically to reach the brass eye hook.

CLIFF

Darian! Hang on!!

INT. ATTIC -- NIGHT

Darian connects with a loud WHACK!! Nick takes it in the back of the head, stumbles and falls as the spinning carousel goes round. The attic background, a whirling blur.

INT. 2ND FLOOR HALLWAY -- NIGHT

Cliff's HAND is within an inch... FEET standing tip-toe to his limit....

The slender table's legs STRAIN from his weight....

INT. ATTIC -- NIGHT

Nick tries to stand. Looks back to see Darian move in for the kill...

INT. 2ND FLOOR HALLWAY -- NIGHT

Cliff suddenly GRABS it, yanks it down, scampers up....

INT. ATTIC -- CONTINUING

Darian nears Nick, the slender rod held high. But Nick dives forward, catches the brass rod with his fist, tries to twist it out of Darian's hands.

CLIFF

Darian!

DARIAN

Help me Daddy!

CLIFF

moves forward, steps onto the spinning platform.

CLIFF

Hang on baby.

NICK
Cliff, don't listen to her!

CLIFF
Shuttup you animal!

He charges, bull-like after Nick. He grabs Nick by the shirt, pulls him back, SLAMMING him down onto the floor.

Nick chokes, Cliff bends over him, wraps his fists around Nick's Neck. Nick can't breath, strains desperately against Cliff. The carousel continues WHIRLING dizzily....

CLIFF

looks up at Darian.

THE BRASS ROD

is lifted into the air, brought down with an incredible SWOOOSSHH!!!

CLIFF
Darian!!

The rod WHIPS through frame and CRAACKS Cliff hard in the head. Cliff falls back.... SWOOSH! Darian hits Cliff again!

Cheyenne SCREAMS....

WIDER

NICK tries desperately to scramble out from the sagging Cliff.

Darian SWINGS hard again. The rod SWOOSHES... Nick throws up an arm. There's a sickening CRACK! as the rod hits his forearm.

Nick struggles forward, inside the arc of the brass rod, grabs at Darian... misses.

Darian steps back, the room is a blur, spinning by. We hear Cheyenne SOB and urge Nick on....

Darian winds up for a final stunning blow.

Nick charges, dives for Darian's feet, grabs, as Darian WHACKS him hard on the back. Nick strains, gets a grip on Darian's calf and pulls hard....

Darian loses her balance and goes reeling backwards.... flying crazily into the air, spinning off the carousel, CRASHING to the floor.

CLOSE

Her head CRACKS into a beam at the edge of the floorboard.

NICK stumbles off the spinning carousel, grabs a hunk of two-by-four off the floor. He charges after Darian, clamps her chest down with a knee, swings board like a club up over his head... and stops....

CLOSE

Darian doesn't move.

NICK

stares at Darian's still body a moment, then rises, finds the control for the carousel, shuts it down.

CLIFF struggles to his feet, stumbles, moves quickly for his daughter, kneels, picks her up, cradles her in his arms.

Nick moves for Cheyenne, takes her by the hand. The two of them watch Cliff and Darian.

DARIAN

chokes, SOBS, opens her eyes, looks up at her father.

Her expression is cold, distant, blank. Slowly she turns her head, looks across at Nick.

NICK

stares back, then drops his head, looks away.

DARIAN

continues to stare.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. A BEDROOM -- DAY

We FLOAT gently, up and over the foot of a bed. CRICKETS CHIRP from out the open window. Leaves HISS in the wind.

Nick is curled up alone in the bed, sound asleep. There's a sound. A FOOTFALL. We MOVE IN close to Nick, hovering over his face. There's another FOOTSTEP.

Nick's eyes open, he's instantly awake, alert, but frozen in fear. A SHADOW falls over the bed. Another FOOTSTEP.

NICK'S HAND slides up under his pillow.

THE SHADOW moves over Nick's pillow, up his shoulder. His eye quivers, strains to the side. Suddenly he jumps, jerks up in bed. His throat emits a TIGHT, STRANGLED CRY!

He's got a FLASHLIGHT, wielding it like a club. He stares. Then softly sighs.

AMY

sits on the edge of the bed. She reaches out, gently touches Nick's chin. She seems none the worse for wear, fully recovered.

AMY

Easy. I know. Easy.

Nick sighs.

NICK

What time is it?

Amy kisses him gently, when he lowers the knife.

AMY

Almost ten. You been working late?

Nick smiles gently, leans forward, kisses Amy on the cheek.

NICK

Yeah. Come to bed.

Amy smiles. Nick pulls her on top of him. Suddenly off in the apartment somewhere, the phone RINGS.

They both freeze, looks the sound. The phone RINGS again.

AMY
Don't get it.

NICK
What if it's Michael?

AMY
Let 'em wait. Let 'em all wait.

They kiss, roll over on the bed.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. AN OFFICE -- DAY

The phone continues to RING at the other end of the line.

We're MOVE CLOSE over the top of a desk. A lamp, a penstand, a photograph of a thirtyish man, his arms around his wife, two small children grinning on either side.

We continue to MOVE over a telephone, it's switchhook lifted, the coiled line pulled up out of frame. The phone continuing to RING on the other end.

We follow the line up, the handset held by a young hand, the head turns away from us.

A large male hand reaches in, gently takes the reciever away.

MALE VOICE
It's okay, we'll try again later.

The hand hangs up the phone, as we go to....

A WIDER ANGLE

We're in a psychiatrist's office. DOCTOR POLLARD is standing over the desk. He smiles. He's the man from the picture.

DARIAN
If only he'd let me apologize. I'd feel so much better.

DARIAN is sitting in the Doctor's office chair, she's a few months older, a little tired-looking, but still lovely. Still Darian.

POLLARD

Don't worry. It takes time. But the progress you've made is phenomenal. I'm going to recommend that you're allowed a visit home next month.

Darian smiles. Pollard looks at his watch.

POLLARD

Now... I think your classmates are waiting.

Darian gets up, heads for the door.

POLLARD

And I'll see you in our session this afternoon.

INT. A HOSPITAL ROOM -- DAY

A small, austere, but comfortable room. Darian opens the door, enters....

Darian carefully closes the door behind her, moves to the side of the bed. She opens her shirt, slides something out.

CLOSE

the photograph of POLLARD and his family.

Darian stares at it, smiles, slides the photo under her mattress.

FADE TO BLACK.