

THE DOGS OF BABEL

Screenplay By
Jamie Linden

Based On The Novel By
Carolyn Parkhurst

OPEN ON:

THE SIDE OF A BED.

From this low angle, all we can tell is that this bed is empty, it has nice sheets, and it is neatly made.

For a long beat, this is how the bed remains.

Then PAUL and LEXY RANSOME fly in and start messing it up. She straddles him, aggressive and passionate.

PAUL
God, I'm sorry.

LEXY
No no, I'm sorry.

Paul's older than Lexy, maybe by 10 years or so. They try to have a conversation while they rip off each other's clothes.

LEXY
I don't know why I get like that--

PAUL
C'mon, I'm the asshole here.

LEXY
Yeah, that's what I'm saying -- I don't know why I get like that when I already know you're the asshole here.

Paul smiles. Lexy kisses him -- but notices his eyes look heavy. She pauses.

LEXY
Wait a minute... this isn't the
scotch apologizing, is it?

*

Paul shakes his head. He tries to kiss her but she pulls away.

LEXY
Because an apology doesn't mean anything if you can't remember it the next morning.

PAUL
I'll remember. I promise.

But she looks dubious. So Paul reaches over to his nightstand and grabs some post-it notes. He writes out "I'm sorry" and sticks it on his nightstand.

Then he writes another "I'm sorry" and sticks it on the headboard of the bed. Then he writes another one and sticks it on Lexy's shoulder. She laughs.

SUDDENLY, FOR NO APPARENT REASON AT ALL -- our view of Lexy and Paul is partially obstructed by the bed. We're much closer to the floor now, directly below Lexy's nightstand.

PAUL

I guess if I'm handing these out I should just go ahead and apologize now for the next time, too.

LEXY

For the next time you're a jerk, you mean?

PAUL

Yeah. This way, when the time comes-- and we both know it will -- then we can just jump right to this part.

LEXY

(kissing him lower)
Okay. Apology accepted.

PAUL

And I should probably apologize for the next time I get distracted at work and come home late. You deserve better than that.

LEXY

You're right, I do.
(kissing lower)
C'mon, what else you got? Cause I'll keep going if you do.

PAUL

Okay. I apologize in advance for... not being more sensitive to your feelings.

(Lexy kisses lower)

For... forgetting our anniversary.

(Lexy kisses lower)

For... letting the kitchen garbage pile up.

(Lexy's head disappears;

Paul's eyes flutter)

For...how quickly this may be over.

Lexy laughs. Paul turns his head...and NOTICES US WATCHING for the first time. He makes a face.

PAUL

Great. What do you want?

FROM HIS POINT OF VIEW -- he sees --

LORELEI, a five-year-old Rhodesian Ridgeback, lying on the carpet, staring earnestly up at them. She wags her tail. Paul slaps at the air in front of her.

PAUL
Shoo. Mush. Shmush.

LEXY
Ah, leave her alone, she's just minding her own business.

PAUL
No, she's not. She's definitely minding our business.

Lorelei stares at Paul. Then she scratches her ear. Then she starts licking her privates.

PAUL
Now she's just mocking me.

Lorelei peeks up at him curiously. Paul gets out of bed and tugs on her collar, losing his balance a bit as he stands.

PAUL
Okay, beat it. Go watch TV downstairs or something.

*

Paul walks over to the door and Lorelei follows, her tail wagging. Maybe they're going for a walk!

But as soon as she gets INTO THE HALL --

Paul SLAMS the door behind her. Lorelei's tail immediately droops. She turns, sniffs under the door. She can still hear Paul's voice.

PAUL'S VOICE
Alright, I'm focused now. I'm conscious. I'm ready. Are you ready?

*

LEXY'S VOICE
Just get over here and kiss me.

Lorelei SCRATCHES at the door.

PAUL'S VOICE
Dog! Scram! You're damaging my mojo.

Lorelei cocks her head at the door, then SCRATCHES it again.

PAUL'S VOICE
Jesus -- hey, dummy, go find the Kitty-cat! Where's the kitty-cat?

Lorelei's ears perk up and she darts off, BARKING--

--as she flies down the stairs -- jumps up on the couch -- and looks eagerly out the front window. She inspects every inch of the yard, her tail wagging a mile a minute.

But there's no kitty-cat out here at all. She's been duped.

She takes one last look around, then gets down and heads over to her dog bowl. She sniffs it once, and again for confirmation -- nope, still nothing in there.

Then she meanders over to the foot of the stairs and looks up at the bedroom door hopefully. It's still closed, and the muffled SOUNDS OF SEX can be heard behind it.

Lorelei sighs, lays down, and rests her head on her paws. But she does not close her eyes. She just looks around the house.

FADE OUT.

THE DOGS OF BABEL

OVER BLACK:

PAUL'S VOICE

*For documentation purposes, here's
what I can remember about that day.*

FADE IN:

ON A CLASSROOM --

Paul is lecturing to 20 college students. On the board behind him are words like: PHONETICS. SEMANTICS. PSYCHOLINGUISTICS.

PAUL'S VOICE

I remember teaching.

The class, for the most part, looks pretty bored, and one STUDENT is asleep in the front row.

But Paul is one of those professors who gets so involved in a lecture that he forgets anyone else is even in the room. A STUDENT raises her hand and Paul, four feet away but right in the middle of a thought, doesn't even notice.

IN PAUL'S OFFICE -- LATER --

Paul watches a video (with the sound off) of a couple arguing, studying their non-verbal communication. He relays his observations into a DICTAPHONE (although we can't hear that, either -- his sound is off for us as well).

PAUL'S VOICE

I remember working.

One of his STUDENTS knocks on the door. Paul's a hundred miles away, though, and doesn't hear her, never even looks up. Just keeps dictating. Words and words and words.

TWO HOURS LATER --

The room is dark except for the eerie gray static from the TV's. But Paul is still poring over papers, lost in thought.

He looks up, maybe for the first time in hours, and sees that it's dark outside. Then he glances at the clock: it's 8:20.

PAUL'S VOICE

*I remember calling Lexy to tell her
I'd be late for dinner.*

He grimaces, then grabs the phone and dials. It rings until the machine picks up -- *You've reached Paul and Lexy, leave a message* -- followed by a BEEP.

PAUL

Well it's a good thing I already
apologized for this, Lex, cause I
completely lost track of time here--

The answering machine CLICKS off suddenly when somebody picks up the phone on the other end.

A MALE VOICE

Ransome residence.

PAUL

Ransome residence? Who is this?

A MALE VOICE

(beat)
Who's this?

PAUL

This is Paul. You're in my house.
Now who is this?

A MALE VOICE

Are you the husband?

PAUL

Am I the husband? Yeah, I'm-- Oh
god, what's wrong? Where's Lexy?

THE MALE VOICE

Sir... there's been an accident.

INSIDE PAUL'S CAR -- TEN MINUTES LATER --

As he frantically turns on his street and speeds to his house.

PAUL'S VOICE

*Then I only remember things I wish
I couldn't.*

IN HIS DRIVEWAY -- there's an ambulance and four police cars.
Paul's breath catches in his throat.

He SCREECHES to a halt, flies out of his car. Time seems to
SLOW. Things become disoriented.

INSIDE THE HOUSE --

Five police officers stop what they're doing and stare at
Paul as he enters. Paul looks around at them wildly, then
SAYS SOMETHING THAT CANNOT BE HEARD.

An OFFICER starts toward him wearily. His MOUTH MOVES but we
can't hear what he's saying either. He grabs Paul's arm, but
Paul pushes him away.

IN THE BACKYARD -- there seems to be an even larger assembly
of OFFICERS. Paul hurries toward them, maneuvering around
the cops inside, who try to block his path as best they can.

PAUL'S VOICE

*(with the same detached
calm as before)*

*But here is what we know to be
true, those of us who can speak to
tell the story.*

Paul finally makes it OUTSIDE -- where a group of officers
stop their conversation to stare at him --

-- while two EMT's and a PHOTOGRAPHER are gathered around the
large trunk of a tree, examining something at its base.

PAUL'S VOICE

*We know that at some point in the
late afternoon or early evening, my
wife Lexy climbed up into an apple
tree in our backyard.*

-- then the photographer moves to get a better angle, opening
up a line of sight for Paul to see --

-- Lexy's lifeless body, lying twisted on the ground.

Paul sinks to his knees.

PAUL'S VOICE

*And we know that at some point
afterwards, she fell out of the
tree, snapped her neck, and died
instantly.*

A creased, middle-aged Detective named ANTHONY STACK notices Paul and SNAPS HIS FINGERS at the paramedics. They quickly fish out a white blanket and throw it over Lexy, covering her.

Paul pries his eyes from the body and looks up, higher and higher, at the apple tree above her. It's large, 20 feet at least, with thick branches and a ripe crop of red apples. It makes Paul FLINCH.

He quickly looks away, sees an OLDER COUPLE standing on the other side of his backyard fence, solemnly watching the scene.

Paul turns before they can make eye contact with him.

PAUL'S VOICE

*We know that the Perasso's, our
next door neighbors, were the ones
who discovered her body.*

Meanwhile, Lorelei is in hysterics, running back and forth between Lexy's body and the Perasso's fence, half WHIMPERING, half WAILING, her legs trembling.

The Perasso's tiny little YORKIE, cradled in Mrs. Perasso's arms, YIPS nonstop.

PAUL'S VOICE

*We know that Lorelei, Lexy's dog,
was the one who summoned them.*

A FEMALE OFFICER tries to corral Lorelei as she makes a mad dash toward the body, but Lorelei won't let herself be caught.

PAUL'S VOICE

*And we know that Lorelei, like me,
could not be consoled afterwards.*

Paul, watching her, looks like he's going to be sick.

IN A BATHROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Paul leans over the toilet and vomits so hard that it's a struggle for him to catch his breath.

IN FRONT OF THE RANSOME HOUSE --

The twinkling lights from the ambulance and police cars have attracted a small crowd, hovering at a respectful distance. A YOUNG OFFICER stands guard outside the front door.

Paul watches wearily on from the window as a couple, MATTHEW and ELEANOR RICE, frantically arrive on the scene.

They try to rush inside, but the Young Officer stops them. They exchange words. Whatever he tells them makes Eleanor START TO SOB.

Matthew, though collects himself quickly, explains who they are. The Young Officer glances back at the house. *

INSIDE --

The front door OPENS and the Young Officer appears in the doorway. Makes eye contact with Paul.

YOUNG OFFICER
There's a couple out there -- said
they're your friends. *
(off Paul's silence)
Want me to... let them through?

Paul doesn't respond right away.

THROUGH THE WINDOW -- A MOMENT LATER

Paul watches the Young Officer trudge back out on the front stoop, where Matthew and Eleanor wait. Paul can't hear what is said, but he can see them react, while -- *

OUTSIDE --

Matthew just stares back at the Officer, confused, while Eleanor starts to cry again. *

YOUNG OFFICER
I'm sorry. But he was very clear. *
He said he'll call you tomorrow.

Matthew looks at the house, directly at the window where Paul had been. It's empty now, though. Paul is gone.

IN THE RANSOME BACKYARD -- LATER --

Paul stands on the porch and watches the EMT's wheel Lexy's body away. His eyes are glassy, though, as if he's unable to actually see anything.

PAUL'S VOICE
But what else do we know?

Lorelei is still hysterical, WHINING louder than ever now that they're taking the body. The Female Cop, obviously a dog lover, tries again to grab her, to calm her down.

Paul, on the other hand, just stands there impassively. *

DETECTIVE STACK
I'm very sorry for your loss, Mr.
Ransome.

Paul didn't even notice Stack approach. He doesn't look over at him, just stares out at nothing. *

DETECTIVE STACK
 You... said on the phone that
 you've been in class all day?

*
 *
 *

Paul nods hollowly.

*

DETECTIVE STACK
 Okay. Shouldn't be too hard to
 corroborate then.

*
 *
 *

Stack watches Paul closely. But he's done this long enough to
 know the difference between a guilty man and a grieving man.

*
 *

DETECTIVE STACK
 Listen. Accidents happen all the
 time, and there's never any rhyme
 or reason to them.

*
 *
 *

(off Paul's silence)

We... found a basket nearby. So our
 assumption is that she was picking
 apples and just lost her footing.
 Is that... is that something she
 did often? Picking apples, I mean?

PAUL

She makes this pie... this fresh
 apple pie. And I've warned her
 before -- she's a grown woman, she
 shouldn't be...

He trails off. Stack notices that Paul is unable to even
 look at the apple tree now.

DETECTIVE STACK
 Alright. Well I'm gonna have a few
 more questions for you, but I'll
 just come back in a couple days
 after you've had some time to--

*

PAUL

I'd rather get it over with now.
 If it's all the same to you.

Stack stares at him. Clearly, he doesn't think that's a very
 good idea. But, with a sigh, he opens up his notebook.

DETECTIVE STACK
 Remember, these are just standard
 questions in cases like these, okay?
 (off Paul's nod)
 Alright. How would you describe
 your wife's mood as of late?
 (off his hesitation)
 What I'm asking is -- did she seem
 depressed? Or moody? You guys been
 fighting lately, anything like that?

PAUL

No, not at all. Things have been normal. Everything's been fine--

(he stops)

Wait. I mean, we did have an argument yesterday, yeah. But...we made up. It wasn't anything that--

DETECTIVE STACK

Okay. I wouldn't worry about it.

But Paul just stares hard at him.

PAUL

What do you mean? Wouldn't worry about what?

DETECTIVE STACK

Well like I said, these are just standard questions. We're really very confident this was an accident--

PAUL

Wait a minute, you're "confident"? But you're not certain?

DETECTIVE STACK

Well, the thing is, without a witness it's really hard to...

(trails off, then:)

Listen. We're certainly confident.

But Paul's obviously troubled now. Stack grimaces.

DETECTIVE STACK

I can get into specifics if you want, but based on where she fell from, based on how she landed, based on what you've told me... this is open and shut, Paul, trust me.

PAUL

Detective. It can't be open and shut unless you're certain.

Stack pauses. Decides to tell Paul what he needs to hear.

DETECTIVE STACK

Okay then. I'm certain.

Stack puts a hand on his shoulder, leads him back inside. And although Paul still looks troubled--

PAUL'S VOICE

This is how we know that Lexy's death was an accident.

THE FRONT OF THE HOUSE -- LATER --

A weary Detective Stack gets in his car, the only one left in the driveway now.

He sits quietly for a minute before turning on the engine.

IN PAUL'S BATHROOM -- LATER

Paul's taking a shower. The glass doors are fogged up. He's been here a long time.

PAUL'S VOICE

But yet.

*

THE NEXT MORNING --

Paul lies awake in his bed. There's a SCRATCH at the door. Paul tries to ignore it. Lorelei keeps SCRATCHING.

Paul reluctantly gets up and opens the door. Lorelei flies past Paul into the room, tail wagging, obviously looking for Lexy. Paul tries to ignore her and heads DOWNSTAIRS --

--where he takes in the empty house. Lorelei gallops past him, over to Lexy's 20 GALLON FISH TANK in the living room.

She SCRATCHES the base of it. Paul glares at her. She SCRATCHES it again, then glances back at Paul.

PAUL'S VOICE

But yet.

She SCRATCHES it once more. Is she really telling him...?

Paul sighs, then walks over to the tank, opens up the cabinet beneath it -- searches around until he finds where Lexy keeps the fish food. He drops a pinch into the water.

IN THE TANK -- the fish swarm the surface. Paul watches them, his face inches from the glass. He looks exhausted.

He drops another pinch of food into the tank, then heads back into the kitchen, grabs a bowl for cereal. Lorelei, still sitting in front of the fish tank, SCRATCHES at it again.

PAUL

I just fed her fucking fish, dog.

He gets her bag of dog food from the pantry and scoops out something for her to eat, too. But Lorelei just SCRATCHES the fish tank again. Paul, annoyed now, starts to yell at her--

--then stops. Something catches his eye. On the stove in the kitchen there's a DIRTY FRYING PAN. Paul walks over to it. Dips his finger into the juices at the bottom.

PAUL'S VOICE
*But yet there's something else that
 we know. That I know.*

Then he walks over to the fridge and opens it up. Looks
 behind a jar of applesauce on the shelf. Nothing is there. *

Paul is perplexed. The doorbell RINGS.

15 MINUTES LATER --

Matt and Eleanor Rice are in the living room, holding hands, *
 here to comfort Paul -- but he's in the kitchen brandishing *
 the frying pan, a halfway manic look on his face. The garbage *
 has been dumped out and sifted through on the floor. *

MATTHEW RICE
 Whaddaya mean she cooked your steak?

PAUL
 I mean I brought a giant porterhouse
 home for this weekend. For Sunday.
 I always grill on Sunday. You know
 that. She knows that. Everyone
 knows that.

(off their stares)
 So why would she just cook my Sunday
 steak up on a Thursday afternoon?

MATTHEW RICE
 Maybe... she got hungry?

PAUL
 Oh yeah, she got hungry. She
 thought she'd have a little snack
 before dinner, so she fried up a 22
 ounce Porterhouse.

Matt and Eleanor trade a look.

PAUL
 But that's not even the weird part.
 Do you want to know the weird part?
 The dishwasher is empty.

(off their blank stares)
 There's no plate. No silverware.
 No nothing.

MATTHEW RICE
 Maybe she empt--

PAUL
 No, I emptied it. The night before.

ELEANOR RICE
 Maybe she washed them by hand?

PAUL

Lexy has never, ever washed anything
by hand. She put plastic forks in
the dishwasher. I'm not even joking.

Matthew and Eleanor stare at him for a long beat.

PAUL

You're looking at me like I'm crazy.
I'm not crazy.
(re: frying pan)
This is crazy. Don't you think this
is crazy?

Off their reactions:

LATER --

Through the kitchen window, Paul watches Matthew and Eleanor
leave. Eleanor is crying as Matt opens the car door for her.

PAUL'S VOICE

*I know that on the afternoon she
died, Lexy stood in our kitchen and
fried up a 22 ounce steak.*

Behind Paul there is a familiar SCRATCHING sound.

Paul grimaces. Turns to find Lorelei by the fishtank again.

PAUL

Oh for christ's sake.
(off another SCRATCH)
Why are you doing that? What do
you want? You want to go outside?

He opens the back door. Lorelei just sits there and
SCRATCHES the fishtank again. Paul, getting frustrated, gets
a treat out of the pantry, gives it to her. *

PAUL

There. Happy now? *

But Lorelei SCRATCHES the fishtank again. Paul fumes.

PAUL

I don't know what that means.
Okay? I don't know what you're
trying to tell me. So knock it off.
(another SCRATCH)
Stop it. Do you hear me? Do not
do that--
(another SCRATCH)
Goddamit. Don't. Do. That.
(another SCRATCH)
Lorelei. No. No! No!

Lorelei looks up at him, sees how angry he is.

*

PAUL'S VOICE

*And I know that afterwards, she
either ate the entire 22 ounce
steak with her fingers...*

Lorelei hesitates... then SCRATCHES the fishtank again.

Paul loses control and PUSHES THE WHOLE THING OVER. Water pours out onto the carpet. Fish flop on the floor.

Lorelei **hurries** past Paul and grabs a BONE which had been wedged between the fish tank and the wall.

*

She brings it over to him and sets it down at his feet. He picks it up. It's not a dog bone. It's the T-bone from a Porterhouse, all the meat gnawed off.

Lorelei happily wags her tail. Paul looks at her, stunned.

PAUL'S VOICE

*...or she fried up the 22 ounce
steak and fed it to Lorelei.*

One of the fish on the carpet stops flopping and dies.

PAUL'S BATHROOM -- NEXT DAY

Paul fiddles with his tie in the mirror. Lorelei watches from the bed. Paul doesn't pay her any attention.

AT THE GRAVEYARD -- LATER

A PASTOR is reading from the Bible, but PAUL isn't listening. His face is clinical, detached.

PAUL'S VOICE

*But so what, right? So what. This is
grief. This is what it does to you.*

BACK AT PAUL'S HOUSE -- LATER

The place is swarming with people here for the post-funeral reception. Lorelei cowers under an end table in the den, while Paul stiffly greets guests. One particularly FAT WOMAN takes him by the shoulders, dripping sympathy.

FAT GUEST

Paul. I'm so, so sorry.

But the words are of little consolation. In fact, they make Paul very uncomfortable.

Finally Matthew brings Paul a beer, notices he's sweating through his shirt. He gently grabs Paul by the arm, excuses him away from the Fat Woman.

MATTHEW RICE

C'mon, buddy. Let's take a breather.

IN THE KITCHEN -- LATER

Unlike the living room, the kitchen is empty except for Eleanor, who's organizing all the catered food.

PAUL'S VOICE

*It makes you spend your days looking
for meaning in insignificant things.
In things that probably have no
meaning at all.*

Paul sits on a stool and watches Matthew help her. It seems like she ordered enough to feed 200 people.

PAUL

How much did all this cost?

(before she can answer)

I should write you a check.

*
*
*

Paul stands up, heads over to the desk counter and starts sorting through the stacks of papers.

ELEANOR RICE

Paul... Paul. Don't worry about --
you don't have to do that right
now, Paul.

*
*

But Paul ignores her, rifling through the drawers.

PAUL

Sorry, Lexy always handled the
checkbook. I know it's in here
somewhere... ah, here we go. Okay,
what's the damage?

Eleanor sighs. But before she can answer -- something in the checkbook catches Paul's attention. The final entries in the transaction record are: POWER. MORTGAGE. CABLE. DRM.

PAUL

DRM?

He looks over at Eleanor and Matthew. Holds the checkbook up.

PAUL

She wrote out a check to DRM on the
day she died. What's DRM?

Matthew looks over Paul's shoulder at the record. The check was for 200 dollars even. Matthew shrugs.

MATTHEW RICE

No idea.

Paul flips through her past check history. Lexy's made out intermittent checks to DRM before, in varying amounts.

Paul, perplexed now, calls out to the throng of guests.

PAUL

Hey, anybody know what DRM stands for? DRM? Anybody?

Most everybody stops their small talk and looks at him. *

PAUL

It's gotta stand for something.
C'mon. DRM. Department of...
recreational... medicine?

Almost everyone is staring at him now. But no one says a word. Paul stares back at them. Then he turns to Matthew.

PAUL

Who are all these people?

Matt makes a very discrete motion to the guests -- go back to what you were doing -- and so the party respectfully returns to their chit chat. But Paul still stares out at them.

PAUL

Lexy didn't know all these people.
So who are they? Who's that guy?

He points to a THIN MAN chatting by the cheese plate.

ELEANOR RICE

You know, I'm not sure what his name is. That's his wife Alva next to him, though. Or wait... is it Alma?
(off his blank look)
They were clients of hers. I'm sure she told you about them -- they're the ones who lost their daughter last year, remember?

PAUL

No, I don't remember. How do you remember?

ELEANOR RICE

Lexy invited me to lunch with Alma... Alva?... a few months ago.
Hand me those crackers, will you?

PAUL

How do you guys know all these people and I don't?

Eleanor doesn't answer. He glances up the stairwell behind her -- at the very top there's a door that's been BEAUTIFULLY HAND-PAINTED into an impressionistic mural. Paul looks away.

PAUL

When did I stop paying attention?
What else did I miss?

Eleanor and Matt exchange a quiet glance. Paul doesn't notice, though -- he's too busy watching a TALL RED-HAIRED WOMAN, who's just walked in the front door.

Lorelei greets her, tail wagging, and the Woman kneels down to pet her. Paul openly stares.

PAUL

Who's that?

ELEANOR RICE

I don't know... listen, maybe you and Matthew should--

PAUL

Will you find out for me?

ELEANOR RICE

Yes, Paul, I'll find out for you.
Now why don't you two go upstairs for a little while -- I've got things under control in here.

Paul doesn't resist when Matt pulls him off of the stool and leads him up the staircase. Lorelei follows.

IN PAUL'S BEDROOM --

*

Matt motions toward the bed.

*

MATTHEW RICE

Go on, go ahead -- take a load off.

Paul distractedly sits down, still holding Lexy's checkbook. Lorelei lays down in her normal spot near the closet.

PAUL

DRM...DRM... it's probably something obvious. Something simple.

MATTHEW RICE

Probably. So I'm gonna turn off the light now. Get some rest, okay?

Paul nods, and Matthew flips off the light, shuts the door.

BACK DOWNSTAIRS --

Eleanor is waiting for him. Matt sighs.

MATTHEW RICE
He's losing it.

PAUL'S BEDROOM -- LATER

Out the window, most of the cars are leaving or have already left. Paul's in a daze, though, staring at his nightstand, where one of his "I'm sorry" post-it notes is still stuck. *

Finally he can't take it anymore and he crumples it up, *throws* it *away*. *Stares down at the trash can near his feet.* *

Then he kicks it over, starts sorting through it, sorting through the receipts, the old magazines, the granola bar wrappers. Finds nothing that means anything. *

PAUL
DRM... DRM... DRM... *

He pops up, starts sorting through her nightstand. Her dresser. Her bookshelf. Her cell phone. Turning the room upside down, looking for something. Anything. *

He heads over to their closet, where Lorelei lies in her spot, as usual. But now she's laying on something yellow. *

Paul takes a closer look-- it's one of Lexy's sweaters. He pulls it from Lorelei, brings it to his nose and smells it.

Then he hangs it carefully back up in the closet. The window nearest him looks out over the backyard, and the apple tree in its center. Paul's eye is drawn to something --

FLASH UP IN THE TREE --

--where Lexy, suspended in the branches, picks an apple and looks up at Paul in the window, her expression unreadable--

FLASH BACK TO THE BEDROOM --

--where Paul snaps out of it, freaked. Slams the blinds shut.

Then he looks down to find Lorelei curled up with the same yellow sweater. The hanger swings back and forth in the closet. *

This time Paul lets her keep it. He lays down opposite her.

PAUL
You were there *that day*. You're the one who called for help. *

Their noses are only an inch apart, but they don't touch.

PAUL
What'd you see? Hmmm? What did
you see?

*

And at that moment, Lorelei SIGHS. It sounds heavy, and sad, and perfectly human. And then Paul notices that her eyes are wet -- if he didn't know better, it would appear that she'd been crying.

Without moving, without even blinking, Paul suddenly looks at Lorelei in an entirely new light.

IN THE STUDY -- LATER

Paul, in a burst of energy, sorts through his desk and bookcase, turning the room upside down.

He frantically thumbs his way through books with titles like "Evolution of Communication" and "The Instinct of Language".

OUT IN THE HALL -- LATER --

Lorelei sniffs under the ATTIC DOOR, scratches it lightly. But it's not going to open. Finally she gives up, heads into--

PAUL'S STUDY --

-- where she finds him on the computer, googling headlines.
Headlines like: "DOG ID'S SUSPECT IN FRENCH MURDER TRIAL."
And: "CAN NURSING HOME CAT REALLY SENSE DEATH?"

*

*

*

Then Paul clicks over to the LEXIS NEXIS academic research database, completely wired now, and types the phrase "COMMUNICATING WITH DOGS" into the search engine.

*

*

Words flash by onscreen. There is a paper by Elisabeth Mann. A paper by Stanley Coren. A paper by Rupert Sheldrake. And a bunch by a man named Wendell Hollis, with titles like:

*

*

ALL BARK, NO BITE

The physiology of a canine's pharynx, trachea, and epiglottis

THE DOGS OF BABEL

Finding the native tongue of canines

Paul clicks on the latter paper and finds sentences like:

...still, humans and canines share 90% of vocal physiology...

...continued scientific experimentation could allow for...

...potential for language acquisition is well within grasp...

Paul's eyes get big. He pulls up Yahoo's PeopleSearch.

*

Lorelei walks over and puts her head in his lap, begging for attention. But Paul doesn't look down at her. *

Instead he grabs the phone and dials a number off the webpage. It rings once, then goes right to voicemail -- the message is simply "You've reached Wendell Hollis." Then it BEEPS.

PAUL

Dr. Hollis, my name is Paul Ransome, I'm a professor of linguistics up here at Ithaca. Sorry to call you at home, but I'm reading your papers here on canine language acquisition, and, well... I had a few questions. If you could call me back as soon as possible, I'd appreciate it.

He leaves his number, hangs up the phone. Thinks. Then --

--snatches his DICTAPHONE off the desk. He starts pacing back and forth across the room. Back and forth. Back and forth, his brain moving too fast, his feet trying to keep up. Then he stops, clicks on the recorder. *

PAUL

For documentation purposes, here's what I can remember about that day.

CUTS OF PAUL -- animatedly talking into the recorder. We can see his mouth move but we don't hear him. Over this:

PAUL'S VOICE

So what else do we know?

Then, suddenly speaking into the recorder live --

PAUL

We know this: On the day Lexy died... Lorelei was there. We know that she saw things -- she knows things -- that we don't. That I don't.

He walks into the bedroom, where Lorelei is asleep on the bed.

PAUL'S VOICE

It's too bad, then, that dogs cannot talk. It's too bad that they can't tell us what they know.

She's dreaming, the way that dogs do -- her legs twitch as if she's running, and her barks come out as MUFFLED WHIMPERS. It seems less like a dream, more like a nightmare.

PAUL'S VOICE

But yet -- somehow, we're able to talk to them.

Paul reaches out to touch her, and she stirs awake.

*

PAUL

Kitty-cat! Where's the kitty-cat?

Lorelei BARKS, jumps off the bed and hauls downstairs.

PAUL

Somehow -- to a certain degree, at least -- they're able to understand us. But it's a one way street. We haven't returned the favor.

Paul heads down into the living room, where Lorelei's at the window, furiously searching the backyard for a kitty-cat.

PAUL

So the question is -- whose fault is that? Theirs?

Paul looks out the window next to Lorelei. The apple tree looms large against the night sky.

PAUL

Or ours?

He quickly closes the curtain and coaxes Lorelei down from the couch. Then he clicks off the recorder.

FADE TO:

BLACK.

PAUL'S VOICE

The following is true. It has been documented, researched, and recorded. It is not anecdotal and nothing has been embellished.

ON A FARM -- deep in the countryside.

PAUL'S VOICE

Graz, Austria. Here there lived a man who owned a small farm, and on this small farm the man kept a watchdog named Sultan.

THE MAN sits on his porch, smoking a pipe, SULTAN by his side.

PAUL'S VOICE

Sultan was faithful, and loyal, and never left the farm his duty was to guard.

The man finishes his smoke, stands up...

...and falls back into his chair. Sultan looks up at him.

OUT ON THE ROAD -- an ambulance flies down the dusty road.
No need for sirens out here.

PAUL'S VOICE

*One day, the man became ill and was
taken to the hospital by ambulance.*

Sultan runs after the ambulance, right up to the edge of
their property... and then he stops. He'll go no further.

IN A HOSPITAL -- the man lies in bed, unconscious, his FAMILY
gathered around him. As the familiar flatline BEEP sounds --

BACK ON HIS PORCH -- Sultan jolts awake.

PAUL'S VOICE

Shortly thereafter, he passed away.

IN A SMALL GRAVEYARD -- a ceremony is held as the man's
casket is lowered into the ground.

PAUL'S VOICE

*He was buried in a local graveyard
five kilometers from his farm.*

BACK ON HIS FRONT PORCH-- as the sun sets, the place is empty.
The man's SON-IN-LAW pushes open the screen door and walks
outside. He looks around. Sultan is nowhere to be found.

PAUL'S VOICE

*The following week, Sultan
disappeared. The family searched
high and low for him. They put
signs up around town.*

A SIGN IS NAILED TO A POST -- with a picture of Sultan
underneath the word MISSING in big black letters.

PAUL'S VOICE

*But days passed, and Sultan did not
return.*

BACK AT THE GRAVEYARD -- the son-in-law gets out of his car,
bringing a bouquet of flowers with him.

PAUL'S VOICE

*A few weeks later, the man's son-in-
law visited his grave.*

He walks toward the graveyard... then stops short. He drops
the flowers, because there at the foot of the man's grave--

SULTAN sits peacefully.

PAUL'S VOICE

Sultan had never been to this graveyard before. There were no footprints of his former master he could've followed. There was no feasible way for him to find the exact grave the man was now buried in, six feet beneath the earth.

Awestruck, he approaches the dog, whose tail wags leisurely.

PAUL'S VOICE

But yet, somehow here Sultan was, guarding his master's new home.

Then, off Sultan's even face --

FADE TO BLACK

ON A STREET - DAY

Lexy jogs down the street with Lorelei, who hasn't quite made it out of that loping puppy phase yet. They pass by a house with an 'ESTATE SALE' sign out front.

Lexy slows as she jogs by. It's a big sale, with lots of people roaming about. Lorelei glances up at her curiously.

LEXY

Oh, c'mon. It'll be quick.

She leads Lorelei over into the yard and starts browsing.

VOICE FROM BEHIND

Looking for anything in particular?

Lexy turns to find Paul watching her from a lawn chair nearby. His hair is shorter and his face is less creased than Present Day Paul. Lexy smiles at him.

LEXY

I'll know it when I see it.

Paul smiles back at her. He stands up, causing Lorelei to cower behind Lexy's legs.

LEXY

*It's okay, girl.
(to Paul)
Sorry...*

PAUL

Oh, no big deal. I'm not really a dog person, anyway.

LEXY

Well that's perfect then. She's not really a people person.

Paul and Lorelei both keep their distance.

LEXY

Once she knows you, she's the friendliest dog in the world, but...

Paul looks at them both. Then he nods politely.

PAUL

Let me know if there's anything I can help you with. The bigger stuff is all inside.

Lexy watches him return to the lawn chair and his book. There's something interesting about him that she can't put her finger on. She decides not to let him off the hook that easily.

LEXY

So where are you moving to?

PAUL

Oh, I live down in South Hill. This is -- was -- my Mom's house.

The look on Paul's face makes the smile wipe off Lexy's.

LEXY

Oh no... I'm sorry.

Paul shrugs pleasantly.

PAUL

You know, I'm trying to start a new rule. If you make it to your 75th birthday, then no one's allowed to say "I'm sorry" to your relatives after you die. Instead, they have to say "congratulations." Because if somebody manages to make it to 75, then you know they've lived a full life, and so there's nothing to be sorry about.

LEXY

(quietly:)

I think that's a good rule.

PAUL

Well, pass it around. Maybe it'll catch on.

*
*
*

They look at each other for a minute. Then Lexy turns back to the junk. She sorts through some board games, then some kitchen knick-knacks. Lorelei never leaves her side.

*
*
*

Lexy sees a small box near a toaster that reads SQUARE EGG PRESS. She picks it up, intrigued. On the side it reads: TURN ORDINARY HARD-BOILED EGGS INTO A UNIQUE SQUARE TREAT.

LEXY

Wow, does this really work?

PAUL

I dunno. But for two dollars American you can take it home and find out.

(off her look)

Well. The price is negotiable.

LEXY

It's not even opened. It's a mint condition square egg press!

PAUL

Really? Here, can I see it?

She grins at him as she hands it over.

LEXY

Damn. I shouldn't have told you that. That really strengthens your negotiating position, doesn't it?

Paul turns the egg press carefully over in his hands.

LEXY

You know what? Never mind. What do I need a square egg press for anyway?

(beat)

Okay, I'm lying, I do need it. I need to own it. So... well played, sir. I will pay full price.

Lexy pulls two dollars out of her pocket and holds it out, but Paul just stares at the egg press. Lexy stops smiling. Finally, Paul glances up at her apologetically.

PAUL

I'm sorry. It's just a shame that she bought the thing and never got a chance to use it, that's all.

He turns, looks at the house behind him like he's seeing it for the first time.

PAUL

She lived in this place for 15 years. And it's not like I grew up here or anything, but I'd come over, you know, every few weeks. Every holiday. Every time she needed something fixed after Dad died.

Then he looks around at all of her things on her lawn. All of her worldly possessions.

PAUL

And it's amazing to me. It's amazing how much of this stuff I've never even seen before.

He looks down, turns the square egg press over in his hands. Then, finally, he shakes himself out of it, holds the box out to Lexy. But she's put her money away.

LEXY

You know what? You should keep it.

PAUL

*Nah, I'd just stick it in a drawer somewhere. Besides, I don't even like square things. I'm an oval guy.
(off her hesitation)
Really. I want you to have it.
Gratis, in fact. Seriously -- this is non-negotiable.*

Finally, she takes the egg press from him. Then she just watches him... watches his eyes lose focus... sees him disappear into his own world again. And she realizes -- this man is grieving. She suddenly becomes self-conscious.

LEXY

Well... I should get going. But thanks for this.

PAUL

*(snapping right out of it)
Oh, you're welcome. I hope you get more use out of it than my mom did.*

She turns, starts to jog away. Then stops.

LEXY

What was her name? Your mother's?

PAUL

Eve. Eve Ransome.

LEXY

Ransome with an 'e'?

PAUL
Yeah. Why?

She smiles at him one last time.

LEXY
Just wondering.

Then she and Lorelei head down the street. Paul watches them grow smaller and smaller until they disappear.

AT A GRAVEYARD - (STILL IN FLASHBACK)

Younger Paul walks through the rows of graves (this is the same graveyard that Lexy will eventually be buried in). He carries a small bouquet of flowers.

He reaches his mother's grave. At the foot of her stone is a small wrapped present. Paul stares at it.

He hesitantly picks the box up and turns it over. Then he lightly shakes it. Then he looks around -- no one is nearby.

So he sighs and carefully starts to pull the wrapping off. When he finishes, he's left with an unmarked cardboard box, and inside --

Is a square hard-boiled egg. Below it is a folded up piece of paper. Paul opens it up.

All that's written inside is one word -- "CONGRATULATIONS."

Paul stares at it, moved.

FADE TO:

PAUL'S HOUSE - PRESENT DAY

Lorelei wanders over to the t-bone from the Porterhouse, still lying on the living room floor, and SNIFFS at it.

She takes it to the corner of the room and drops it, but then, apparently not happy with that hiding spot, she picks it up again and carefully places it behind the leg of the couch.

Much more pleased with that spot, she turns --

-- and is startled by Paul, who's standing in the doorway, watching her. He clicks on his DICTAPHONE.

PAUL
Okay then. I'd like to start by testing out a list of words and phrases that I believe the subject is already familiar with.

Paul flips to a long-ish list he's jotted down in his notebook. The first word at the top is "SIT".

PAUL
Lorelei. Sit.

Lorelei does. Paul puts a check mark by "SIT".

PAUL
Good. Now lie down.

Lorelei does. Paul puts another check mark in his notebook.

PAUL
Good. Go get your ball.

Lorelei just tilts her head at him.

PAUL
Lorelei, go get your ball.

Lorelei heads over to her toy basket and pulls out a SQUEAKY BALL. She looks back at Paul, almost as if to say -- "is this what you wanted?"

PAUL
Yep, good. Now bring it over here.
(off her hesitation)
Come on, come here! C'mere!

Lorelei hurries over, but Paul furrows his brow -- on the last 'c'mere', he'd subconsciously raised his voice to that familiar high pitch we all use to talk to dogs and babies.

PAUL
Wait, let's try that second part again. You stay here -- stay.

Paul walks over to the other side of the room. Lorelei, still clutching the ball in her mouth, just stares at him.

PAUL
Okay, now -- Lorelei...
(with the baby talk pitch)
...applesauce!

But Lorelei doesn't move.

PAUL
Lorelei, cobblestone! Combover!
Commandant Lassard!

Then with a flat, normal voice:

PAUL
Come here.

Lorelei hurries over with her ball. Paul blinks, impressed.

PAUL

Wow. Very good. I was thinking maybe you were just reacting to the inflection of my voice and not the specific words, but obviously that's not the case. Which is good.

Paul stops -- why is he telling her this, exactly? He looks down at his notebook. The next phrase is 'go for a walk?'

OUT ON THE STREET -- LATER

Paul and Lorelei have almost made it to a nearby coffee shop.

PAUL

Heel. Good.
(as he jots in his notebook)
Now stay.

Paul ties Lorelei to a table, then walks inside.

Lorelei watches Paul order a coffee without ever looking up at the TEENAGE CLERK, writing in his notebook the whole time.

He returns outside, unties Lorelei, and motions for her to jump onto a table.

PAUL

Up.
(off her hesitation)
Come on. Up.

She finally abides. Inside, the Teenage Clerk doesn't seem to approve, but Paul just ignores him and puts a check next to 'UP' on the list. The next word down is 'SPEAK'.

PAUL

Okay, Lorelei. Speak.

Lorelei sticks her paw out.

PAUL

No, not shake. Speak. Speak.
C'mon, I know you know this one.

But Lorelei just stares at him. Paul glances around -- they're pretty much alone outside.

PAUL

Speak. You know -- woof.
(sounding it out now)
Ruff. Lorelei, ruff! Woof!

*

He barks for a little while, trying various styles and tones.

Finally, Lorelei let's out a throaty sort of sound -- not quite a bark, not quite a whine.

PAUL

Good! Very good. That was a strong 'r' -- now give that to me again. Speak. Lorelei, speak.

But Lorelei silently sticks her paw out again. Paul bites his lip, then opens up his notebook.

In the margin next to SPEAK, he writes: RESULTS INCONCLUSIVE.

MONTAGE OF SHOTS -- IN DIFFERENT LOCATIONS

-- of Lorelei responding to various words as they return home. "Get in the car." "Roll over." "Off the couch."

The list grows longer and longer.

LATER --

Paul, in gym shorts and a t-shirt, tries to tie his running shoes while talking into the dictaphone.

PAUL

Subject knows over 80 distinct words and phrases. Language comprehension is equivalent to a year old human infant. Increased linguistic capacity certainly appears possible with the right amount of training.

Lorelei sits calmly nearby, watching him. Paul clicks off the recorder and glances at her.

PAUL

Good first day. Thank you.

Paul finishes tying his shoes. Lorelei stands up and stares at him, wagging her tail, expecting to go with him.

PAUL

Sorry, dog. But I jog alone.

Paul heads to the door, then glances back at Lorelei --

--who's still staring at him, still wagging her tail. Paul hesitates in the doorway.

FADE TO:

A HILLY STREET - DUSK

All is quiet until two figures appear on the horizon, jogging down the road. A person and a dog. They get closer...

...and closer... until they're near enough to recognize. The dog is Lorelei, but the person isn't Paul -- it's Lexy.

Lorelei and Lexy jog on, until another figure appears from an intersecting road and falls into step with them.

This is younger Paul, drenched in sweat and barely able to catch his breath. But he tries to play it cool anyway.

PAUL

Hey.

LEXY

Hey.

Lexy smiles to herself, amused by his attempt at casualness. They run on. When Paul speaks again, though, he has to do it in between gasps of breath.

PAUL

Are...you... married?

LEXY

No. Are you?

Paul shakes his head. Lexy notices he's started to turn pale.

LEXY

Jesus. You don't look very good.

For his sake, she stops running. Paul immediately puts his hands on his knees, gasping for air, but waves her off.

PAUL

*I'm fine. And as soon...as I...
catch my breath... I'm going to ask
you out... on a date.*

Lexy smiles. She pulls a water bottle out and offers it to Paul. He takes it and starts gulping it down.

LEXY

You really don't look very good.

She watches him gulp the water down. Smiles wider.

LEXY

*How many laps around this
neighborhood did it take to
accidentally run into me?*

Paul rests his hands on his knees, trying to catch his breath.

PAUL

One too many, obviously.

*He hands the water bottle back, empty. Again, Lorelei hurries *
between Lexy's legs. Lexy shrugs at him.*

LEXY

Sorry. Strangers.

PAUL

*Well -- for the time being. But I'm
persistent, I'll just keep trying.*

Lexy can't seem to stop smiling at him.

LEXY

*Tell you what, you doing anything on
Friday? Cause I've got this--*

PAUL

*I'd love to. I don't even care what
it is. Seriously. I'd love to.*

LEXY

*Well okay. But it might be a
pretty boring first date...*

Paul waves her off as he collapses in a front yard.

PAUL

Beats the shit out of jogging.

FADE TO:

THE HILLY STREET - DAY

Present day Paul jogs down the very same hilly street, alone. He's sweating, but he's not out of breath. This isn't some light jog-- he runs with focus and intensity.

Obviously, he's gotten the hang of it by now.

IN PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

A sweaty Paul gulps down a glass of water, post-jog. He lays down on the kitchen floor to do some sit-ups. Lorelei watches him lazily from the living room couch.

But every time he sits up, he gets a view of the HAND-PAINTED DOOR at the top of the stairs.

When he finishes, he stands, heads upstairs. Lorelei jumps off the couch and follows him, interested now, *but when* Paul reaches the door, *he* can't bring himself to turn the knob.

Lorelei lays down. Watches him eyeball it for a bit. Then she YAWNS (sort of a 'waa' sound) and Paul turns to her.

PAUL
Whoa. What was that?
(mimicking)
Waa. Waa. C'mon, Lorelei, do that
again. Waa.

But Lorelei rests her head back down on the floor.

PAUL
Lorelei. Waa. Waa, like...

Paul hurries down to Lorelei's water bowl and brings it back to her. Lorelei sniffs it, then leans over to lap some up --

PAUL
No, you want some? Say 'waa'.

Lorelei stares at him. Paul sighs, then sticks his tongue out and laps some up himself.

PAUL
See? Waa-ter. Waa--- yeeecch.

He makes a face, then gets rid of the water and pours her a new bowl. Lorelei follows him to the sink, but Paul keeps the bowl just out of reach, tempting her.

PAUL
Here you go. Fresh water. Waa-
ter. Just make the sound.

But Lorelei just stares at him. So Paul goes to the pantry and grabs a bag of potato chips. He feeds her one, and then another, and then another.

PAUL
You like that? Salt tastes good, huh?

Lorelei licks her lips, but Paul puts the water bowl on the counter. Lorelei looks up at him with her best sad dog-eyes.

PAUL
Don't take this personally. It's a
legitimate study. For academic
purposes.

Lorelei SCRATCHES at the counter.

PAUL
You want it? Just say 'waa' and
it's yours.

Lorelei just wags her tail. Paul stares down at her. Then he glances over at his office.

FADE TO:

BLACK.

PAUL'S VOICE

The following is true. It has been documented, researched, and recorded. It is not anecdotal and nothing has been embellished.

AT A HOUSE BY THE SHORE -- a WOMAN looks out the window at her three dogs, napping in her back yard.

PAUL'S VOICE

Halifax, Canada. Here there lived the daughter of a Nobel Prize winner, a woman who would one day become a well known writer and environmentalist in her own right. But before any of that, she was just a woman with a curious mind, whose best and longest companions were her three English Setters.

IN THE BACK YARD -- the woman whistles off-screen. Two of the dogs lazily lift their heads up but don't move, while the third dog, ARLI, jumps up and takes off towards her.

PAUL'S VOICE

In October of 1962, the woman decided she would try to teach her smartest setter, Arli, how to read and write.

IN THE KITCHEN -- the woman puts three lettered cups upside down on the floor -- A,B,C. Arli stares at her.

Then the Woman hides a treat under cup B.

ELISABETH MANN

B, Arli. Go ahead. B.

Arli takes his cue, nudges over the cup and eats the treat.

The woman smiles. She puts all three cups upright and holds a treat in her hand.

ELISABETH MANN

Do it again then. B. B, Arli.

Arli hesitates, then nudges over cup B. The woman grins again.

WEEKS LATER -- the Woman sits at her kitchen table, hunched over a typewriter. But she's not typing on it -- she's using pliers to pull keys out.

PAUL'S VOICE

The woman devised a special keyboard for Arli, and over the course of 3 years, she slowly, painstakingly taught him how to use it.

THE TYPEWRITER -- modified now, sits on the ground with three large cardboard extensions -- A, B, and C -- attached to their respective keys. She places a treat on the 'B' key.

ELISABETH MANN

B, Arli.

Arli walks up to the keyboard and nudges the correct key. The letter 'B' is typed out onto a blank page.

The woman grins again. Arli takes the treat and runs off.

TWO YEARS LATER -- the keyboard is now covered with modified letters and Arli navigates them expertly.

PAUL'S VOICE

Arli eventually learned how to type 19 different letters, plus the space bar.

The woman paces as she spells out words. Arli keeps up easily and without error.

PAUL'S VOICE

He became so proficient, in fact, that the woman could even dictate her yearly Christmas letter to him.

ELISABETH MANN

New paragraph. L-0-V-E-spacebar-A-R-

Arli types out the L and I in his name before the woman ever says them out loud. She pets Arli, pleased with his work.

BEHIND HER -- a group of ACADEMICS observe them, stunned.

PAUL'S VOICE

Since Arli was the only animal in the world who knew how to type, visitors declared him to be the smartest dog they'd ever seen.

CLOSE ON THE PAGE -- as the woman whips it out of the typewriter. Arli's typed an entire four paragraph letter. He wags his tail as the woman proudly grabs an envelope.

PAUL'S VOICE
But the woman knew differently: she
was just the only person in the world
to bother teaching one how.

FADE TO:

IN PAUL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Paul CLICKS off his dictaphone. On the computer monitor, a matching photo of Arli with the Woman, Elisabeth Mann, accompanies a research paper about them. Paul scrolls back up the page, his interest piqued.

Then Paul looks down at his laptop's keyboard. Thinks. And--

OUT ON THE STREET - NIGHT

Paul's neighbors, the Perasso's, are taking their Yorkie out on an evening stroll. Next door, Paul's garage door is open, and Paul is rummaging through the clutter of boxes.

He accidentally knocks a ladder over, setting off a chain reaction of destruction that ends with some lawn furniture CLANGING down around him.

Paul emerges out of the rubble, holding his back with one hand and an ANCIENT, BULKY LAPTOP computer with the other.

PAUL
 Found it! Found it--
 (noticing the Perasso's)
 --oh. Hello.

MRS. PERASSO
 Are you okay?

PAUL
 Yep. Kinda tweaked my back a
 little, but no biggie...

The Perasso's trade a glance. Mrs. Perasso looks sympathetic.

MRS. PERASSO
 How are you otherwise, though? Are
 you doing okay?

PAUL
 Huh? Oh yeah, sure. I'm fine.
 I'm good. Why? How are you?

The Perasso's stare at Paul. Their Yorkie YIPS at him twice.

BACK INSIDE PAUL'S HOUSE -

Lorelei is starting to drift off to sleep on the couch when HAMMERING from the kitchen wakes her up. She perks up, goes to check it out, passes a big stack of UNOPENED MAIL tossed haphazardly on the counter next to her marooned water bowl.

She finds Paul in the dining room, hard at work modifying the old laptop, just as Elisabeth Mann had done 45 years before.

PAUL

Not ready for you yet.

Lorelei looks over at her water bowl, marooned on the counter. She SCRATCHES the cabinet beneath it, but Paul doesn't look up.

So Lorelei sighs and walks over to the glass door leading into the backyard. The door is open, but the screen is shut.

Unable to go outside, Lorelei stares out at the apple tree. As the wind gusts, and the white curtains billow around her --

FADE TO:

-- younger Paul as he ducks beneath the also-billowing flap of a giant white tent to find:

A JAPANESE BONSAI GARDEN -- NIGHT

The garden is beautifully manicured, with a reflective wading pond in the middle. The place is jam-packed with people.

Each piece is hung over the pond, a few inches above water, so the pond's reflection gives the paintings a mirror image.

Paul takes in the entire scene, a little overwhelmed. He stops in front of an enormous, eight foot tall painting.

To Paul, it just looks like a couple squiggly lines on a plain white canvas. Really giant squiggly lines. He glances at the price tag, and his eyes bulge.

VOICE FROM BEHIND

Hey, you know what they say -- the bigger the painting, the bigger the price tag.

Paul turns to find Lexy behind him, stunning in her dress.

LEXY

Little trick I think they must teach in art school.

Paul smiles, thrilled to see her.

PAUL
*But isn't the Mona Lisa only, like,
 thirty inches tall?*

LEXY
*Well. Imagine how much it would go
 for if it were this big.*

*She walks up beside him, takes in the painting. Paul tries to
 find something there besides the squiggly lines.*

PAUL
*Am I just missing something here?
 I'm missing something here, aren't I?*

LEXY
(with a shrug)
Depends what it is you're seeing.

*Paul squints at it, as if staring at it harder will produce
 different results. Lexy watches him, amused.*

LEXY
*I warned you about tonight. Just
 remember that.*

*He turns, looks around at the rest of the pieces. There's a
 variety of types and styles on display, but none of it is
 particularly accessible.*

LEXY
*Did you get a catalog when you
 walked in?*

PAUL
*No, was I supposed to? Because I
 didn't -- I'm not -- I've never
 really been to one of these before.*

LEXY
It's okay. But just so you know--

PAUL
(interrupting)
See, now this one I actually like.

*He nods towards a nearby piece, which is abstract but oddly
 familiar. It's a painting of a sad looking man sitting
 outside in the sun, amongst rows and rows of clutter.*

PAUL
*There's something about it that's
 interesting, isn't there? It's sad
 and it's hopeful and it's... it's...*

Paul steps closer to get a better look. He glances down at the title -- it's called MY MOTHER'S THINGS.

Then, beneath that, is the artists signature in the corner -- and the realization suddenly hits him like a lightning bolt.

PAUL

...yours.

Lexy's embarrassed, but also kinda dumbfounded -- of all the paintings here, he somehow gravitated right to hers.

LEXY

I have a real job. For the record.
This is just a hobby. That's actually
the first piece of mine anybody's
ever wanted to put out in public.

*

Paul steps closer to it, completely transfixed. Even though the way she painted him is abstract, the way she captured him is uncanny.

PAUL

Was that... was that really how I
looked to you?

Lexy nods. Watches him very carefully.

Paul steps as close as possible to the painting now. He tries to reach for it, out over the water, but it's hung too far away. His fingers fall just short.

PAUL

I want to buy this. How much is it?

LEXY

It's not really for sale.

PAUL

What? I thought that was the whole
point of an art show.

LEXY

Maybe for them. Not for me.

*

She smiles at Paul, moves very close to him.

LEXY

Don't worry. I can always paint
others, right?

And as Paul looks down from her painting into the pond, where their image is reflected back at him --

FADE TO:

PAUL'S HOUSE - PRESENT DAY

*

Present Day Paul stares at himself in the mirror, alone now.

He slowly starts to spread shaving cream onto his face.

DOWNSTAIRS --

Lorelei scratches at the front door, looks up the stairs. She needs to go outside, obviously, but Paul's not around. So Lorelei pulls her leash off the table and heads upstairs.

On the wall of the staircase is the painting of MY MOTHER'S THINGS, followed by a painting of Paul as he's standing in a reflecting pond, followed by three or four more similarly styled paintings, all of them featuring abstract Paul.

Lorelei passes them without comment, and wanders into --

PAUL'S BEDROOM --

-- where she finds Paul holding a razor, his face covered with shaving cream. But he's in a daze, staring into the mirror.

Lorelei rubs up against his leg and Paul JUMPS, causing Lorelei to jump, too, and drop her leash.

Paul blinks down at her, like he's looking at a stranger.

A NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - DAY

Lorelei and Paul walk to the same coffee shop as before. Lorelei sits tied up outside, obediently waiting for him. Paul enters to find the same Teenage Clerk behind the counter.

But Paul forgot to wipe the shaving cream off his face. The Clerk stares at him as he orders.

IN PAUL'S HOUSE --

Coffee in hand, Paul walks back up the driveway with Lorelei in tow. Matthew Rice is waiting for him on the front stoop.

MATTHEW RICE

Hey, buddy. I like the new look.

Paul's confused. Matthew motions to his face. Paul touches it and is truly surprised to find shaving cream there.

MATTHEW RICE

Missed you at school today.

He greets a friendly Lorelei. They both follow Paul inside.

PAUL

Today's Wednesday. I don't have
any class on Wed--

MATTHEW RICE

Today's Thursday.
(off Paul's surprise)
It's okay. I filled in for you. *

Matthew notices the altered laptop on the table and goes over
to take a look while Paul wipes the shaving cream off. *

Lorelei, meanwhile, heads over to her water bowl on the
counter, panting now, and SCRATCHES for it. But no one pays
her any attention. She glances at the door to the backyard. *

MATTHEW RICE

(distracted by the laptop) *
You know what, why don't you take a *
few weeks off? Go away, take some *
time for yourself. Parks and I will
cover your class load-- *

PAUL

(almost too quickly) *
Okay. *

Matthew stares at him for a long beat. Then looks down at
the keyboard on the table. *

MATTHEW RICE

Paul? What is this? *

Paul sighs. *

As he finally starts to launch into his explanation, though,
Lorelei wanders off, through the doggy door into--

THE BACK YARD --

--where she looks around, taking in the scene. Cars drive by
the side of the house. A neighbor mows the grass nearby.
Paul and Matthew's conversation becomes background noise,
drowned out by the rest of the sounds from the neighborhood.

Lorelei lopes over to the big apple tree in the middle of the
yard. She puts her two front paws on the tree and stands on
her hind legs, staring up at the branches above her. Almost
like she's looking for something. Or someone.

MEANWHILE, INSIDE --

--Paul is still explaining his experiment to Matthew. But *
Matthew's focused on the mess in the kitchen... the dirty
dishes piled in the sink... Lorelei's water bowl, stranded up
on the counter.

As Paul rambles on, Matt decides to help out and picks Lorelei's bowl up, fills it with fresh water.

PAUL

...I've done the research, Matt.
You would be amazed at some of the
things dogs are capable of. This
is serious work--
(re: the water bowl)
Hold on. Don't give her that.

MATTHEW RICE

Oh. Okay.
(beat)
Why?

PAUL

Because I'm withholding it.
(off his look)
As part of a test.

Matthew looks out at Lorelei, who's still sniffing around the apple tree outside. Paul refuses to follow his gaze, though.

PAUL

Listen, they say dogs have the
mental capacity of a two year old
child. Well, two year old kids
learn to talk -- why can't dogs?

MATTHEW RICE

Because... they're dogs?

PAUL

We've taught chimps to speak in
sign language. We've learned that
dolphins communicate complex
thoughts to each other in squeaks.
40 years ago, no one believed
either of those things were
remotely possible. Listen, I'm not
saying I'm gonna get Lorelei to
tell me what she dreamt about last
night. I'm just saying -- let's
put aside socially accepted beliefs
about what dogs can or can't do,
and let's see what may be possible.

Matthew just looks at Paul.

MATTHEW RICE

You're serious.

Paul nods. After a long beat, Matthew chuckles.

MATTHEW RICE

A guy walks into a bar with a dog, right? He says to the bartender, "I'll sell you this dog for 5 bucks, and guess what -- he can talk." But the bartender doesn't believe him, of course, so the man nudges the dog and says "okay, show him." The dog looks up at the bartender and goes "Dude. You gotta buy me, this guy's an asshole -- he keeps me locked in a cage, he never takes me for walks, and the shit he feeds me makes dog food taste good." Well, the bartender's in shock -- he says to the owner, "this dog is amazing! But why are you selling him for five bucks -- he could make you rich!" And the man replies, "Yeah, I'm just sick of all his damn lies."

He grins, but Paul just stares at him. Matthew SIGHS.

MATTHEW RICE

What's the point of all of this, Paul? What is it that you're trying to do here?

Paul looks away. Lets his exhaustion, for a brief moment, leak out onto his face.

PAUL

I just wanna be able to fall asleep at night. That's it. That's all I want. I just want it to make sense so I can finally fall asleep again.

Matt nods, sees the naked weariness in his eyes. He follows Paul's gaze down to the water bowl.

MATTHEW RICE

You know not giving them water is, like, breaking the cardinal rule of dog ownership, right?

PAUL

She can have water. All she has to do is ask for it.

Matt grins despite himself. Then he stands, grabs his coat.

MATTHEW RICE

Let me know if there's anything I can do to help, okay?

PAUL

Thanks for stopping by.

*

Matthew leaves. Paul finally looks outside, sees Lorelei lying underneath the apple tree, staring up into it. He walks over to the sliding glass door. His lip curls.

*

He grabs his dictaphone off the counter. Clicks it on.

PAUL

Reminder. Have the apple tree in the backyard removed.

*

Then he opens the glass door and walks OUTSIDE --

*

-- to fetch Lorelei. But just then she starts BARKING and runs over to the fence, her stump of a tail wagging furiously.

*

*

Paul follows her, looks out at the street, sees Matt leave in his car. Assuming that's what Lorelei is making a commotion over, he starts to pull her away... but she keeps BARKING.

*

*

*

Paul takes a second look. And as Matt drives past, he sees it: a LATE MODEL SAAB, just parked outside his house, the engine running.

*

*

PAUL

Who is that?

Lorelei BARKS again. Paul opens the gate, keeping Lorelei back with his foot, heads into his front yard...

*

...and the Saab suddenly pulls away.

*

PAUL

Hey! Hey!

Paul tries to get the license plate, but the Saab turns the corner and is gone before he gets the chance.

He looks into the backyard. Lorelei is on her hind legs, scratching at the gate, trying to join him in the front yard.

*

Paul walks slowly back over to her. Gets down on her level. Stares at her through the chain links.

*

PAUL

Who was that? You recognized that person. Didn't you? You know who that was.

*

And Lorelei responds with a kind of SPOKEN HOWL. "Aaawroo."

*

Paul immediately realizes that it is a howl of agreement. He looks out at the empty street.

*

*

PAUL
Well if they come back... we'll be
watching.

*
*
*

INSIDE THE HOUSE -- LATE THAT NIGHT

The lights are off inside so that Paul can see out the
kitchen window into the night. He sits at the table,
surveying the street with his binoculars. But no Saab.

*
*
*

So he focuses back down on the modified laptop in front of
him, makes a few final adjustments, then sets the thing down
on the floor. It's a primitive job, with three giant cardboard
keys (A, B, and C) attached to their respective letters.

*
*
*

He gets a dog treat and puts it on the giant 'B' key.

PAUL
Okay. Lorelei--

But she's not in the living room. He looks around, starts to
head up the stairs, sees her at the top -- where she's laying
in front of the HAND PAINTED ATTIC DOOR.

PAUL
C'mere. Come on down here.

Lorelei glances at him, then reluctantly gets up, heads
downstairs. Paul leads her over to the laptop.

PAUL
Alright. B. B...

Lorelei snatches the treat off the key. But she doesn't
press it hard enough, and the laptop screen stays blank.

Paul grimaces. So he goes to the fridge, grabs some peanut
butter, and spreads it over the 'B' key.

PAUL
Okay, B. Again, girl. B.

Lorelei starts to lick the 'B' key, causing a string of
'bbbbbb's to appear on the monitor. Paul smiles, pleased.

But Lorelei licks the cardboard key so hard it comes off.

Then she picks it up and takes it across the room, where she
lays down and starts licking the hell out of it.

PAUL
Hey. No. Lorelei, no--

*

Paul grabs it from her. Lorelei, licking peanut butter off
her lips, heads over to the counter, tries to get at her
water bowl. But Paul ignores her.

*
*
*

She lets out a FRUSTRATED WHIMPER, then walks past Paul, who's focused on fitting the 'B' key back in place. But he ends up knocking the modified 'A' key off instead. He throws them both down in frustration, when--

-- a strange LAPPING noise can be heard from somewhere. Paul stands up and follows the sound to the nearby --

BATHROOM --

--where Lorelei is now drinking water from the toilet bowl. She looks up at him and happily wags her tail. Paul grimaces.

He flips off the light to the bathroom and walks away, leaving the room dark and QUIET.

FADE TO:

A DARK AND QUIET ROOM --

...until Paul turns on the nightstand lamp, wipes the sleep out of his eyes, looks over at the other side of his bed --

--which is empty except for Lorelei, stretched out like she owns the thing. She glances lazily up at Paul.

Paul checks a nearby clock. It's two in the morning. He stands up, looks down at Lorelei.

PAUL

Where's Lexy, girl? Where's Lexy at?

Lorelei's tail immediately starts to wag and she jumps up, heads out of the bedroom, down the stairs. Paul follows her--

INTO THE KITCHEN --

-- where Lorelei leads him right to Lexy, who's busy cooking up a storm.

PAUL

It's 3 am. Why are you cooking at 3 am?

LEXY

I got hungry. It's this crazy thing that happens to me a few times every day.

She's lording over six different boiling pots and steaming pans at once. Paul takes in the whole scene.

PAUL

Okay. What are you cooking at 3 am?

LEXY

Well that's the thing. I couldn't decide if it was too early for breakfast or too late for dinner, so I just made both.

Paul checks the pots and pans. She's grilling salmon, frying bacon, mashing potatoes, and flipping over an omelette. He watches her work, frenzied but focused.

PAUL

I don't think I've ever known anybody quite like you.

LEXY

Yeah, you know, the more you tell me that, the more I wonder if it's actually a compliment.

(then, grabbing two plates)

So. You hungry or what?

BACK UP IN THEIR BEDROOM --

Paul and Lexy eat in bed -- Paul got the breakfast, Lexy took the dinner. Lorelei watches hungrily from the foot of the bed.

PAUL

Are you still having trouble sleeping when I stay over, is that it?

LEXY

Oh no, no, I was sleeping fine. In fact, I was right in the middle of this great dream when Lorelei --

(to Lorelei, who perks up)

Yeah, you. You kicked me. You're a bed-kicker.

(back to Paul)

And of course I did one of those things where I tried to go back to sleep as fast as possible so I could pick up where I left off--

PAUL

That never works.

LEXY

I know! But I was concentrating so hard on trying that I gave myself a headache. And when I get a headache -- I get hungry. Okay, switch.

They trade plates. Lexy takes breakfast, Paul gets dinner.

PAUL

What was the dream about?

LEXY

I can't tell you, I'd ruin it.

PAUL

You'd ruin it? How?

LEXY

Because, dummy, the best dreams are always the ones that sound the most ridiculous out loud, and so if you ever try to explain them to somebody you always end up ruining them. God, don't you know anything?

Paul stares at her, then grabs a slice of bacon off her plate.

PAUL

I'm persistent, remember. I'll just keep asking.

Lexy looks back at him, then rolls her eyes.

LEXY

Okay, fine. I dreamt that I was living in this mansion -- a lot like this house, but way, way bigger -- and I was a really famous writer. Which is a little strange, because I almost flunked English every year back in high school.

She takes a bite of her eggs and a sip of her coffee.

LEXY

In this dream, though, I was the most famous writer in the world. But the thing of it was, I'd only ever written one sentence in my life.

PAUL

One sentence made you the most famous writer in the world?

LEXY

Everybody just thought it was the saddest sentence ever written. It was so powerful that it made people weep just to hear it read out loud.

PAUL

Wow. What was it?

Lexy pauses, a little apprehensive.

LEXY

"I remember my wife in white."

PAUL
(beat, then sounds it out)
I remember my wife in white.

Lexy cringes when she hears him say it.

LEXY
Damn it!

PAUL
No, it's a good sentence. I mean--
But Lexy smiles and playfully buries her head in a pillow.

LEXY
Argh! See, I told you!

Lexy rolls over and stares up at him.

LEXY
You ruined my beautiful dream,
Paul. You owe me big.

Paul stares back, admiring her. Suddenly, the words impulsively pop out of his mouth.

PAUL
Marry me.

LEXY
You don't owe me that big.

PAUL
Lexy. Marry me.

Lexy playfully throws a blanket over him.

LEXY
You're too old for me to marry.
You're practically middle-aged.

PAUL
I am not middle-aged.

LEXY
You're practically middle-aged.
You have tenure, you're over the
hill. How come you didn't get
married when you were young, like a
good little adjunct professor?

PAUL
Because I didn't know you when I was
a good little adjunct professor.

Lexy smiles at him. Looks at his face, which is so earnest

it hurts... and suddenly she realizes --

LEXY

Wait a minute... are you serious?

PAUL

I am completely serious.

LEXY

Paul... Jesus, Paul!

(before he can respond)

No. It's been four months, you don't know nearly enough about me yet.

PAUL

I know everything I need to know about you.

LEXY

But what if you don't? What if you find out more and then you change your mind?

PAUL

I won't.

Lexy just stares at him, a million different emotions flashing past her face. Finally, she nods.

LEXY

Okay. I'll marry you if you can answer one question.

PAUL

Ask it.

Lexy pulls the blanket up to her neck, covering her body.

LEXY

Do I have any tattoos?

PAUL

No.

(then, after he thinks)

No. You don't have to cover up, I know every inch of you by heart.

You have a birthmark on your left ankle and a scar on your right hip, but you don't have a single tattoo.

Lexy smiles at him, then sits up and moves close, like she's about to kiss him. But at the last moment, she lowers her head and parts her hair. An intricate ink design can be seen on her scalp.

LEXY

It's snake hair. Like Medusa. I got it when I was 17.

Paul, shocked, touches it with his fingers, tracing from a few inches above her hairline all the way to the back of her head -- it covers the entire scalp.

PAUL

When you were 17... you shaved your head... to get a Medusa tattoo?

LEXY

No. I shaved my head because I hated my hair. I got a Medusa tattoo because I was 17.

She looks him in the eyes.

LEXY

I love you, Paul. But you don't know enough about me yet.

Then she turns back to the breakfast tray.

PAUL

I'll just keep asking, you know.

Lexy just shrugs as she lays her plate down on the ground so that Lorelei can quickly, sloppily lick it clean.

But when Lorelei looks up gratefully at her she sees -- although Paul cannot -- that Lexy is unable to stop smiling.

FADE TO:

PAUL'S BEDROOM - MORNING (PRESENT DAY)

-- where Paul groggily opens his eyes to find Lorelei licking his face. He pushes her away, then turns his pillow over and tries to get back to sleep.

PAUL

Take Lorelei out, wouldja--

But he pauses when he realizes that Lexy's not beside him. Her side of the bed is empty.

Lorelei's tail starts THUMPING against the mattress. Paul stares hard at her.

PAUL

Lorelei... where's Lexy?

Lorelei's ears perk up and her tail THUMPS the bed even harder, but she doesn't move.

PAUL
C'mon, where's Lexy? Go find Lexy!

And all of a sudden, she's off, running wildly from room to room. Paul *watches her*, heart-struck, as she charges through the upstairs bedrooms, looking for Lexy.

He grabs his notebook, flips it to the page where he's making a list of the words that Lorelei knows. With a sigh, he adds 'WHERE'S LEXY?' to the end of the list.

Then he walks out into the hall to find Lorelei pawing at the HAND-PAINTED DOOR at the top of the stairs.

Lorelei SCRATCHES at it again, sits down right in front of the door. Waiting. Paul bites his lip.

INSIDE THE ATTIC -

All is dark -- until the door CREAKS open.

Paul flips on the lightbulb. He stands at the threshold, hesitant to go in, but Lorelei flies past him up the stairs.

He follows her up. Part of the attic is used for storage, the other part for a casual kind of art studio. Half-finished artwork is stacked in piles, tools cover the work desk. Nothing here has been touched since Lexy's death.

Lorelei sniffs around in every corner. Paul follows, taking in the scene. He runs his hand over her tools. Looks in a closet, which has become a makeshift wine cabinet.

But then he notices how dark it is up here. Strangely dark. Paul glances over to the wall, where BLACK TRASH BAGS have been taped up. They concern him greatly.

He walks over, yanks one of the trash bags off, and he has to shield his eyes as LIGHT floods through the window behind the bag and --

THE ATTIC IS FLOODED WITH LIGHT --

-- as Paul KNOCKS through the drywall with a sledgehammer. The bricks behind it fly out in a clump, leaving a large open gap in the wall. Paul shields his eyes from the backyard's bright afternoon light.

A WOMAN'S VOICE
What the hell are you doing up there?

Paul is startled. He didn't think there was anybody outside. He looks through the hole -- but the backyard is completely empty, except for Lorelei, who lies underneath the apple tree, staring up at Paul with great interest.

Paul stares back at her... wait... no way... but then there's
a WHISTLE from the apple tree, and Paul looks up to find
Lexy, perched high up in the branches.

PAUL
Oh. I'm remodeling. What the hell
are you doing up there?

LEXY
I'm picking apples for a pie. What
do you mean you're remodeling?

Paul stares at the tree, which is full and in season. Ripe
apples are everywhere.

PAUL
You know there are plenty of apples
you can reach from the ground, right?

LEXY
Ah, but here's the thing nobody
tells you: the best apples are
always the hardest ones to reach.
You know I'm not actually doing any
remodeling these days, right?

PAUL
You're a grown woman, you shouldn't
be climbing trees, you could hurt
yourself.

LEXY
Well you're a grown man, maybe it
wouldn't hurt you to climb a tree
every now and then. What exactly
are you remodeling, Paul?

Paul shrugs. They are about the same distance from the
ground, nearly eye to eye, 30 feet up.

PAUL
Come here and I'll show you.

IN THE ATTIC -- LATER

Lexy walks through the door. Takes in the gaping void that
used to be her attic wall.

LEXY
Nice hole.

Paul nods at a plate of glass nearby.

PAUL
It'll be a window soon enough.

Lexy's confused. Paul puts down the sledgehammer, wipes the dust off his arms sheepishly.

PAUL

I just -- I heard that an artist studio should have as much natural light as possible. So I thought I'd do something about it.

LEXY

Where'd you hear that?

PAUL

Well. I didn't hear it. I read it.

She looks at him. Realizes -- he's been doing research.

She smiles as she looks around... there's an easel over in a corner, but it's surrounded by boxes and clutter. Back then the attic was ninety five percent storage area.

LEXY

But this is just where I come to mess around. I'd hardly call it a studio...

Paul shrugs again. Looks her in the eye.

PAUL

So now you can.

He walks over close to her. Nods at the nearby blank easel.

PAUL

You're good. You're really good. And trust me, if I can see that -- then anybody can.

Truly touched, tears well up in Lexy's eyes, until she has to look away into the light, and as the sun FLARES back at her --

CUT TO:

THE ATTIC -- PRESENT DAY

-- as Paul rips the rest of the trash bags off the big window, blanketing the room in sun. He looks over at Lorelei.

PAUL

Why would she cover this up?

He peers around the room, truly bewildered.

PAUL

What was she doing in here?

Lorelei just stares at him blankly. Paul sits down on the floor, stares back at her for a long beat. Swallows.

PAUL
I think you're jumping to conclusions.

But then he notices it. An empty bottle of wine nearby. And next to it are two glasses.

Paul starts to pale. He gets up, walks over, reads the label -- it's a '97 Caymus Cabernet. He stares at the two glasses.

Then he impulsively grabs a nearby phone and dials a number.

AT THE RICE'S HOUSE - DAY

Matthew and Eleanor Rice busy themselves in the kitchen, getting ready for the day as Matthew picks up the phone.

MATTHEW RICE
Hello?

PAUL'S VOICE
'97 Caymus Cabernet. Is that a good wine?

MATTHEW RICE
A '97 Caymus Cab? Heck yeah it is -- why, you find a bottle?

PAUL'S VOICE
Lexy has one.
(beat)
Had one.

Matt shoots Eleanor a look, misunderstanding what he meant.

MATTHEW RICE
Hey, Paul...it's 8 in the morning.
I mean, I'm not your mother, but--

PAUL'S VOICE
I'm not drinking it, Matt.

MATTHEW RICE
Oh. Okay. Good.
(beat)
Can I have it then?

Eleanor shoots Matt a dirty look.

MATTHEW RICE
What? C'mon, he's a barley guy. A hops guy. He's not exactly gonna appreciate something like--

She glares at her husband, who shrugs.

MATTHEW RICE

(into phone)

All I'm saying is if you just want
to get drunk, Paul, a six pack of
Miller Light will do the job fine.

BACK IN THE ATTIC -- SAME

Paul's barely listening to him.

PAUL

Were either of you over here that
afternoon? For lunch or something?
The day Lexy... you know.

MATTHEW RICE'S VOICE

No, Paul. We were both at school.

PAUL

Did anybody say anything at the
funeral? About being here that day?
Because no one said a word to me.

MATTHEW RICE'S VOICE

No, not that I remember. Why?

PAUL

I think maybe somebody was here that
afternoon. I'm just not sure wh--

He trails off. The sun from the attic window hits the
glasses at just the right angle, and Paul gasps.

There are fingerprints all over them. Distracted, he --

BACK IN THE RICE'S KITCHEN --

--hangs up the phone. The DIAL TONE sounds.

MATTHEW RICE

Paul? Hello? Hello?

Matt hangs up, too, and looks over at Eleanor.

MATTHEW RICE

He's really losing it.

AT THE POLICE STATION -- DAY

Paul waits in the lobby, a briefcase in his lap, completely
out of place among the rest of the clientele here.

DETECTIVE STACK'S DESK -- A FEW MINUTES LATER --

Stack holds the two wine glasses (each tucked safely in their own plastic bag) up to the light. The fingerprints are clearly visible. Paul sits across the desk.

DETECTIVE STACK
 Forgive me for being dense -- but
 I'm still not sure I understand what
 these have to do with your wife's
 accident.

Paul doesn't answer. Stack bites his lip.

DETECTIVE STACK
 Listen, domestic issues like this...
 they're not really our territory.

PAUL
 Domestic issues? What does that
 even mean? You told me if I found
 anything relevant -- this is pretty
 relevant, don't you think?

DETECTIVE STACK
 Okay. For argument's sake, let's
 just say someone else was there that
 day. Then what? Huh? Then they
 somehow coaxed her up into the tree
 before pushing her right back out?

Paul pauses. Stack's bluntness turns him frosty.

PAUL
 Listen, there was a car outside my
 house the other day. There was
 someone inside and...
 (trailing off as he hears
 himself out loud)
 Christ, I dunno, okay? I don't know.
 All I know is that there are some
 things, some details, that don't add
 up, and I'm just looking for answers
 here. Answers to what, I'm not sure--
 but if there was someone in the
 house...maybe they do.

Stack stares at him. Paul stares back. Finally Stack SIGHS.

DETECTIVE STACK
 It's gonna take a few hours. Go see
 Cindy outside, ask her to take your
 prints for reference. I'll be in
 touch.

AT PAUL'S FAVORITE COFFEE SHOP - DAY

*

Paul **sits impatiently** at a table outside, drinking coffee and eating a greasy fast food burger. Lorelei **lies** by his legs, **hungrily** watching him eat.

*

*

*

Paul looks down at her and she gives him her best dog eyes. He sighs, then drops a few french fries to the ground for her. She hungrily scarfs them up.

A LITTLE KID nearby tries to pet Lorelei, but she ducks away and cowers between Paul's legs. Paul shrugs at the kid.

PAUL

She's shy around strangers.

For some reason, the kid bursts out CRYING and runs over to his MOTHER. Paul looks bewildered. The Mother and the Teenage Clerk stare at him disapprovingly.

Detective Stack walks up, a box under his arm. Paul **pops out of his chair to greet him**, but Stack waves him away, right to business. He pulls the **wrapped** wine glasses out of **the** box.

*

*

*

DETECTIVE STACK

So this one has Lexy's fingerprints all over it. And this one has someone else's.

PAUL

Whose?

DETECTIVE STACK

I don't know, the prints aren't in the database. All I can tell you for sure is that he's not you, he's not Lexy, and he's never been arrested.

He hands both glasses to Paul, who inspects them carefully.

PAUL

So what now?

DETECTIVE STACK

What now? Now I give you advice. And hopefully now you listen.

(before Paul can protest)

Your wife had an accident, Paul. It's tragic but it's true, and the sooner you just accept that, the sooner you move on with your life, the better off you'll be. Whether or not someone else was in the house that day, whether or not Lexy was having an affair, ultimately none of that matters--

PAUL

Who said anything about an affair?

DETECTIVE STACK

C'mon, Paul. Don't pretend you didn't notice the lipstick's only on one of the glasses.

Paul looks away. Obviously he did notice.

DETECTIVE STACK

Listen, the bottom line here is -- whoever was in the house that day, he was gone long before Lexy ever went up in that tree.

PAUL

You don't know that for sure.

DETECTIVE STACK

Yes, I do. People don't run away from a crime scene if there's no crime, okay? They dial 911. They try CPR. They feel for a pulse, at least. But none of that happened here. Nobody called for help, and nobody touched Lexy's body until we did. Well, nobody human, anyway.

Stack looks down at Lorelei, who's eyeing him warily from under the table. Paul follows his gaze.

Then Stack stands, signaling that this discussion is over.

DETECTIVE STACK

I'm sorry about your wife's accident.
I wish there was more I could do.

BACK AT PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

The kitchen is a mess, with dirty dishes in the sink and stacks of unopened mail untouched on the counter.

Paul sits at his table, which is just as bad, littered with the research of people like Elisabeth Mann and Wendell Hollis.

Paul absently studies the papers he's already read a hundred times. He grabs THE DOGS OF BABEL, one of Hollis' papers. Looks it over. Then he picks up the phone and dials a number-- but like before, it goes straight to voicemail.

PAUL

Hi, Dr. Hollis. It's Paul Ransome from Ithaca again. I'm here working with a do-- a subject, a canine subject, on language acquisition.

(MORE)

PAUL (cont'd)
We're using the Mann keyboard method
-- I'm not sure if you're familiar
with that or not -- and, well...
it's not without it's frustrations.
But you seem to be somewhat of an
expert in this field, and I really
would love to talk, just to... you
know. Compare notes. Please call
me back if you can. Thanks.

Paul leaves his number again, hangs up. He looks over at his modified laptop. The giant keys are askew -- at best, it looks like a grade school science project. Paul sets his jaw.

AT ITHACA COLLEGE - HALLWAY - DAY

A professor named PARKS leads two STUDENTS into a LAB.

PARKS
Now for the duration of the semester
this lab will be yours and yours
alone, so take advantage of it...

BUT INSIDE --

--is a man using a WELDING IRON. Sparks flying everywhere.

PARKS
Excuse me. Excuse me! This lab's
reserved for graduate students only.

But Parks's voice is drowned out by the WELDING. And although the man wears a METAL MASK covering his face --

Lorelei cowers in the corner, the noise already terrifying her, the new people doubly so. Paul finally realizes that he's not alone, stops welding and pulls up the mask.

PARKS
Oh -- Paul. Hey. What, uh...what
are you doing in here?

PAUL
Modifying a laptop.

Parks and his students stare at him. Paul impatiently sighs.

PAUL
A subject I'm working with -- she
needs the keys to be larger.

The students get a closer look at what Paul's working on. The keys he's welding onto the laptop are enormous.

STUDENT

Your subject must have some
seriously fat fingers.

Paul stares evenly at the student... then flips the mask down and gets back to welding. Sparks fly everywhere again. Parks gets the message, motions for the students to follow him out.

IN THE HALLWAY -- LATER

The two students peek in the window into the lab, where --
-- Paul has set the half-finished laptop down and is trying to coax Lorelei over to it, but she's keeping her distance.

Paul grabs her and pulls her over forcefully. Lorelei squirms, trying to get away, but Paul overpowers her, presses her nose down on one of the keys. The students stare, wide-eyed.

STUDENT

You've gotta be kidding...

PARKS

You two! Get to class.

Parks chases them off. But when he glances into the lab window himself, his face creases with confusion, then sympathy.

IN THE LAB --

Paul's surgery on the laptop has given it a bizarre, metallic look, and there are sharp edges everywhere. No matter what Paul does, Lorelei has no interest in coming anywhere near it.

Paul glares at her, frustrated, then sinks down to the floor. The laptop sits between Paul and Lorelei, a full room apart.

FADE TO:

BLACK.

PAUL'S VOICE

*The following is true. It has been
documented, researched, and
recorded. It is not anecdotal and
nothing has been embellished.*

AT A HOUSE BY THE SHORE -- cars fill the front yard while two English Setters nap in the back yard.

PAUL'S VOICE

*Halifax, Canada. Here, you'll recall,
there lived a woman with one curious
mind and three English Setters, the
smartest of whom happened to be Arli,
the famous typing dog.*

INSIDE THE HOUSE -- spectators shake their heads in amazement as Arli expertly takes dictation from the Woman.

PAUL'S VOICE

Like the mixed breeds of Ivan Pavlov before him, and like Koko the signing gorilla after him, Arli had forced the scientific community to redefine how the mind of an animal worked, and to reconsider just what they were capable of accomplishing.

THE WOMAN -- pulls the paper out of the typewriter and passes it around to her peers. But this time she's not smiling.

PAUL'S VOICE

Despite their achievements, however, the woman was not satisfied. Instead, she held out hope that one day, Arli might stop typing her words and start typing his own.

ANOTHER DAY -- the crowds are gone now, and the Woman puts the keyboard down in front of Arli, who waits patiently for her to start calling letters.

ELISABETH MANN

No dictation today. Just write.
Whatever you'd like to say.

Arli stares up at her, confused.

ELISABETH MANN

Go on. Don't type -- write.
(off his hesitation)
Write, Arli. Write.

Then, after another beat of confusion, Arli begins to write. And write. The Woman watches him with great anticipation.

When Arli finishes, she yanks the paper out of the typewriter. She reads it and her face falls.

PAUL'S VOICE

But that day never came.

The paper reads: *Bed a cat cad a baf art ad arli.*

Arli wags her tail, awaiting the Woman's approval. But the Woman crumples up the paper and stares at him sternly.

ELISABETH MANN

Again.

CLOSE ON SHEETS OF PAPER -- as they're ripped out of the typewriter, one by one, all filled with nonsense words.

The Woman glares at Arli.

ELISABETH MANN

Again.

Arli looks sheepishly up at her.

OUT IN THE BACKYARD -- The sun rises over the horizon. All three dogs are asleep together.

The Woman whistles for Arli. The other two dogs lazily lift their heads, but don't get up... and neither does Arli.

PAUL'S VOICE

Then, one morning, in the third year of their experiment, Arli woke up and decided that he did not want to write anymore.

The Woman walks outside, concerned.

IN THE KITCHEN -- the Woman tries to drag Arli toward the typewriter, tugging at him as hard as she can.

But Arli doesn't budge.

PAUL'S VOICE

And so, for the rest of his life, no matter how hard the woman tried to convince him otherwise, Arli the typing dog would type no more.

Off Arli's unyielding face --

IN PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Paul CLICKS OFF his tape recorder. He's lying on the floor of his kitchen. His (poorly) modified laptop is nearby, even more of a mess now that peanut butter is slathered all over it.

But Lorelei is still keeping a room's distance between her and the laptop. She puts her nose in her paws and eyes Paul warily.

Paul pushes the laptop towards her with his foot, and Lorelei scurries backwards. Paul SIGHS, defeated.

Then, without warning, the power goes out. Everything turns DARK. Silence fills the room.

PAUL

Son of a bitch.

FADE TO:

AN EQUALLY SILENT, EQUALLY DARK ROOM --

--where Younger Paul rubs his face, takes a moment to collect himself. The he opens the door and walks into --

THE SUNLIGHT --

-- to find a courtyard set up for a wedding. A wedding that is about to start. The seats on the left are jam packed, but the seats on the right are much more sparse. Lorelei lies lazily under an oak tree nearby.

Paul walks up, takes his place at the front. Then the first notes of 'Here Comes The Bride' start and the crowd turns.

Lexy walks down the aisle, alone. Both her veil and her dress are perhaps a shade or two darker than normal.

She arrives at Paul's side, and he pulls her veil up. Underneath, tears stream down Lexy's face. She looks back at the lopsided crowd behind her.

LEXY

You think you're so popular, don't you?

PAUL

I warned you. Remember that. I'm the only groom in history to say the sentence 'sweetheart, honestly, you should really invite more people.'

She laughs. Straights his tie, looks him in the eye.

LEXY

You're here. I'm here. That's all I need.

She glances back at the crowd, waves at a COUPLE sitting in the second row on her side, then whispers to Paul--

LEXY

The Gibson's are your friends. For the record.

PAUL

They're both our friends.

LEXY

You've known him since college.

PAUL

But she really likes you.

Lexy smiles again. Paul does, too. As the PASTOR begins to SPEAK, Lexy leans into Paul.

LEXY
(whispering)
I have a question.

PAUL
I have an answer.

LEXY
Would you have ever stopped asking?

Paul brushes Lexy's face as he shakes his head 'no'.

Without any prodding from the Pastor, Paul leans in to kiss her, but just before he reaches her lips, Lexy's face DISTORTS into the abstract, just like before, and --

PAUL'S KITCHEN - MORNING

Paul wakes with a start. Out the window, the sun is just starting to rise, but the room around him is still dark.

Paul looks out at the Perasso's house, which is well-lit and crackling with electricity. So are all the other houses.

PAUL FLIPS ON A FLASHLIGHT --

-- starts digging around the unopened mail, finding FINAL NOTICES among piles of bills. But there's almost four weeks of mail here, so it's kind of needle in a haystack territory.

Paul gives up, heads over to the desk drawer where he found Lexy's checkbook. He flips through a manilla folder packed with bills, phone numbers, all sorts of important information. Finally he finds the number for the power company--

--then stops. Turns back a page. There, on a yellow post-it, is a PHONE NUMBER. And above it are the letters DRM.

Paul stares at those letters and the number beneath it --

--and then, impulsively, he picks up the wall phone and dials. After a few rings, a groggy male VOICE mumbles out a 'hello'.

PAUL
 Who is this?

VOICE
(still groggy)
 David. This is David.

PAUL
 David who?

VOICE
 David Mackay. Why? Who's this?

Paul glances back at the post-it and the letters DRM. He sucks in a sharp breath.

PAUL
How do you know my wife?

VOICE
I'm sorry?

PAUL
How do you know Lexy Ransome?

VOICE
Lexy Ransome? I have no idea. Who is this?

PAUL
Your initials and your phone number are right here, man, so there's no point in lying to me.

VOICE
(beat)
Is this a joke?

PAUL
No, it's not. Now I'm going to ask you again: how do you know my wife?

VOICE
It's 5:30 in the morning. You can't be--

PAUL
Were you parked outside my house the other day? What kind of car do you drive? Seriously, you better start giving me some answers here or--

Paul's interrupted by a CLICK and then a DIAL TONE. He stares at the phone, then dials again. The same VOICE answers.

PAUL
How do you know my wi--

VOICE
For chrissakes. Stop calling here.

The voice hangs up and again, there's a DIAL TONE. Paul slams * down the phone.

Then, wild-eyed, he glances over at his laptop.

*

OUTSIDE A HOUSE -- TWENTY MINUTES LATER

A MIDDLE-AGED MAN in a bathrobe walks out his door to grab the paper. He flips to the sports page, checking last night's score, and doesn't see Paul until he's a few feet away.

PAUL
David Mackay?
(off his hesitant nod)
We just spoke on the phone--

DAVID MACKAY
Oh my god.

PAUL
Tell me how you know my wife.

DAVID MACKAY
Listen, buddy, I don't know how you got here, I don't know who you are or what you're after--

PAUL
I PeopleSearched you, buddy, and she had your name and number in her folder, okay, so please don't--

DAVID MACKAY
-- but I'm gonna give you about five seconds to--

PAUL
--so please don't insult me by saying you have no idea who she was--

DAVID MACKAY
--to get off my property--

PAUL
Your middle name begins with an R, doesn't it. Doesn't it?

DAVID MACKAY
What? No. My middle name is Alan.

PAUL
You're lying.
(beat)
Were you there that day?

DAVID MACKAY
What day?

PAUL
The day she died.

DAVID MACKAY
Jesus. Listen, man--

PAUL

Were you having an affair with her?

DAVID MACKAY

That's it. I'm calling the cops.

When he turns back to the door, Paul grabs him by the wrist. Mackay tries to shake him off, but Paul won't budge.

They struggle (a little pathetically) until Paul eventually loses his footing and Mackay pushes him to the ground. *

He hurries back inside and SHUTS and LOCKS the door. Paul gets to his feet, sees Mackay pick up the phone inside. *

Paul turns to hurry away, but then his eyes dart to the newspaper strewn at his feet. He pauses.

IN THE POLICE STATION - DAY

Detective Stack sits at his desk, typing up a report, when Paul walks in. He carries Mackay's newspaper with the sleeves of his shirt pulled over his hands.

PAUL

We need to dust this newspaper for prints and compare it with what you took off that wine glass.

DETECTIVE STACK

Jesus.

PAUL

I think this guy was in my house that day. I think we found him.

DETECTIVE STACK

Paul. Lexy's case is closed. I've already turned in the paperwork.

PAUL

Okay, but all I'm asking--

DETECTIVE STACK

No, you're not listening to me. I can't run prints on this even if I wanted to -- I don't have an active case number for billing.

PAUL

Oh come on, don't give me the red tape excuse here.

DETECTIVE STACK

I'm sorry, Paul, but it's against protocol--

PAUL

Detective. My wife is dead. No offense, but I don't give a damn about your protocol.

Stack regards him coolly. Paul sighs.

PAUL

Please. Do this one last thing for me, Tony, and I promise, I'll leave you alone for good.

Detective Stack looks at him...

... then snaps on a plastic glove, grabs the newspaper, and tucks it into an envelope marked 'evidence'.

PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Empty except for Lorelei, sniffing around the staircase.

The door to the attic is open a crack. As Lorelei pushes it open with her paw --

IN THE ATTIC (FLASHBACK) --

-- Lexy turns and jumps when she sees Lorelei walking in. Right behind her is Younger Paul.

LEXY

Oh my god. You guys scared me.

Paul looks around. It's dark outside, which means the attic is dark as well. It seems like Lexy's been up here for awhile.

PAUL

I thought you were gonna make dinner.

Lexy shrugs, turns back to her work.

LEXY

I'm not hungry. I went to the grocery store, though, *there's* plenty of stuff to eat down *there*.

*
*

Paul hesitates... then decides to just go ahead and say it.

PAUL

Actually you went to the store three days ago. The groceries have been sitting on the counter for three days.

Lexy turns. Looks him in the eye now.

LEXY

Wow. So that you notice, huh?
 (off his silence)
 I was wondering how long it would
 take. And then -- would you say
 anything to me? Or would you just
 put them away yourself?

*

PAUL

Well. It's just, you know...
 something you've always done.

Lexy waves him off, turns back to her work again.

LEXY

I put everything that needed to go
 into the fridge into the fridge,
 okay? Go on, there's plenty of
 stuff to eat down there.

*

But Paul hesitates. Doesn't want to leave on that note.

PAUL

What are you working on?

LEXY

(with barely masked annoyance)
 Same thing, Paul.

PAUL

Which thing? The thing you started
 four weeks ago?

*

Lexy shrugs a 'yes', clearly reluctant to talk about it.

PAUL

Well this one's taking longer than
 usual.

LEXY

That's because this one isn't just
 for me this time.

PAUL

Really? Who's it for?

LEXY

A couple. From the Halloween party
 last year. They remembered the masks
 I made for us and they tracked me
 down. They had a...special request.

PAUL

Yeah? What kind of special request?

LEXY

They just -- they wanted me to make
a mask of their daughter.

PAUL

Of their daughter or for their
daughter?

LEXY

Of. She died two months ago.

PAUL

Oh god, that's terrible. How?

Lexy doesn't answer at first. She just holds out a picture
to Paul.

LEXY

They gave me this as a reference.
She's pretty, isn't she?

THE PICTURE -- is of a 16-year-old GIRL. Maybe she's not
quite comfortable in her own skin yet, but she's smiling
widely, and, for all intents and purposes, she looks happy.

LEXY

They gave me this, too.

She shows Paul a sealed book. The cover reads: **PAM'S DIARY --
TO BE READ BY NO ONE! (NOT EVEN YOU, MOTHER!)**

Then Lexy unlocks the book and opens it to a dog-eared page. *
She starts to read.

LEXY

I keep telling everybody I'm fine.
And I am. But... there are moments.
There are moments when suddenly it
doesn't matter if people love me. It
doesn't matter how nice a day it is
outside. It doesn't matter if
there's a movie coming out tomorrow
that I really want to see. Suddenly
none of that matters. But of course
that's all they are -- moments --
and when they're gone, they're gone.
Trouble is, even when I'm fine again,
in the back of my mind I always
know... all it takes is a moment.

She gingerly closes the book and locks it again...

LEXY

I think, right now, both of her
parents are wondering -- did we
ever know her at all?

...then she carefully places it beside the girl's picture.

LEXY

And I dunno. Maybe this mask'll give them something they recognize again.

Paul looks over at the mask -- but Lexy shields it from view, obviously nervous to show it off. Paul is persistent, though, and she finally allows him to nudge his way past her.

It's amazing work -- she's captured the girl perfectly. But *
unlike her picture, she's not smiling here, and the holes where
the eyes should be give the mask an eerie, funereal quality.

LEXY

Well? Do you think they'll like it? *

(off his face) *

What? What's wrong? *

PAUL

No, I mean, it's beautiful. But
it's just so... haunting.

(beat)

Are you sure her parents are
looking for 'haunting'?

LEXY

They want something to remember
their daughter by. Well... this is
their daughter.

Paul sees how important this is to her.

PAUL

Then I think they'll love it.

Paul smiles at her, kisses her on the forehead.

PAUL

I just don't know where they're
gonna put it. What do they wanna
do, display this thing on their
coffee table?

LEXY

Death masks have been around for
thousands of years, you know.

He turns to leave, looks back over his shoulder.

PAUL

I know. It just seems kinda...goth.

LEXY

Well, we all grieve in different
ways, Paul.

Then as Paul starts down the stairs, he's suddenly STARTLED by a bright light and --

FADE BACK:

TO THE PRESENT --

--where Present Day Paul is standing at the bottom of the stairs, shining his flashlight into the darkness.

PAUL
Lorelei? You up there?

Lorelei bounds down the stairs, tail wagging, to greet Paul. He shoots her a dirty look, then flips off the flashlight.

BY THE FRONT WINDOW --

Paul stares out the window with binoculars again, looking for the mysterious Saab again. But the street is empty again.

It's getting dark, and the power's still out. The house is a mess, but Paul either doesn't notice or doesn't care.

There's a SCRATCH and a WHIMPER behind him. Paul turns to find Lorelei at the back door, waiting to go outside.

He sighs, heads over, lets her out. Watches her hurry into the backyard, assuming she's gonna go right to the bathroom -- but instead, she trots over to the APPLE TREE and starts circling it, staring up into the branches.

Paul's upper lip curls. He pulls out his dictaphone.

PAUL
Second reminder. Get that apple tree removed. ASAP.

Then he clicks it off, unable to watch Lorelei anymore. He turns to head back to the front window and almost runs into--

LEXY --

--*walking in the front door, gripping the death mask tightly in her hand. Paul (the younger version now) jumps, startled.*

PAUL
Jesus, you scared me.
(off her silence)
Well? What did they think--?

--*but he stops when he sees her face.*

LEXY
They hated it.

PAUL
I'm sorry, Lex.

When he tries to put his arm around her, though, Lexy turns sharply away. She walks across the room toward the fireplace, leaving Paul by the door.

PAUL
So what now?

Lexy shrugs... and then HURLS the mask into the barely lit fire. It cracks in half from the impact.

LEXY
Now I try again.

She heads straight up the stairs and, without another word, she disappears into the attic.

Paul, alone now, walks over to the fireplace and uses the poker to pull the pieces out onto the hearth. He stares at the mask -- it's even more haunting cracked in two.

But then somewhere, a doorbell RINGS, snapping him back to --

THE PRESENT --

-where Older Paul is now standing in the same spot. From the look of things, the fireplace hasn't been used in months. *

The doorbell RINGS. Paul **startles -- then hurries over, opens** the door to find Detective Stack standing on his front stoop. *

Lorelei peeks out between Paul's legs, then runs away.

PAUL
Sorry, she's shy around strangers. *
But you know that. Come on in. *

DETECTIVE STACK
It's not a match.

PAUL
What do you mean it's not a match?

DETECTIVE STACK
I mean the person who drank from your wine glass and the person who touched this newspaper are not the same.

PAUL
Are you sure?

DETECTIVE STACK
Yes, Paul. On this, we are absolutely sure.

PAUL

That... can't be right, though.

DETECTIVE STACK

Paul. You know what I'm going to say now, don't you?

(off Paul's silence)

Listen to me. This is a dead end, this road you're on. Even if you somehow find the right guy, he's not going to give you answers. Not answers you're gonna want to hear, anyway.

Paul looks away, his mind reeling.

DETECTIVE STACK

Do you understand me, Paul? It's time to move on.

PAUL

I... yeah. I--I'm sorry for wasting your time.

He closes the door.

In a bit of a daze, he wanders into the kitchen. As he stares at something on the wall that we can't see--

BEHIND HIM, IN FLASHBACK--

A middle-aged Couple (ALMA and DON JENKINS, who we recognize from Lexy's funeral) sits on the couch in the living room.

Lexy nervously brings a mask down from the attic and then carefully hands it over to them.

THE NEW MASK -- is the Girl's face again. But this time, she's smiling wide, her cheeks are rosy, her skin seems to somehow glow.

Don Jenkins is unable to look away from it, but Alma Jenkins glances up at Lexy with tears in her eyes. She smiles.

ALMA JENKINS

It's perfect.

Paul glances in from the kitchen, sees their reaction. Lexy smiles happily back at him.

AT THE DOOR --

Lexy shows the Jenkins' out, still all smiles as they say their goodbyes.

Lorelei watches from beneath a nearby table. When Lexy closes the door, she finally feels safe enough to come out from her hiding place, tail wagging, until she notices --

-- Lexy's not smiling anymore. Lorelei nuzzles her leg and Lexy pets her absently. Then Lorelei watches Lexy head into the kitchen --

--and flip a switch, suddenly smiling again. Paul's tinkering with something on the counter.

LEXY

Well, that went much better.

PAUL

Yeah, I heard.

Lexy puts her hands on his shoulders.

LEXY

They didn't touch the cookies, if you're hungry--

She stops when she sees what's in his hands -- it's the first death mask, which he's painstakingly glued back together. Paul shows it to her proudly.

PAUL

Sorry. But it was just too good to let burn.

Lexy does not touch the mask. Instead, she starts to cry. They are not tears of joy, though. They're tears of sadness.

But Paul doesn't notice. He kisses her on the forehead, then turns and carefully hangs the mask up on a nail in the wall.

Only Lorelei sees Lexy wipe her tears away -- Paul is too busy adjusting the mask, centering it on the wall, and then when Paul turns back to Lexy --

IN THE KITCHEN -- PRESENT DAY --

--Paul's the only person here now. He stares at the same spot on the wall. Although the paint color has changed (it's now a bright, bright yellow) the mask still hangs on the wall.

In fact, it hangs right next to the window. And out the window is the apple tree. Still looming over the backyard. Still taunting him.

*
*
*

Paul sets his jaw.

IN THE BACKYARD -- EVENING

*

Paul marches towards the tree, a LARGE AX in his hand.
Lorelei follows him. He's making her uneasy.

*

Paul reaches the tree and without a moment's hesitation, he
SLAMS the ax into the trunk. Then again. Again. Harder.

Lorelei BARKS at him, agitated. Paul SLAMS the ax into the
tree with all his strength. Lorelei BARKS again.

PAUL

What? You got a problem?

Lorelei BARKS again, louder this time.

PAUL

You want to keep the tree? Then
say it. Say it! SAY IT! Say
something, you stupid fucking dog!

He shakes the ax at her and Lorelei YELPS, cowers slightly.

It makes Paul pause. He glances around. Realizes how
demented he must look. The air slowly seeps out of him.

He leans against the tree. Sinks down till he's sitting on
the grass. Stares over at Lorelei, who's buried her snout in
her arms. Paul exhales very slowly.

Lorelei stands... hesitantly comes over... lays down beside
him. Puts her head right in his lap.

Paul looks down at her. And then, for the first time that
we've seen, he gently pets her.

A HILLY STREET - EVENING

*

All is quiet until two figures appear on the horizon, jogging
down the road. A person and a dog. They get closer...

...and closer... until they're near enough to recognize. The
dog is Lorelei... and this time, the person is Paul.

They run down the road, together.

PAUL'S HOUSE -- THAT NIGHT

Paul's fallen asleep on the couch. A TV TRAY is nearby. A
mostly finished plate of spaghetti sits on it.

Lorelei wanders over. Sniffs the air. Glances over at Paul.
He's definitely asleep.

She turns her attention to the spaghetti. The plate is just out of reach so she gets up on her hind legs -- rests her front legs on the TV tray -- but of course it's way too rickety for her weight, and she knocks it over with a CLANG.

Lorelei jumps back, startled, right as Paul wakes up. He glances down, sees the plate of spaghetti on the floor, sees Lorelei's guilty face. Paul glares at her.

PAUL
Dammit. Bad dog.

He stalks over to the kitchen to get some rags. Lorelei whimpers slightly from the floor. Then, she MUMBLES the word:

LORELEI
Hungry.

Paul spins around in the kitchen. Stares at her.

PAUL
What'd you just say?

Lorelei shrugs. Says it again, louder this time.

LORELEI
Hungry.

Paul's mouth drops in shock. Lorelei just rolls her eyes.

LORELEI
Jesus. Listen, you give me one of those meatballs, I'll tell you everything you want to know.

Paul stares at her, eyes wide, then slowly picks a meatball off the stove and holds it out to her.

Lorelei snatches it away, hurries over to her favorite spot on the carpet, and lays down to eat. She glances back at Paul.

LORELEI
(with her mouth full)
Okay. Hit me.

Paul pauses only briefly.

PAUL
What... what happened to Lexy?

Lorelei nods at a nearby door as she wolfs down the meatball.

LORELEI
Nothing happened to her. She's right in there.

Paul looks at Lorelei... then at the door... and then he stands up. Lorelei watches on from her spot on the floor.

Paul reaches the door and pauses. The kitchen phone starts to RING, but Paul ignores it. He takes a deep breath, then pushes the door open, revealing --

...AN EMPTY BATHROOM. Paul walks in and yanks the shower curtain back -- it's empty in there, too. He sighs, then wheels around and glares at Lorelei.

PAUL

I'm so sick of all your goddamn lies.

SMASH CUT:

BACK IN THE LIVING ROOM -- MORNING

-- where Paul's eyes snap open. He's still lying on the couch, his plate of spaghetti safe on the TV tray next to him, and Lorelei lying innocently in her favorite spot on the floor. But the phone is RINGING here, too.

Paul shakes the dream off, grabs the phone and ANSWERS.

VOICE

Hello, Paul? This is Wendell Hollis.

PAUL

You're shitting me.

WENDELL HOLLIS (V.O.)

I -- Excuse me?

PAUL

Sorry, sorry, I just... had this weird... nevermind. Dr. Hollis -- thanks for calling me back.

WENDELL HOLLIS (V.O.)

Sorry about the delay, but your last message was very interesting. I'm glad to hear you read my work.

PAUL

Oh yeah. Yeah, every word.

WENDELL HOLLIS (V.O.)

And you're using the Mann method on a subject right now, you said?

PAUL

A five-year-old Rhodesian ridgeback.

WENDELL HOLLIS (V.O.)

Are you having any success?

PAUL
Not much, I'm afraid.

*

The phone goes quiet for a moment. Then, after a long beat,
Hollis CLEARS HIS THROAT.

*

*

WENDELL HOLLIS (V.O.)
Well then. Perhaps I can help.

*

IN PAUL'S CAR -- DAY

Paul, showered and shaved, drives down a highway. Lorelei
sits happily next to him, her head hanging out the window.

*

WOOSTER, OHIO - NIGHT

Paul's car cruises down one of the streets. He takes a left
into a motel. The sign reads ROOMS AVAILABLE, PETS WELCOME.

IN A MOTEL ROOM -

The door opens and Lorelei bounds in to check out the digs.
Paul drags his luggage in and closes the door behind him.

A WOOSTER NEIGHBORHOOD - MORNING

It's a normal middle-class American suburb, and Paul parks
his car in front of a normal middle-class American house.

A GRANDFATHERLY MAN sees him through the screen door and
walks outside. He waves at Paul as he gets out of his car.

PAUL
Dr. Hollis?

WENDELL HOLLIS
Please... Wendell. You must be
Paul. How was the drive?

*

PAUL
A breeze, made it in less than four
hours -- listen, thank you again
for inviting us--

*

*

WENDELL HOLLIS
Nonsense, thanks for coming. It's
always nice to meet a colleague.

Paul opens the passenger door to let Lorelei out. Hollis
admires her as she cautiously jumps down to the ground.

WENDELL HOLLIS
Well, will you look at her. Isn't
she something?

Hollis slowly approaches, holding his hand out. But Lorelei retreats, as usual, only this time she also starts BARKING.

PAUL
Lorelei! Be nice.
(to Hollis)
Sorry, she's always a little shy
around strangers.

WENDELL HOLLIS
No problem.

Hollis crouches down and looks her in the eyes, but Lorelei keeps right on BARKING. Hollis watches Paul try to soothe her.

WENDELL HOLLIS
She's a pet, isn't she? Not just a
test subject, I mean.

PAUL
(a little defensively)
Well... she was my wife's, yeah.
But I'm not all that much of a dog
person, to be honest with you.

WENDELL HOLLIS
Really? How interesting.

Hollis holds eye contact with Lorelei and slowly extends his hand to take hold of her muzzle...

WENDELL HOLLIS
Me, I love dogs. They're amazing
creatures, they really are.

...but at the last minute, Lorelei SNARLS and twists her face as if to bite him. Hollis deftly pulls his hand away.

PAUL
Lorelei! Jesus.

WENDELL HOLLIS
She's a feisty one, isn't she?

PAUL
I'm sorry, I've never seen her act
like this.

Lorelei shrinks away from Hollis and tries to hide behind Paul's legs. She continues to BARK, but it's a higher pitch now, as if Lorelei's becoming more and more frightened. Paul watches, concerned.

PAUL
You know, I think I should just leave
her in the car for the time being.

WENDELL HOLLIS

That's probably a good idea. Let her settle down, get used to all the new smells. We'll bring her in when she's comfortable.

Paul opens the car door and Lorelei quickly jumps in. He cracks the window for air, then shuts the door.

But now Lorelei gets even more frantic. She keeps BARKING and starts scratching at the window as hard as she can. Paul tries in vain to calm her down.

He opens the door and tries petting her, but nothing seems to work. It's almost like Lorelei's having a panic attack.

PAUL

Actually... maybe I'll just run her back to the motel.

WENDELL HOLLIS

I'm sure she'll be fine in the car.

Lorelei starts YELPING now, really ear-piercing. Paul cringes.

PAUL

I'm sorry about this. I won't be long -- the motel's really close.

Hollis stares at Lorelei in the car, his face unreadable.

WENDELL HOLLIS

Where are you staying?

PAUL

The Wooster Inn on Wayne?

WENDELL HOLLIS

Oh sure. That's a nice place. Very pet friendly.

(as he smiles at Paul)

Well. I'll be right here.

PAUL'S MOTEL ROOM --

Paul opens the door again and Lorelei, back to her old self now, bounds in. She turns her head to see if Paul wants to play -- but the door is already SLAMMING shut.

Lorelei stares at the closed door, her tail frozen in mid-wag.

BACK AT WENDELL HOLLIS'S HOUSE -

Paul drives up to find Hollis talking to a TATTOOED MAN in his front yard.

Hollis waves at Paul. The Tattooed Man quietly walks away. A smiling Hollis slaps Paul on the back and brings him--

INSIDE THE HOUSE -- TEN MINUTES LATER

Paul sits on a couch as Hollis makes coffee in the other room. The place is nice enough, but it's cluttered and a bit messy-- not at all unlike Paul's house without Lexy, actually.

Hollis carries on a conversation with Paul from the kitchen.

WENDELL HOLLIS

Honestly, you can stop apologizing.
Wait till you meet my dogs -- they
make Lorelei look like a Westminster
Best In Show.

PAUL

How many do you have?

WENDELL HOLLIS

Just six right now. All rescues,
I'm proud to say.
(off Paul's reaction)
Hey, I told you. I love dogs.

Paul glances around the room. There's no dogs, no dog toys, no sign of any animals at all.

PAUL

Wow. Are they pets, or...?

WENDELL HOLLIS

No no, they're much more than pets.
They're my life's work.

Hollis brings in a pot of coffee on a tray. Paul leans forward in his seat.

PAUL

So you've had some success with them?

WENDELL HOLLIS

Oh yes. My methods are a little
avant garde, I suppose, but it's
hard to argue with my results. How
do you take your coffee?

PAUL

Sugar, no cream. What do you mean--

WENDELL HOLLIS

Well I talk to them every day, Paul.
Of course, so does everyone else --
dogs are great listeners, as my
mother always said. One sugar or two?

PAUL

Just one.

He drops in a cube, then hands the coffee over with a smile.

WENDELL HOLLIS

The difference, though, is that my
dogs talk back.

Paul stares at him, but Hollis busies himself with the cream
and sugar for his own coffee.

WENDELL HOLLIS

I've made some really great strides
on my latest, a lab. Well, I say
latest -- he's been with me for two
years now, but I only started
working seriously with him in the
past few months. We've already
come so far, though... much further
than any of the others.

He sips his coffee, then casually looks up at Paul.

WENDELL HOLLIS

Why... you wanna speak with him?

A STAIRWELL -- SECONDS LATER

Paul follows Hollis down a claustrophobic stairwell.

WENDELL HOLLIS

Forgive the mess down here, six dogs
can be quite a handful-- say, you're
not a police officer, are you?

Paul looks up at him as the first wave of real uneasiness
sets in. But he shakes his head and mumbles a 'no'.

WENDELL HOLLIS (CONT'D)

Sorry, had to ask. You just can't
be too careful these days.

They reach the bottom of the stairwell. Hollis unlocks the
door and they walk into a cold, dark basement. Paul
immediately covers his nose from the smell.

Although Paul can't see anything, they're greeted by a
commotion -- everything from a DEEP BARK to a RASPY HOWL to
something else, a sound that Paul's unable to place.

It's an odd, disquieting symphony, but Hollis just ignores
it. He raps his knuckles on the padding that lines the walls.

WENDELL HOLLIS

Soundproof. 2 inch acoustic vinyl.
(winks at Paul)
Let's em talk as much as they want
without disturbing the neighbors.

He flips a switch and florescent lights flicker on. The room is large and messy, and along with normal basement stuff -- boxes and old furniture -- there are eight very large covered crates spread throughout the room.

WENDELL HOLLIS

If you've read my papers already
then I don't need to go into detail,
but as I'm sure you know, dogs
simply don't have the genetic makeup
to allow speech-- not by our
definition of the term, at least.
The bottom line is they've simply
been designed wrong. So it's up to
us to remedy that.

Hollis walks through the room, tidying up. Neither the NOISE or the smell seems to bother him much.

WENDELL HOLLIS

Anyway, most all of my first
attempts involved various degrees
of reconstruction...

Paul starts to turn pale.

PAUL

Reconstruction?

WENDELL HOLLIS

Unfortunately it's been a long time
since I was in medical school, you
know? I did my research, of course,
but things still got a bit... messy.

They pass by one of the crates, and there is a DEEP BARKING from inside, but the florescent light isn't nearly enough to pierce through the covered crate. There's definitely a dog in there, but Paul can't see what kind.

WENDELL HOLLIS

About two years ago, though, I made a
real breakthrough. I visited an uncle
in the hospital -- throat cancer,
heavy smoker, had a laryngectomy. He
was learning to talk with this --
it's called an electrolarynx.

Hollis brings an electrolarynx (essentially a metal vibrating tube) out of his pocket and grins proudly at Paul's reaction.

WENDELL HOLLIS

I know, hard to believe no one
thought of this before, huh? I
realized if I could just train a
dog to use their lips and tongue
correctly, only minor surgery would
be necessary.

Hollis reaches the last cage, deep in the back of the room.
This one, unlike all the others, is eerily silent. He kneels
down and unlocks the grated door.

WENDELL HOLLIS

My, they sure can make a mess in one
night, can't they?
(to the unseen dog)
Come on out and say hello. J --
get out here. Come here!

He reaches in and pulls the dog out by his collar.

WENDELL HOLLIS

Paul... meet Dog J.

At first, the dog seems like a normal yellow lab, only too
thin and too mangy. His mouth, though, looks just slightly
off -- like bad plastic surgery -- and near the top of his
throat, where his larynx would be, there is a small scar.

Wendell scratches him behind the ears, gently prodding him,
and holds the electrolarynx up to his scar.

WENDELL HOLLIS

Go on, don't be shy. You've got a
guest -- say something.

The dog looks at Paul. When he finally speaks, the sound
that comes out is unearthly.

DOG J

Ayayay. Kafowayo.

PAUL

Jesus.

DOG J

Woganoo. Jukaluk.

Paul stares at the dog, horrified. But Wendell is too proud
to notice.

WENDELL HOLLIS

I know. You have no idea how hard
it's been to get the J's and K's
right.

As the dog continues to BABBLE, the reality of the situation slowly sinks in for Paul.

When he finally glances over at Hollis, his expression is unmistakable -- my God, how did I possibly end up here?

OUTSIDE HOLLIS'S HOUSE -- LATER

Hollis walks a still stunned Paul out to his car.

WENDELL HOLLIS

I have a 10:30 class tomorrow, but
I can stop by on my way to school,
if that works for you.

Paul gets in and looks back up at Hollis, no clue what he's talking about. Hollis shrugs.

WENDELL HOLLIS

You know -- to get a look at
Lorelei, see what she's capable of.
I'm sure she'll be much more
relaxed in your room.
(mistaking Paul's expression)
What? You are staying another
night, aren't you?

Paul is unable to do anything except nod.

WENDELL HOLLIS

Great. See you around 9 then?

MOTEL HALLWAY - LATER THAT AFTERNOON

Paul hurries down the hall to his room. The MAID's cart is outside his door, and when she sees him she starts to say something in Spanish.

PAUL

No, it's okay, go ahead. We're
checking out anyway.

But the maid keeps talking in SPANISH, and when Paul walks in, he finds an empty room. He looks around.

PAUL

Lorelei?

He turns to the Maid, who's still spitting out Spanish. She tries to talk with her hands, but Paul's not getting it.

PAUL

Where is the dog that was in here?

HOTEL MAID

Escápese! Perro escápese! No pararle.

Paul freezes. Realizes what she's saying. Then he takes off like a rocket back towards his car.

HOTEL MAID
Traté, señor. Traté!

WOOSTER STREETS - SERIES OF SHOTS

--as Paul drives around the neighborhood, calling Lorelei's name. His eyes dart everywhere. A few cars start to back up behind him, but Paul keeps it under 20 m.p.h.

WOOSTER POUND - DAY

The place is pretty small and cramped. Paul hurries in the door to find a young POUND CLERK behind the front desk.

PAUL
Has a Rhodesian ridgeback come in today? She's got that strip of hair running down her back -- her name's Lorelei, it's on her tag.

POUND CLERK
Sorry, we haven't had any dropoffs since I got in this morning.

Paul's face falls.

PAUL
Okay-- she's reddish brown, 80 pounds or so. She was last seen on, what is it -- Wayne Avenue? She's my wife's dog and we're not-- she's not from here, so there's nowhere familiar for her to go.

He grabs a piece of paper and scribbles down his info.

POUND CLERK
Don't worry, sir, I'm sure she'll turn up. They almost always do.

PAUL
The number on her collar is our home phone, so please, call me on my cell as soon as someone finds her, okay? I'm staying at the Wooster Inn -- you can reach me there too.

POUND CLERK
Oh, that's a great little motel, isn't it? Very pet friendly.

Paul stops -- the words trigger something. He stands there in front of the counter, his mind racing.

*
*

PAUL

You don't -- you don't know a Dr.
Hollis by any chance, do you? Dr.
Wendell Hollis?

*

POUND CLERK

Mr. Hollis? Of course. Such a
nice man. You know, thanks to him,
we haven't had to put down a dog
around here in ages.

Paul turns pale. Stares back at her.

*

PAUL

Do you have any idea what he does
to those dogs?

POUND CLERK

Sure. He takes them out to his
farm in Andersonville, let's them
roam wherever they--

Paul reaches over the desk, grabs the phone receiver, holds
it out to her.

PAUL

Get the police. Right now.

WENDELL HOLLIS' HOUSE - DAY

In SLO-MO (similar to the day Lexy died, where Paul came home
to find his house swarming with police) Paul watches as cops
bring out the dogs from Hollis' basement, one by one.

Red police car lights flash. A crowd gathers. Crime tape is
used to keep them at bay. It's turned into quite a scene.

An officer named GARCIA brings Hollis out the front door in
handcuffs. Hollis and Paul lock eyes.

WENDELL HOLLIS

How could you do this to me?

PAUL

(to Garcia)

Is she in there?

WENDELL HOLLIS

Is who in--?

OFFICER GARCIA

--we're still looking.

PAUL

(right at Hollis)

If you did anything to Lorelei, you
sick fuck, I swear to god...

WENDELL HOLLIS

Are you serious? How would I possibly -- you brought her back to the motel, remember?

PAUL

You asked me where I was staying before I left. Who were you talking to while I was gone, Hollis? What happened to that guy I saw you with?

While Garcia turns to have a quick word with another COP, Hollis stares at Paul. He finally puts it together.

WENDELL HOLLIS

Oh my. She ran away, didn't she?
(off Paul's face)
Well, isn't that rude. She could've at least left a note.

Paul DECKS Hollis in the face. Garcia catches the tail end of it and pulls Paul away from Hollis.

WENDELL HOLLIS

Did you see that, officer? He just assaulted me!

Garcia glares at Paul, then turns to Hollis and yanks him into the back of a squad car.

OFFICER GARCIA

Must've just missed it.

Another OFFICER brings one last crate out the front door.

OFFICER

Sorry. That's all of them.

Paul's face falls. Hollis, meanwhile, calls out to Paul from the backseat of the police car.

WENDELL HOLLIS

I don't have Lorelei, Dr. Ransome.
But I promise -- I'll keep my eye out for her.

Garcia glares at him, then turns around to reassure Paul, but Paul's already walking away towards his own car.

OFFICER GARCIA

Sir, we're still gonna need you down at the station to answer some ques-- hey! Where are you going?

PAUL

To find my dog.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

PAUL DRIVING THROUGH THE CITY -- calling for Lorelei. *

STREET after STREET after STREET.

AT A KINKO'S **LATE AT NIGHT** -- Paul makes copies, the light from the machine flashing steadily beneath him. *

BACK ON THE STREETS **THE NEXT DAY** -- He nails a flier to a post. He carries a big box -- he's got hundreds of these. *

DRIVING AGAIN -- at night **again**, idling slowly through neighborhoods, calling out for Lorelei. *

Lights flip on in houses he passes by, but Paul doesn't seem to notice or care. A voice yells out -- *shut up already!* -- but Paul just ignores it.

PAUL'S CAR -- MORNING

The car is frosted over, and Paul's asleep in the driver's seat. Suddenly there's a KNOCK on his door, and Paul stirs awake. It's Officer Garcia. Paul rolls down the window, revealing that he's parked outside the POLICE STATION.

OFFICER GARCIA

Go home, Mr. Ransome.

PAUL

(rubbing the sleep away)

I can't. She's still missing.

OFFICER GARCIA

You said your home number was on her collar, right? Well some nice family probably found her, took her in. Now they're just waiting for you to call them back. *

PAUL

I checked my machine. No one's called. Besides, Lorelei **doesn't like strangers** -- she'd never let anybody take her in. *

Garcia sighs. He leans in the window.

OFFICER GARCIA

We've had multiple complaints **these last few nights**, Mr. Ransome. You ever heard the term 'disturbing the peace?' *

(off Paul's shrug)

Listen, I have all our squad cars on the lookout. *

(MORE)

OFFICER GARCIA (cont'd)
Beth at Animal Control has called
every pound within 100 miles of
here and given them the heads up.
Hollis is locked up. You've
posterred the city. You've done all
you can do. Go home, Mr. Ransome.

PAUL
Not without my dog.

OFFICER GARCIA
Fine. Just so we know, how long you
planning on sticking around then?

PAUL
However long it takes.

OFFICER GARCIA
What if she hasn't shown up after a
week? You got enough vacation
saved up? What if it's a month?
You just gonna up and move here?

Paul doesn't answer, just starts to roll up the window.
Garcia looks away. His tone changes.

OFFICER GARCIA
I have two of my own, you know. A
boxer and a beagle.

Paul stops rolling up the window.

OFFICER GARCIA
I love those dogs. And so I promise
you-- I'll look for her like she's
one of mine, okay?

He pulls out a business car and hands it over.

OFFICER GARCIA
My direct number. Call me everyday
if you want. If she's still here,
Paul... I'll find her.

Paul reluctantly takes the card. Then he rolls his window up,
pulls his seat back up, tucks his head into his lap. *

After Garcia's police cruiser pulls away, Paul's is the only
car left on the street. *

FADE TO:

BLACK.

PAUL'S VOICE

The following is true. It has been documented, researched, and recorded. It is not anecdotal and nothing has been embellished.

ON A MAN'S SAD, WRINKLED FACE -- as he opens his eyes in the morning.

PAUL'S VOICE

Hamburg, Germany. Here there lived an unhappy man who woke up one day and decided he'd had enough.

The Man stares at himself in the mirror. Then:

*

QUICK CUTS --

-- of the man frying bacon on the stove --

-- watching his German Shepherd, REXINA, piss in the grass --

-- opening a box stashed high in his closet, the contents of which we cannot see.

PAUL'S VOICE

He made his wife breakfast, took his dog Rexina for a walk, and then left them both in the house while he locked himself in their backyard greenhouse. He said nothing to his wife and wrote no note.

IN THE BACK YARD -- As the man enters the greenhouse, he takes one last look around his prized garden.

INSIDE THE MAIN HOUSE -- Rexina, standing on her hind legs and staring out the window, begins to BARK.

*

She hurries over to the man's WIFE, who's reading the paper, and runs around her madly, BARKING and WHIMPERING. The wife shushes her, but Rexina only grows more agitated.

PAUL'S VOICE

Back in the house, Rexina became excited, and the man's wife was unable to calm her down.

ON THE BACK DOOR -- as the man's wife opens it to let Rexina out. She cuts across the yard, right at the greenhouse.

The woman, a little puzzled, follows her. Rexina SCRATCHES at the closed greenhouse door, BARKING LOUDLY. The woman tries the door. Locked. She KNOCKS.

WIFE

Ehemann? Hallo? Sind sie hinein?

Rexina, frantic now, continues to scratch at the door knob, BARKING furiously. When no one answers, she backs up and leaps straight THROUGH the glass, disappearing inside.

The shocked woman reaches through the shattered pane to unlock the door. She hurries into the greenhouse to find --

--her husband, still alive. Rexina has tackled him and is frantically licking his face, quietly whimpering.

Confused, the woman goes to pull Rexina off her husband when she sees a GUN LYING NEARBY. The man looks up at her -- and has tears in his eyes.

He begins to BABBLE IN GERMAN, then stands up, collapses into her arms and starts to sob.

The woman is too stunned to speak. She just hugs him tightly. Rexina watches from below, refusing to leave the man's side.

PAUL'S VOICE

The man was so moved by his dog's devotion that he put the gun back in the box in his closet, and never opened it again.

IN HIS CLOSET -- the box is tucked away on the top shelf.

CLOSE ON -- the man's wrinkled face as he opens his eyes in bed the next morning.

Then he leans over and kisses his sleeping wife on her head. Rexina rests peacefully between them.

THE GARDEN -- is full and the flowers are in bloom.

But the man, a few years older now, slowly digs a hole.

PAUL'S VOICE

Four years later, old and weary, the dog passed peacefully away in her sleep. The man buried her by his greenhouse, and on her gravestone, which he carved by hand, he wrote "Here lies our beloved Rexina, to whom I owe the rest of my life."

Then, off a beautiful stone, with those words in German --

FADE TO BLACK

PAUL'S CAR -- EVENING

Paul CLICKS off his tape recorder. He's still sitting in his car, but now --

He's back in his driveway. Staring up at his darkened house.

IN THE HOUSE -- LATER

Paul walks through the door. There are dog toys in the foyer. He looks around, almost as if he's waiting for Lorelei to hurry downstairs to greet him. But of course she doesn't.

It's all too much. He turns around and walks out again.

ITHACA COLLEGE - PAUL'S OFFICE

The hallways are deserted at this late hour. There's a note taped to Paul's office door. It's one of those *While You Were Away* post-its. The message is "Your dog called." And then below it: "Woof woof."

Paul crumples it up as he walks into his office. Papers are piled on his couch. Unopened mail floods his in-box here, too. And there's a large package on his desk with a note attached. He opens it. The note reads:

HAD SOME FREE TIME, THOUGHT THIS MIGHT HELP. PARKS

Paul opens the package -- it's another modified typewriter. But this one is professionally crafted, impressively sleek, and now completely useless.

Paul SIGHS. Nearby, the light on his voicemail blinks. He pushes the button. An electronic voice greets him.

YOU HAVE 11 MESSAGES. MESSAGE ONE: YESTERDAY, 6 PM.

VOICE

Paul, this is Dean McGraw. Hope you're well, I'm just checking to see how large of a class load you want to take on next semester...

Paul deletes the message, then quickly navigates through the rest of the teachers, students, and well-wishers.

He deletes them all, faster and faster as the days fly by: MESSAGE TWO: FIVE DAYS AGO... MESSAGE SEVEN: TWENTY DAYS AGO.

Finally he reaches the last one. MESSAGE ELEVEN: THIRTY-SEVEN DAYS AGO. He's about to delete this one too when he hears her voice.

LEXY'S VOICE

It's me. Guess you're working late again. What else is new, huh?

Paul freezes. Perfectly still. Lexy SIGHS.

LEXY'S VOICE

Well listen. When you come home...
if you come home... will you pick
 up some milk? Thanks. See you
 soon... maybe. Hopefully.

Then with a CLICK, she hangs up. Paul closes his eyes -- that was all he gets. He goes to play the message again but hits the wrong button. YOU HAVE NO MORE MESSAGES.

He pushes every button frantically. But the message is gone.

OUTSIDE PAUL'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Paul sits in his car again, no radio, no nothing. He stares at his house, but it's still too dark and empty to go inside.

He looks over at his mailbox, which is so jammed full of **old** *
 mail that it's bulging out. He sighs, gets out of his car,
 grabs all the mail, and as he closes the box--

CUT TO:

OUTSIDE PAUL'S HOUSE -- FLASHBACK

-- as Younger Paul, fit and clean-shaven now, closes the box
 as well, then sifts through the **single** day's mail on the way *
 up the driveway. He walks --

INTO THE HOUSE --

-- where there's music coming from the kitchen. Lexy appears
 in the hallway -- she's dressed in raggedy clothes and is
 splotted with paint, but she's still radiant. She kisses
 Paul as Lorelei happily greets him.

LEXY

You're home! Did you get the milk?

He glances up at her, confused.

PAUL

Was I supposed to get milk?

LEXY

Yeah, I left a message but-- forget
 it, just come in here, I've got a
 surprise for you!

Lexy pulls him into the kitchen, which has been freshly painted that familiar yellow. The cabinets are taped and covered, and all the decorations from the walls (including the death mask) are lying on the counters. She smiles at Paul. *

LEXY
Whaddaya think? Can you see it?

Paul looks around. Clearly he's not thrilled.

PAUL
How could I not?

LEXY
C'mon, look harder. You're talking about the color, I'm talking about-- *

PAUL
That's more than a color, that's a phosphor.

Paul shrugs and heads to the fridge, ignoring Lorelei.

PAUL
It's fine, honey. I just wish you'd asked me first.

Lexy stares at him, hurt by his indifferent reaction.

LEXY
I spent all day on this, Paul.

PAUL
Which is exactly why I wish you'd asked me about it first.

He goes to the fridge, grabs a diet coke. Lexy watches him, and a realization suddenly washes over her.

LEXY
Oh my god. You really can't see it.

PAUL
What are you talking about? I've got work to do, Lexy. When dinner's ready, let me know.

LEXY
Fuck your dinner.

Paul stops. But he doesn't turn to face her.

LEXY
That's all I am to you these days, isn't it? I'm just a pitstop at the dinner table--

PAUL

Oh, give me a break, willya?
You're up in your studio just as
much as I'm up in my office, so--

LEXY

How would you know, you haven't
been up there in months!

PAUL

Right, here we go again. You've
got it so rough, don't you? Life
must be so hard for you. *

LEXY

Don't do that. Don't trivialize
this, you know I hate it when you--

PAUL

I'm not trivializing anything, I'm
just trying to give you perspective.

LEXY

No, you're trying to make me feel
small, and I don't need your damn
perspective.

They stare each other down... and then, Paul shrugs.

PAUL

Fine. When you're done with the drama
queen shtick? I'll be in my office.

He turns and heads towards the stairs, until --

-- something CRASHES in the kitchen. Paul turns and hurries
back as there's another CRASH, and he walks in to find --

LEXY -- destroying all the decorations that had been hanging
on the wall. Smashing paintings. Breaking decorative
plates. Destroying pictures. Lorelei cowers in a corner. *

Lexy reaches the death mask... and quickly passes over it,
grabbing the framed photo of their wedding day--

PAUL

Lexy, Jesus Ch--

--and she slams it on the floor, shattering it to pieces.

Then she calmly, coldly glares at him... and she walks out,
leaving Paul and Lorelei alone together.

BLACK. Then...

Paul pours himself a glass of *scotch*. He fills it to the middle, pauses... and keeps going until he hits the top. *

BLACK. Then...

Paul tries to work in his office. But he's too distracted. He slams a book closed and takes a sip from his *drink*. *

BLACK. Then...

Downstairs, Paul hesitantly tries to open the basement door. It's locked. He *KNOCKS*, but Lexy doesn't answer.

BLACK. Then...

Paul lays in bed, alone, the lights out but his eyes open.

BLACK. Then...

Paul opens up their medicine cabinet in the bathroom. Pulls out a bottle, and dumps a few pills into his hands.

LEXY (O.S.)
What are you doing?

He turns to find Lexy standing in the doorway. He pops one of the pills.

PAUL
Taking a valium.
(and then another)
Or two.

He chases it down with the familiar glass. Lexy glares at it.

LEXY
Is that *scotch*? *

PAUL
It'll help me sleep.

LEXY
Paul... you remember what happened last time you mixed those? You couldn't remember a damn thing the next morning.

PAUL
Yeah, that's what I'm hoping for.

She stares at him. Paul takes a seat on the closed toilet seat. Then he sighs, suddenly vulnerable.

PAUL
I can't sleep if you're mad at me.
Never could.

Lexy regards him. And slowly, her face creases with the slightest twinge of sympathy.

BLACK. Then...

Paul and Lexy fly into bed, ripping each other's clothes off.

PAUL
God, I'm sorry.

LEXY
No no, I'm sorry. I don't know why
I get like that--

PAUL
C'mon, I'm the asshole here.

LEXY
Yeah, that's what I'm saying-- I
don't know why I get like that when I
already know you're the asshole here.

Lexy kisses him-- but notices his eyes look heavy.

LEXY
Wait a minute... this isn't the
scotch apologizing, is it?

*

Paul shakes his head, tries to kiss her back. She pulls away.

LEXY
Because an apology doesn't mean
anything if you can't remember it
the next morning.

PAN OUT -- to reveal Lorelei watching them silently from
beside the bed.

BLACK. Then...

Paul SLAMS the door on Lorelei, shutting her out. She
SCRATCHES it, trying to get back inside.

PAUL
Dog! Scram! You're damaging my
mojo.
(off another SCRATCH)
Hey, dummy -- go find the Kitty-
cat! Where's the kitty-cat?

Lorelei starts BARKING and Paul grins as he hears her run down
the stairs. Then he hurries back to the bed and jumps in.

PAUL
Where were we?

Lexy rolls on top of him. Her head disappears under the sheets. Paul closes his eyes... and they stay closed.

Lexy stops, looks at him, flicks his forehead. Paul wakes up.

PAUL

What? Don't stop now.

Lexy rolls her eyes. Paul smiles up at her... but his eyes flutter again, and as he loses focus...

BLACK. *Then...*

Paul opens his eyes. Lexy's on top of him.

PAUL

(groggily)

I love you...

But then Paul looks up at her face... and he GASPS, because her features have begun to gradually FADE AWAY, which SNAPS him back to--

PAUL'S CAR - PRESENT DAY

Paul wakes up in his car for the second consecutive day. It's freezing outside, but he's sweating. He gets his bearings, *
wipes himself off. His mailbox is still jammed full.

Suddenly there's a KNOCK on his car window, startling him. It's Eleanor Rice, carrying a big bucket of cleaning supplies.

ELEANOR RICE

Matt told me you might be able to
use a little help around the house.

PAUL

Oh. Thanks, that's very kind, but--

Eleanor, though, just ignores him and walks inside. Matthew follows her with a stack of dishes wrapped in tin foil.

Paul reluctantly follows. The place is a wreck -- garbage is *
piled sky high and a layer of dust has accumulated throughout.

ELEANOR RICE

I made some soup and casseroles to
heat up if you get hungry. Matt,
stick them in the freezer, will
you? And put on a pot of coffee.

Paul stands in the foyer as the two get to work. His face is a melting pot of emotions. But he closes the door anyway.

IN THE BACKYARD -- LATER

Paul and Matt sip coffee out on the porch. In the window behind them, Eleanor busily scrubs the kitchen counter. Matt looks out into the yard, notices how empty it feels.

MATTHEW RICE

Hey, where's Lorelei?

Paul doesn't answer, just looks up at the looming apple tree.

PAUL

I've been running it over and over again in my head, you know? Lexy's last days. Her last years.

The sky is overcast. The branches eerily sway in the breeze.

PAUL

Sometimes I can't even see her face anymore, Matt.

Matt looks over at him. Paul's eyes are hollow. He couldn't cry even if he wanted to.

They stand there together, outside, in the cold.

PAUL'S HOUSE -- LATER

Paul shows the Rice's to the door. They've turned the power back on and the house is sparkling clean.

ELEANOR RICE

I put the stuff I wasn't sure what to do with in a pile on the counter.

PAUL

Thank you. I...

He trails off. Eleanor hugs him. Smiles.

ELEANOR RICE

We'll see you soon, Paul.

Then Paul closes the door. He's all alone again.

IN THE KITCHEN -- LATER

Paul's on the phone.

PAUL

Officer Garcia? It's Paul Ransome.
Any sign of Lorelei--?
(his face falls)
Okay... okay... thank you.

He hangs up. And looks around at his clean house.

The pile of stuff Eleanor left sits on the counter. There's a stack of mail, some receipts, and Lexy's MANILLA FOLDER. Paul opens it, flips to the post-it note with the DRM phone number.

He stares at it. Then he picks up the phone, dials again.

AUTOMATED VOICE
*The number you are calling has been
blocked. Please hang up...*

Paul does. But he looks at the phone. Then back at the folder.

NEIGHBORHOOD STREET -- LATER

Paul sits in his car, a few houses down from David Mackay's place. Right now, the lights are off there and all is quiet.

Binoculars sit on the dash, but Paul leans back in his seat, eating one of Eleanor's cold casseroles. From the look of things, he's been camped out here awhile.

A car passes by him and pulls into Mackay's driveway. Paul sits up and grabs his binoculars.

PAUL
Welcome home, Dave.

David Mackay gets out of the car. Then a RED-HAIRED WOMAN steps out, too, and goes to help him with the groceries.

PAUL
Who's that? That your girlfriend?
Your wife? Your bosses' wife?

Paul's talking to himself, which is never a good sign. But then he stops -- suddenly realizes -- they're driving a SAAB. The same Saab that Lorelei recognized in front of his house. *

He takes another look at the red-haired lady and he tenses. He's seen her before. He racks his brain, trying to place her... and then a lightbulb goes off.

IN PAUL'S HOUSE -- AFTER LEXY'S FUNERAL -- FLASHBACK --

Paul, in the kitchen with Matt and Eleanor, watches the same red-haired woman walk in his front door. Lorelei greets her, tail wagging, and the Woman kneels down to pet her and -- *

BACK IN THE CAR --

Paul grabs his cell phone and quickly dials a number. It goes straight to voicemail. *

PAUL

Eleanor, it's Paul. What'd you find
out about that red-haired woman who
came in late to Lexy's funeral? I
asked you to find out who she was.
Did you? *Call me back.*

*
*
*

Paul hangs up the phone, *looking about as crazed as he sounds
by now.* He stares at the Woman as she comes back out of the
house to get another load of groceries.

*
*

*IN HIS HEAD -- he sees her again as she walks in his door.
As she looks around. As Lorelei greets her, tail wagging--*

And Paul abruptly opens the car door. He grabs the manilla
folder, then hurries down the street and comes up from behind
her as she juggles three bags of groceries.

PAUL

Who are you?

He startles her and she drops one of the grocery bags. When
she looks back and sees Paul, though, her face whitens.

PAUL

You were at my wife's funeral that
day. So who are you?

The woman collects herself. She tries to balance the other
groceries as she reaches down to get the bag she dropped.

WOMAN

It's -- Paul, right? You
disappeared that day before I could
ever introduce myself. I'm Sylvia,
I'm an old friend of Lexy's *from
way, way back--*

*

*
*

PAUL

Can't be that way back. Lorelei
knew you.

*
*
*

Sylvia looks back at him, confused.

PAUL

My dog -- she walked right up to
you. But she's scared of
strangers, *she* only approaches
people she's familiar with.

*

SYLVIA MACKAY

Well...*I mean -- I guess* we're not
that old of friends--

*

PAUL

Lorelei's five. I've been around since she was a puppy. If she knows you, then I should too.

(he steps forward)

She recognized you first. Then she recognized your car. So who are you really? How did you know my wife?

Just then David Mackay walks out to help with the groceries.

DAVID MACKAY

Oh Jesus -- not again.

SYLVIA MACKAY

Hold on, David...

DAVID MACKAY

This is him, this is that wackjob I told you about! He assaulted me and then he stole my newspaper--

(to Paul)

Yeah, I watched you do it, buddy.

SYLVIA MACKAY

David...

But Paul holds the folder with their phone number up.

PAUL

This is your number alright. But she wasn't calling you...

(to Sylvia)

She was calling you. Wasn't she?

DAVID MACKAY

Save it for the cops, pal.

SYLVIA MACKAY (CONT'D)

David! Please. Just... go inside.

DAVID MACKAY

You gotta be kiddin me--

SYLVIA MACKAY

Go inside, David.

Mackay stares at her in disbelief. But he eventually does as he's told, glaring at Paul as he shuts the door.

SYLVIA MACKAY (CONT'D)

He told me about what happened -- the day you showed up here, I mean. And I knew it was you. But I...I couldn't say anything.

PAUL
How do you know my wife?

Sylvia stops. Takes a deep breath.

SYLVIA MACKAY
 Please. Don't do this. Don't put
 me in this position. *

PAUL
 Oh god. Were you two...?

SYLVIA MACKAY
 Oh no. No. It was nothing like that.

But she doesn't elaborate. Paul takes a step toward her.

PAUL
 Listen, whatever it is you're not
 telling me? It can't be worse than
 this. It can't be worse than not
 knowing.

Sylvia looks at him. Thinks hard...then makes the decision.

SYLVIA MACKAY
 My name's Sylvia Mackay.
 (re: the folder)
 Dr. Sylvia Mackay.

Paul glances down at the folder, sees the letters DRM...Dr. M.
 Sylvia watches him carefully.

SYLVIA MACKAY
 We'd meet every Tuesday morning,
 while you were at work.

PAUL
 What? For...for how long? Since
 when?

SYLVIA MACKAY
 Off and on for 10 years. Ever
 since her first attempt. *

Paul goes ice cold. Shivers fly down his spine. *

PAUL
 Her -- first attempt? First...
 first attempt at what? *

But they both know at what. Sylvia puts the groceries down. *

SYLVIA MACKAY
 That's what I do, I'm a crisis
 therapist. *

(MORE) *

SYLVIA MACKAY (cont'd)
 I meet patients on their turf -- in
 the hospital, at their home. Mainly
 troubled teenagers. Most of them end
 up being short term clients, but
 Lexy...Lexy was special.

Paul steps back, shakes his head, unable to process all this.

PAUL
 What-- what does that mean, special?

Sylvia pauses, looks away. Then, despite herself, she starts
 to cry.

SYLVIA MACKAY
 I'm sorry. It's just -- it's so
 fucking sad. It's so sad that I have
 to be the one to tell you all this.

Paul watches her. Can hardly believe what he's hearing.

PAUL
 Tell me all what? What the hell
 are you telling me?
 (off her silence)
 You're saying she was, what? Sick?
 Troubled? We were married for four
 years -- all that time, I never even
 saw... I mean, she didn't have any
 medicine. I have medicine. The
 valium, the percocet, they're mine,
 she never even touched the stuff--

SYLVIA MACKAY
 She hid it from you. All of it.

She quickly composes herself, looks back at Paul.

SYLVIA MACKAY
 When you came along -- you didn't
 see her the way everybody else did.
 You didn't see the scared girl with
 a shaved head, the girl she kept
 trying to leave behind. And that
 was very important to her.

She steps closer to him. Reaches out for his shoulder.

SYLVIA MACKAY
 She wanted so badly to let you in,
 Paul, but she was just too afraid.
 We were close, though, I know it.
 We were closer than ever--

But Paul yanks his arm away from her.

PAUL

You were at our house that day?

Sylvia looks away again. Nods.

SYLVIA MACKAY

It was a Tuesday, remember?

PAUL

(almost afraid to ask)

Was she... in trouble? Was she...

SYLVIA MACKAY

No. Not at all. She was in a great mood, Paul. She even opened a--

PAUL

--bottle of wine.

Paul grimaces, disappointed in himself for misinterpreting his only clue. He says, almost to himself:

PAUL

But... you're wearing lipstick. And there was no lipstick on the other glass...

Sylvia pauses. Realizes how deeply this has tormented him.

SYLVIA MACKAY

That's because I didn't drink it. I didn't want to be rude, but I was on the clock, after all.

PAUL

You were on the clock.

Paul stares at her. Anger begins to build inside of him.

PAUL

You knew all this, **but** when you showed up at my house after she died, you didn't say a word? Why didn't you tell me if my wife had all these issues?

SYLVIA MACKAY

Because it would've been unethical! I can't disclose any information about a patient unless I have their expressed consent, even after they pass away--

PAUL

I'm her husband, goddammit!

She doesn't respond. Paul just glares at her.

SYLVIA MACKAY

I thought about talking to you.
That's why I came to the funeral.
That's why I came to your house
later. I knew it probably wasn't
right, but... I'm not sure I know
what is right in this situation.

*

She sighs and rubs her eyes, looking more stressed than Paul, even.

SYLVIA MACKAY

It keeps me awake at night. You
know? She keeps me awake at night.

Suddenly it hits Paul like a lightning bolt -- he realizes how deeply this has tormented her.

PAUL

Oh my god. You're still looking for
answers, too. You're still not sure
either, are you?

SYLVIA MACKAY

No, I'm -- I'm trained to see those
signs, okay? There weren't any,
trust me. She was happy, she was in
a great mood, there was nothing at
all that would indicate it might
be...

*

*

(phrasing this carefully)
...anything other than what they
say it was.

Paul looks away. Then he abruptly turns and heads back to his car without another word.

Sylvia watches him go, concerned. She calls after him.

SYLVIA MACKAY

It was an accident, Paul. It had
to be.

But she sounds like she's trying to convince herself more than anyone. He keeps walking away.

LEXY'S ATTIC -- EVENING

Paul flips on the lights and looks around, like he's seeing everything for the first time.

He flies down the stairs, manic now, and starts rooting through all of Lexy's stuff, knocking everything off her desk, ripping canvas, searching desperately through it all--

--until he finds what he's looking for in an empty paint can: Lexy's stash of medicine. Four or five different kinds.

He sits on the floor. At his feet, there in the mess from Lexy's desk, is a journal. Paul recognizes it immediately. On the cover it says **PAM'S DIARY -- TO BE READ BY NO ONE!** *

It hits Paul like a brick. He lays down on the cold cement, picks the diary up, thumbs through it, his hand shaking. *

Then he looks up, out the attic window he built her -- and there's the big APPLE TREE, looming against the darkening sky. *

He closes his eyes.

CUT TO:

OUTSIDE NOW--

--where Lexy stares up at the top of the tree as well. A tear cuts down her cheek.

LEXY'S VOICE

I keep telling everybody I'm fine.
And I am. But...there are moments.

Then her face FADES again, as --

LORELEI RUNS OUTSIDE -- right to the base of the apple tree, and she looks up and BARKS once, then AGAIN, sensing something's wrong, because --

NOW LEXY CLIMBS THE BRANCHES --

--going higher and higher.

LEXY'S VOICE

There are moments when suddenly it
doesn't matter if people love me.
It doesn't matter how nice a day it
is outside. It doesn't matter if
there's a movie coming out tomorrow
that I really want to see.
Suddenly none of that matters.

She reaches the top but, scared now, she clings to the trunk. She closes her eyes, trying to push everything out.

And before her face starts to FADE, it flashes from confusion to frustration, because below her, Lorelei's BARKING up a storm, beside herself, doing anything she can to save her, and Lexy can't concentrate, so --

IN THE KITCHEN --

--a steak SIZZLES as it's thrown on the frying pan.

LEXY'S VOICE

*But of course that's all they are --
moments -- and when they're gone,
they're gone.*

THEN LORELEI LAYS ON THE LIVING ROOM FLOOR --

--happily tearing into the steak, unaware of what's going on--

OUT IN THE TREE --

--where Lexy climbs higher and higher, while --

*DOWN BELOW -- a lone apple falls to the ground, shaken out of
the branches.*

LEXY'S VOICE

*Trouble is, even when I'm fine again,
in the back of my mind I always
know... all it takes is a moment.*

PAUL'S IN BED WITH LEXY --

*--and she's parting her hair for him, and he sees the ink
from the tattoo and he runs his finger against it, and then
she looks him in the eyes...*

LEXY

*I love you, Paul. But you don't
know enough about me yet.*

Her face FADES again, and --

BACK UP IN THE TREE --

*Lexy frees her hands from the branch she'd been clutching and
she sticks her arms out wide and her basket falls away and --*

LEXY'S ON TOP OF PAUL IN BED --

*--where Paul's having trouble keeping his eyes open because
of the valium, but he's just trying to stay awake, he's
trying to stay present for her. He can't help it, though,
and he starts to slip away, but just before he does, just
before her face FADES AWAY...*

...a tear drops from her eye down onto his chest, and --

*

LEXY'S BACK IN THE TREE --

*--where she's perched on the branch, her arms outstretched,
and just as she starts to fall backwards--*

LORELEI'S INSIDE THE HOUSE --

-- and all that's left of the Porterhouse is the bone now, which she happily takes over to the fishtank, and just as she goes to hide it...

...suddenly something makes Lorelei tense up. The bone flies out of her mouth, deep behind the fishtank, and as Lorelei looks off-screen, we can't hear the THUD but we can feel it and with a FLASH --

WE'RE BACK IN THE ATTIC--

--and Paul's covered in sweat. It's morning now, and light streams through the long window. He glances up at it--

--and Lexy's there, too, staring blankly outside.

PAUL

You did it, didn't you? You made a choice and you did it.

Lexy turns and looks at him sadly, but doesn't say anything.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Answer me! Admit it, goddammit! I want to hear you say it!

She just looks back at him silently. Her eyes fill with tears.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Why didn't you tell me? Lexy... it wouldn't have mattered. Whatever was wrong, whatever happened to you, it wouldn't have changed anything.

(angry again)

Why didn't you tell me? I could've done something! I could've helped you! I could've stopped you!

But Lexy doesn't answer. Paul glares at her.

PAUL (CONT'D)

What else was a lie then? Hunh? How am I supposed to know? What else did you leave out? What else did you not tell me?

Again, Lexy doesn't answer. Her face begins to FADE.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Was any of it true? Was anything true, Lexy? I'm asking you a question -- was there anything in our marriage that was actually true?

Paul knocks some boxes over, startling her.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Don't just sit there, say
something! Speak! Speak! Speak,
goddamit, speak!

Lexy stares at him, scared and vulnerable. When she finally opens her mouth, the voice of Dog J comes out.

LEXY
Woganoo. Jukaluk.

And then, with another FLASH OF LIGHT --

PAUL WAKES UP --

And he's back in the present, curled up on the attic floor, all alone now.

DOWN IN THE KITCHEN --

Paul emerges from the darkness of the stairwell and has to shield his eyes -- sunlight streams in from the windows. Then he sees the DEATH MASK, all that's left on the yellow walls.

He goes to it, pulls it off. Stares at it in his hands -- but it's like it's burning, it's too hot to hold -- so he HURLS IT TO THE GROUND, shattering it into dozens of pieces.

He sinks to the ground, exhausted and drained.

After a beat, he grabs the phone off the counter and dials.

PAUL
Officer Garcia please.
(after a wait)
It's Paul. Any sign of Lorel--?

Paul stops, listening to Garcia. His reaction tells us all we need to know. He hangs up the phone without saying goodbye.

HILLY STREET - DAY

The same hilly street that Paul once jogged with Lorelei, and before then, that Lexy jogged with her. But now, all is quiet.

And then, in the distance, a figure appears on the horizon, trotting down the road. But it's not a person.

It's a dog.

BACK IN PAUL'S KITCHEN --

Paul opens his eyes. He stares upward. And then, suddenly, he sees something that makes him freeze.

Somehow, right where the wall meets the ceiling, the word "YOU" glints in the sunlight.

Paul slowly stands. Next to "YOU", the word "I" comes into focus, and then "LOVE", and then "YOU" again.

Paul looks around, sees that the room is bordered with the words "I LOVE YOU", written in translucent glaze lettering, over and over again. It can only be seen in the morning and late afternoon, when the right light shines in.

Lexy's voice rings in his ears.

LEXY'S VOICE
*You're home! Come in here, I've
got a surprise for you!*

As Paul stares up at this message from his dead wife--

FADE TO:

THE KITCHEN - DAY

-- where Lexy is hanging a photo of Paul's. There are moving * boxes stacked all over, and Younger Paul is unpacking his stuff. Lexy steps back to make sure the photo is straight and makes a face (here the walls are painted a dreary gray).

LEXY
God, I hate the color of this room.

PAUL
Then let's paint it.

She looks around the kitchen.

LEXY
*I will. One day, I will. What's
your favorite color?*

PAUL
I dunno. Yellow.

LEXY
(making a face)
Yellow? Really?

Paul shrugs as he sits down on the floor, dumping a box of utensils into one of the bottom cabinet drawers.

Suddenly he stops... and pulls out the SQUARE EGG PRESS. He grins, then turns, shows it to Lexy. She smiles back at him.

LEXY
Ah. Reunited at last.

As Paul stares at the egg press in his hands, Lorelei walks into the kitchen, sees him on the floor.

Still wary of him, she keeps her distance. But Lexy sits down behind Paul, resting her head on his shoulder.

LEXY

*I can't wait to share this house
with you.*

PAUL

(re: Lorelei)

I'm not sure she feels the same way.

LEXY

She'll come around. You both will.

Lexy playfully grabs Lorelei and rolls with her on the floor.

LEXY

*Wanna go for a run, girl? Hunh?
You wanna go for a run?*

Lorelei jumps up, tail wagging, and goes to fetch her leash.

PAUL

You two jog a lot.

Lexy smiles as she clips Lorelei's leash on. Then, still on the floor, she leans over and kisses him.

He kisses her back. She pulls away, stares at him. No one has ever looked more sincere.

LEXY

*You have no idea how much better my
life is with you in it.
(with another kiss)
Welcome home.*

*Then she stands up and leads Lorelei out the front door.
Paul watches them go.*

FADE TO:

THE HILLY STREET -- PRESENT DAY

Closer now on the same dog from before, jogging down the road. It's Lorelei -- definitely Lorelei, wet, dirty, tired.

But she trots on, past house after house, street after street.

BACK IN PAUL'S KITCHEN --

Paul is still on the floor, eyes wide, staring at the words painted into the yellow walls.

Finally he looks away, glances out the window. And there's the apple tree, towering over his backyard.

He stands up, fixated now, and heads --

OUTSIDE --

-- where he looks up into the tree...

...and there's Lexy, high in the branches. His breath catches in his throat. He starts to panic.

PAUL

Lex -- Lexy. What the hell are you doing up there?

Lexy doesn't look down at Paul. She just stares straight out at the house.

LEXY

Picking apples for a pie. What the hell are you doing up there?

And Paul's confused, because it doesn't seem like she's talking to him, she's not even looking at him, but it sounds so familiar and Paul turns to follow her gaze and sees --

-- the HOLE in the attic wall, the bricks knocked out in a clump. But inside the hold is only BLACKNESS.

No one is there. Younger Paul is gone.

Lexy stares into the blackness, realizes he's gone, too, and so she turns, disappearing back into the tree. Beneath her, as Paul starts to panic even more --

OUT ON THE HILLY STREET --

Lorelei comes to the end of the road. She can turn left or right. She lifts her nose, smells the air.

Without breaking stride, she turns right. And she starts to run faster.

AT THE TREE IN THE BACKYARD --

Paul frantically tries to get a glimpse of Lexy in the tree.

PAUL

Lexy! Lexy, where are you!?

But she's disappeared. So Paul has no choice -- he lifts himself up to the lowest branch, and as he starts to climb up after her --

OUT ON A STREET -- WHO KNOWS HOW CLOSE --

-- Lorelei flies through a cross street, narrowly avoiding a car, which SKIDS to a halt.

But Lorelei doesn't stop. She runs even faster.

UP IN THE TREE --

--Paul climbs up, higher and higher, reaching the biggest branch -- and there's Lexy again, inching out to the edge. *

She takes a deep breath, steels herself for what she's about to do... and then looks silently RIGHT AT PAUL. *

Paul frantically takes a step forward. But she takes a step back, right to the very edge. And Paul knows this is as close as he can get, that she's going to jump no matter what. *

PAUL

Lexy... please... please...

She pauses, right before she falls, right there on the cusp. Her face is clear and whole, and she looks right back at Paul -- right back into Paul. She gets her message across. His eyes widen.

PAUL

Oh my god. You were protecting me. *

She stares straight ahead, focused entirely on him.

PAUL

That's why you came up here. Isn't it? Because you wanted me to think it was an accident. Because then I wouldn't second guess everything, right? Then I'd always look at you... the way I've always looked at you. *

The leaves RUSTLE. Paul steps forward.

PAUL

Tell me you were always going to end up here then. Tell me it wasn't me that made you come up in this tree. Tell me that for the last four years, I've been the only thing keeping you out of it.

Paul fights back tears.

PAUL

Lex. I need to know. Was there anything I could've done?

He steps further down the branch, reaches out --

Right then, from somewhere close there's a familiar BARK, and as he turns to look out to the road...

...Lexy starts to fall. He focuses back on her face -- it's not twisted and anguished like he used to imagine it. Now her face is serene and peaceful, almost beatific.

PAUL
Lexy! Wait...

Time stands still. Lexy looks back at him, somehow pauses in midair. Paul takes her in one last time.

PAUL
I love you, too.

She smiles. And then she's gone, disappearing from view--

WHILE IN FRONT OF THE HOUSE --

Lorelei gallops up into the yard, takes a quick look at the closed front door, and then hurries around to the side.

There's the apple tree, looming over the back yard. Branches RUSTLE and RUMBLE. Lorelei flies towards it, YELPING. She reaches the trunk and tries to jump up into it, while--

UP IN THE TREE --

Paul looks down at the COMMOTION. His eyes widen-- but there's no way. Clearly he's still imagining things. He takes a step over to get a better look --

...and the branch SNAPS. He falls.

He CRASHES through the tree, trying to grab hold of something, able to slow himself down but only barely, and he breaks through one last branch and there's the ground and --

CUT TO BLACK

STILL BLACK.

Still black. And then, a WHIMPER fades up, and --

PAUL OPENS HIS EYES --

--to find Lorelei furiously licking his face, trying to wake him, her tail wagging a mile a minute.

In spite of the pain, Paul instinctively grabs hold of her, hardly able to believe she's real. Lorelei WHIMPERS loudly.

PAUL

I don't-- my god, I don't believe it.

Lorelei keeps WHIMPERING, hysterical.

PAUL

Thank you. Oh god, thank you.
Shhhh. You're back. You're safe.
(as she keeps WHIMPERING)
Shhh, it's okay. I hear you. I
hear you.

Lorelei suddenly jerks out of his arms and runs to the apple tree again, manically YELPING and jumping up, looking for Lexy up in the branches now.

Paul heads over, gathers Lorelei in his arms, holding on until the fight drains out of her.

PAUL

All that time I spent trying to get you to talk... you'd already told me who was in the house that day. You'd already told me everything I needed to know. But I just wasn't listening.

Paul starts to CRY. Lorelei licks at his tears -- they're both trying to comfort each other.

PAUL

It's not your fault. Okay? It's not your fault. You did everything you could do. It's not your fault.

THEN DRIFT AWAY --

-- leaving Paul and Lorelei alone, in the grass of his backyard, beneath the apple tree.

FADE TO:

BLACK.

PAUL'S VOICE

The following is true. It has been documented, researched, and recorded. It is not anecdotal and nothing has been embellished.

ON A SHOWER HEAD --

--as the water is turned on.

PAUL'S VOICE

*Ithaca, New York. Here there lived
a woman who fell out of an apple
tree, leaving behind a man,
suddenly without his wife, and a
dog, suddenly without her owner.*

Paul scrubs the dirt off Lorelei in the bathtub.

PAUL'S VOICE

*The woman also left behind some
questions, though. Questions that
her husband could not answer.*

IN THE KITCHEN --

A clean Lorelei rolls around on the carpet, drying herself.

PAUL'S VOICE

But perhaps... just perhaps...

Paul watches her quietly.

PAUL'S VOICE

...her dog could.

ON LORELEI'S FACE --

As she watches Paul now, rooting around in the kitchen cabinet. He knocks over a cookie sheet and it CLATTERS to the floor, startling Lorelei.

PAUL'S VOICE

*So the man and the dog traveled to
Ohio to meet someone who said he
could help.*

Paul keeps searching until he finds what he's looking for.

PAUL'S VOICE

*But instead, the man lost his wife's
dog in Ohio, and after searching
high and low, he had to drive home,
alone, afraid he'd never see her
again.*

He takes whatever it is and walks out of the room--

PAUL'S VOICE

*The worst part was, when the man
returned to his empty house, only
then did he realize that the answers
he'd been looking for...*

--passing under the words "I LOVE YOU," glistening above him in the morning sun.

PAUL'S VOICE
*...had been right in front of his
 eyes the entire time.*

BY PAUL'S CAR --

Paul sits on the hood, talking into the tape recorder.

PAUL'S VOICE
*Somehow, though, some way, over five
 days and four nights, the dog
 traveled 300 miles and found her way
 back to him. Found her way back home.*

Lorelei stares up at him, panting in a way that makes it seem like she's grinning.

PAUL'S VOICE
*The man promised his dog he'd never
 abandon her again.*

Then Lorelei suddenly sees a squirrel nearby and DARTS after it. Paul grins, too, as he watches her run across the parking lot.

PAUL'S VOICE
*And the dog promised the man the
 same thing.*

Lorelei's almost caught the squirrel now, she's gaining fast -- but there's a WHISTLE from the car.

She looks back, sees Paul wave her over... and without another glance at the squirrel, she trots back to him.

PAUL'S VOICE
*So then the man made himself one
 last promise.*

AT A GRAVEYARD - DAY

Paul and Lorelei walk through the gravestones, which go on as far as the eye can see.

PAUL'S VOICE
I remember my wife in white.

BETWEEN THE ROWS --

There's a vision of Lexy walking down the aisle in her white tank top and shorts. She pulls her veil off as if it's a mask.

PAUL'S VOICE
*I remember her face when she walked
 toward me on our wedding day.*

AT A FRESHLY LAID GRAVESTONE --

Paul kneels down... and like Lexy had done for his mother all those years before, he pulls a small present out of his pocket and lays it against the stone.

Then, after brushing a few stray blades of grass away from Lexy's grave, Paul stands up. And he and Lorelei head back the way they came.

ON A GRILL --

A Porterhouse SIZZLES as it's laid over the flames.

IN PAUL'S KITCHEN --

Paul sets the cooked steak down on the floor. Lorelei looks up at him -- is this really for me?

Paul nods. He smiles as he laces up his jogging shoes, watching her scarf the steak down in just a few bites.

*

*PAUL'S VOICE (CONT'D)
And I'll always remember that for
every dark moment, there was a
moment of such brightness I almost
couldn't bear to look at it head on.*

Then he stands up, heads to the front door. When he opens it, DAYLIGHT floods into the room. He squints into the sun.

PAUL
You ready, girl?

Lorelei excitedly scrambles outside, more than ready, and as Paul shuts the door behind them --

CUT TO BLACK