

THE
GREAT UNKNOWN
by
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I'm Nobody! Who are you?
Are you--Nobody--Too?
Then there's a pair of us!
Don't tell! they'd advertise--you know!

How dreary--to be--Somebody!
How public--like a Frog--
To tell one's name--the livelong June--
To an admiring Bog!

Emily Dickinson

1 INT. DAWN. APARTMENT--PARK SLOPE

Dawn leaks into a basement apartment. HAROLD BELDING, 32, a bundle of exposed nerves and hidden desires, lies in bed and stares at the ceiling. His wife, MIRANDA, shy of 30, sleeps beside him. Something soft-focus about Miranda. An aroma of sex, as if she's been marinating in it.

HAROLD
Why haven't they called? It's
three weeks already.

MIRANDA
Who--? What time is it?

She reaches for the ALARM CLOCK...

HAROLD
You'd think they had to bring in
a team of codebreakers.

MIRANDA
Why don't you call your editor?

HAROLD
Editors don't talk to writers,
Miranda. Editors talk to agents
and lawyers.

She climbs out of bed, with Harold in anxious pursuit...The cold floors sting her feet...She starts to make coffee...

MIRANDA
If they hated it they would've
called you.

HAROLD
Hated it? It never occurred to
me that they hated it. Hated it?
(beat)
Well, fuck them. Fuck them if
they hate it. What do they know?

MIRANDA
I'm sure they haven't even read
it yet.

HAROLD
Of course not. I'm not a "name."
I'm not "promotable". If it said
"by Stephen King" on the title
page they'd have a million books
in the stores by now.

(CONTINUED)

1 CONTINUED:

MIRANDA
You're not that kind of writer.

HAROLD
You mean a successful one?

MIRANDA
You know what I mean.

Harold PACES...

HAROLD
Maybe I can still get it back.

MIRANDA
And do what with it?

HAROLD
You've read it. Faulkner said a
book with one reader was worth
writing.

MIRANDA
That was your last book.

HAROLD
My last book sold eight hundred
copies, for your information.
(beat)
We have a Gulag in America, too--
they call a writer "promising."

MIRANDA
Harold--call your editor.

HAROLD
If I had known what I was
starting I would never have
written "The End."

MIRANDA
"The End" is the way books end.

HAROLD
Books don't end--authors end.
It's their books that end them.

MIRANDA
I know you. If you're scared
that means it's good.

HAROLD
I can't do this any more.

(CONTINUED)

1 CONTINUED: (2)

MIRANDA
Harold, you've stuck with it--

HAROLD
And now I'm stuck with it?

MIRANDA
I believe in you.

HAROLD
We are all quite familiar with
your heroic belief in me, thank
you.

MIRANDA
You want me to tell you it's
probably lousy. Like if I'm a
pessimist it makes me more
interesting. I'm sorry I'm not
more interesting.

HAROLD
This isn't about you.

MIRANDA
Excuse me for getting in the way.

She turns her back to him and EXITS toward the bathroom...He
follows, stops her, takes her hands...

HAROLD
I don't need you to tell me it's
great. I need you to tell me
it's okay if it--.
(turns to her)
I mean, maybe it isn't great.

They look at each other. Then she goes to him, kisses and
caresses him as she maneuvers him into the living room...

MIRANDA
Then we'll just have to live
forever in our romantic little
apartment...

HAROLD
Basement apartment.

MIRANDA
...And eat candlelit dinners when
they shut off our power...With
our mismatched china...
(more)

(CONTINUED)

1 CONTINUED: (3)

MIRANDA (Cont'd)
And put weeds in a flea market
vase...Hold hands with our gloves
on, till the heat comes up...

HAROLD
Miranda, I really want to talk
about this.

She pushes him back onto their secondhand sofa...

MIRANDA
...And have no place else but a
sofa no one wanted...To make love
seven times a day.

Then he kisses her. They begin to make love--

CUT TO:

2 INT. MORNING. DAVIS, DAY PUBLISHING

By the elevators, brass letters on wood:

DAVIS, DAY PUBLISHING A Division
of American Metaplastic

A SECRETARY in an outer office answers the phone.

SECRETARY
Mr. Lahore's office...

Inside, BUDDY LAHORE, 40s, a monstrosly urbane Sikh, goatee
and Oxford accent, SIGHS as he broods over his view--late
March, as winter eases its grip...On his desk, a MANUSCRIPT--

THE BLUE GUITAR: A Novel by Harold Belding

He scans a page. Thinks. Then punches a button.

VOICE (O.C.)
Yes?

LAHORE
June? Who is Harold Belding?

CUT TO:

3 INT. MORNING. STRAND BOOKSTORE

Ambition's tomb... Rows of abandoned books... Harold, in a clerk's BLUE SMOCK, stacks volumes on a shelf-- "BOOKS BY THE POUND." He notices a BROWSER enter at the other end of the aisle. Then approaches as furtively as a flasher.

HAROLD
I've got just the outstanding
novel you're looking for.

The Browser eyes it skeptically...

BROWSER
Darkness Illumined?

HAROLD
Illumin-éd.

BROWSER
Harold Belding? I never heard of
him.

HAROLD
Isn't it just your favorite thing--
to discover a new writer?

BROWSER
Where's his picture--?

The Browser turns the book over in his hand. Harold grabs it, whips the jacket off. Hands the book back to the Browser.

HAROLD
Belding doesn't go for all that
personality crap. It's all about
the work.
(beat)
Nineteen cents! What do you
lose?

BROWSER
I don't like clutter.

HAROLD
All you have to do is read it.
Just take it.

BROWSER
I want to see what he looks
like...

The Browser tries to pull another copy from the shelf. Harold shoves it back, keeps forcing the book on her.

(CONTINUED)

3 CONTINUED:

HAROLD
There's no secret compartment
with plutonium in it--it's just
a book! Take it!
(beat)
I'll throw in The Pelican
Brief...

Harold tries to force the book on her. The Browser recoils,
then FLEES. Harold looks at the "clutter" in his hand--

CUT TO:

4 INT. NIGHT. BARNEY'S

Miranda and ELAINE, 30s, shrewd eyes, decorate the shop window.
A MANNEQUIN unclothed, with a cigarette in a holder, as four
tuxedoed GORILLAS compete to light it.

MIRANDA
...Your life can change
overnight. That's what happened
to this guy-- he was just another
guy in Harold's writing program,
then the next thing you know--

ELAINE
(rummaging)
You know where I put those pins?

MIRANDA
Nobody thought he was as
promising as Harold.

ELAINE
I don't know, Miranda. It sounds
to me like you have a lot riding
on this next book of his.

MIRANDA
What do you mean?

ELAINE
God forbid--but what if--?

Miranda cuts her off.

MIRANDA
Harold has this amazing belief in
himself, this pure-- This
passion.
(more)

(CONTINUED)

4 CONTINUED:

MIRANDA (Cont'd)
I'll wake up in the middle of the night and he's at his desk with all the windows open, burning up with some idea...That's what I fell in love with.

ELAINE
I'm just looking for a guy with a dental plan.

MIRANDA
Sometimes I think I'm the only one who understands him. He's so hard on himself. He wants so much.

ELAINE
And what do you want?

MIRANDA
I just want him to be happy.
(off her look)
Oh, who ever knows what they want. Don't start that with me. I have what I want.

She opens a box, pulls out ten thousand dollars of beaded GOWN...Flounces comically as she models it...They laugh.

ELAINE
I'm gonna go get a box of pins.

Elaine EXITS. Miranda's laughter tails off. Then she catches HER REFLECTION

In the window...And secretly admires herself in the gown--

CUT TO:

5 INT. NIGHT. BELDING APARTMENT

Harold works in the little spotlight of an old Tensor lamp...A Smith Corona electric and a metal typing table...

IN THE HALLWAY

Miranda arrives at the door, PAUSES to smile at the little thud and clatter inside...

(CONTINUED)

5 CONTINUED:

BACK ON--HAROLD

As Miranda enters without a word. Embraces him from behind. He hardly acknowledges her as he continues to work--

DISSOLVE TO:

6 INT. MORNING. ABBOTT HOUSE--SAGAPONACK

Barely seen amidst the STEAM that plumes and hisses about him-- ROBERT GRAND ABBOTT, mid-50s, the reigning, roaring lion of American letters. The smile of a hard-working charmer. The hands of a surgeon--hands that can tie little invisible knots or break bones. He talks on a PORTABLE PHONE.

ABBOTT

...No, I'm eager to meet you.
It's just I have to fly down to
Mexico Thursday for Miss Universe--
I'm, uh, judging it. They're
going to count it toward my
community service for that
disorderly conduct thing...

Then the DOORBELL. But he's not expecting anyone. As he exits the shower, he pulls on a monogrammed BATHROBE: RGA.

YOUNG WOMAN (O.C.)

(on phone)

It's so important--for me,
personally-- to have Robert Grand
Abbott be part of the symposium.
And I feel "The Moral
Responsibility of the Artist" is
such an important topic...

ABBOTT

No, no, I take the moral
responsibility of the artist very
seriously.

Abbott reaches in for his TUXEDO, which had been smoothing out in the steam room along with him...

YOUNG WOMAN (O.C.)

...If I could just meet you in
person, maybe I could persuade
you to--

The doorbell rings again. Abbott peers outside...

(CONTINUED)

6 CONTINUED:

ABBOTT'S POV

A classic PORSCHE parked on the lawn.

BACK ON--ABBOTT

Troubled, as if the Grim Reaper had been known to drive precisely that type of car. The doorbell rings again...

ABBOTT

(mutters to himself)

What the hell's he doing here?

(to phone)

Are you going to the wingding for
The Library?

YOUNG WOMAN (O.C.)

Yes, but--

ABBOTT

Maybe we could hook up there.

YOUNG WOMAN (O.C.)

I'm just concerned--it's such a
large event--we might not--

ABBOTT

Wear a short skirt--I'll be sure
to find you. Bye bye.

Abbott clicks off. Peers outside again.

ABBOTT'S POV

As Lahore looks up at the house for signs of Abbott...

LAHORE

(calling)

Bob?

BACK ON--ABBOTT

His mind racing, as he ties his bathrobe--

CUT TO:

7 EXT. MORNING. ABBOTT HOUSE

A large shingle-style house on Sagg Pond. Lahore stands on the front porch, rings again. Abbott opens the door.

(CONTINUED)

7 CONTINUED:

ABBOTT

Buddy! How wonderful to wake up
and find you leaking oil on my
new sod.

LAHORE

Bob.

They embrace warily.

ABBOTT

How about a cup of coffee?

CUT TO:

8 INT. LATER. ABBOTT HOUSE--KITCHEN

The kitchen of a cooking enthusiast. Abbott grinds his beans,
makes coffee in a copper-clad Italian contraption.

LAHORE

You look well, Bob.

ABBOTT

I wouldn't expect to see you out
here before summer.

LAHORE

I hope you don't feel like I've
been ignoring you.

ABBOTT

I've just been working so damn
hard, you know, trying to finish
the Big Book...

LAHORE

Have things gotten that bad
between us--you think I'd be so
vulgar as to pester you about the
Big Book?

ABBOTT

No, no...You know how I've been
breaking my back.

LAHORE

But if I were to ask you--
generally-- how your novel is
going...?

Abbott looks at him. Then returns to his coffee-making...

(CONTINUED)

8 CONTINUED:

ABBOTT

It's not really a novel anymore.
I'm calling it, Love Yourself.
Love Your Thighs! I was sure
you'd be pleased.

LAHORE

Don't be that way.

ABBOTT

I need an editor, Buddy. Not an
egg timer.

LAHORE

I've stood by you nine years,
Bob. It only took Joyce twelve
years to finish Ulysses.

ABBOTT

Meanwhile they could pay both
Joyce and his editor out of your
lunch bill.

LAHORE

I forget, I'm an Indian. I'm
supposed to subsist on my own
urine.

ABBOTT

Nine years does me no good if you
bail out now.

Lahore finds a MANUSCRIPT that Abbott has flipped over and used
as a MEMO PAD. "CHARLENE 876-9066", "BECKY 909-2332"...

LAHORE

Well, they're starting to play
rough.

(mutters)

I see you got that manuscript I
sent you.

ABBOTT

Oh, c'mon, Buddy--who could ever
replace you?

(beat)

Anyone I know?

LAHORE

We're a subsidiary this of a
worldwide that now. These guys
want to sell books the way they
sell panty hose...

(CONTINUED)

8 CONTINUED: (2)

ABBOTT
Panty hose.

LAHORE
...on a rack at the airport.

ABBOTT
Opaque tights and sheer crap.

LAHORE
They're businessmen, that's all.

ABBOTT
That's exactly what it is--a lot of macho bullshit. They don't want to see a guy make a million bucks for some dilly-dude job like writing a book.

LAHORE
Actually, they're calling it two million.

ABBOTT
Two million?

LAHORE
You know, with the interest.

ABBOTT
Tell them you've read it. Tell them it bags at the knee.

LAHORE
Two million of "their" money. You know how they talk.

Abbott takes a beat. Then turns to Lahore.

ABBOTT
Wait a minute--. Are they saying they want the advance back?
(off Lahore's look)
They can kiss my Pulitzer Prize.

He returns, furiously, to making his coffee...

LAHORE
I talked them out of the whole lawsuit thing. They're off that now.

(CONTINUED)

8 CONTINUED: (3)

ABBOTT
I'm Robert Grand Abbott,
goddammit!

LAHORE
Look, it's not that you're
forgotten, exactly, but...

ABBOTT
What am I supposed to do--sell my
house--with the market in the
crapper?

LAHORE
You know the Robert Grand Abbott
at the Stage Deli--the tongue
with pickled tomato?

ABBOTT
My sandwich?

LAHORE
It's now the Charles Grodin.

ABBOTT
They took away my sandwich?

LAHORE
The irony is, if you had a book
coming out now, you could
probably--

ABBOTT
Fuck 'em! Fuck them!

LAHORE
--double your money just with the
movie rights. Merchandising,
Books on Tape, CD-ROM...

ABBOTT
Fuck--!
(beat)
That money wouldn't go against
the advance?

LAHORE
It could be a little book. That
you can hold in the palm of your
hand and read in an afternoon.
(more)

(CONTINUED)

8 CONTINUED: (4)

LAHORE (Cont'd)

A thriller-- two hundred pages,
with an erotic drawing of some
sort on the jacket-- for the
Spring list. Murder, adultery,
a man with something to prove...

ABBOTT

That's not my kind of thing.

LAHORE

Of course, it'd be a departure
for you.

ABBOTT

I'd have to put the Big Book
aside. I can't do it.

LAHORE

That's the point, isn't it? The
Big Book will come out and
everyone will forget all of this--
the broken promises and missed
deadlines, your temper tantrums
and abusive behavior...

ABBOTT

(not at all sure)

Absolutely.

LAHORE

Because it's sure to be such a
historic achievement--with such
broad commercial appeal--

ABBOTT

Look, Buddy, if I were you, I'd
want a Robert Grand Abbott for
the Spring list, too. I just
can't do it.

LAHORE

I don't care who does it. I just
need a book.

Abbott, ENRAGED--but not showing it--buries himself in making
the coffee, his back to Lahore...TRAPPED...

ABBOTT

Well, you'd never be so vulgar as
to ask a thing like that.

(beat)

So I take it you're not asking.

(CONTINUED)

8 CONTINUED: (5)

LAHORE

Your name, your face, and
something in between.

ABBOTT

And some other guy writes it.

LAHORE

Well, why not?

ABBOTT

Talk about a departure.

LAHORE

Of course, you'll hash out the
broad strokes with him, and then
he'll be on his own.

Abbott turns to him.

ABBOTT

So you have someone in mind?
(off Lahore's look)
Oh, really?

LAHORE

A real writer's writer.

Abbott sits down with his coffee opposite Lahore.

ABBOTT

Tell me, Buddy. Who is this
bright young man who thinks he's
Robert Grand Abbott?

CUT TO:

9 EXT. DAY. STRAND

"JAY MCINERNEY WEARS KHAKIS" on a BUS, which, as it pulls off,
REVEALS Harold, in his clerk's smock, on a PAY PHONE.

VOICE (O.C.)

Harold who?

HAROLD

It's me, Mother.

VOICE (O.C.)

(sarcastic)

Not Harold Belding the novelist?

(CONTINUED)

9 CONTINUED:

HAROLD
Yes, Mother.

VOICE (O.C.)
The author Harold Belding?

HAROLD
Is this necessary?

VOICE (O.C.)
I own a copy of that book of
yours, Darkness Illumined.

HAROLD
Illumin-éd.

VOICE (O.C.)
It's a real collector's item.

HAROLD
Mother, you know I wouldn't ask
for anything for myself, but
Miranda--

Harold's burly SUPERVISOR, returning from his own lunch break,
cuffs him as he BELLOWS...

SUPERVISOR
Hey, Mr. Fucking Literary Man--
get your fucking ass back to
work.

VOICE (O.C.)
Where are you calling from, the
Algonquin?

HAROLD
I'm sure you could find the
generosity in your heart, Mother.
Perhaps by driving a stake
through it.
(click and dial tone)
Mother?

CUT TO:

10 INT. NIGHT. BELDING APARTMENT

A cake--"WORLD'S GREATEST WRITER". Miranda, in a cocktail
dress, SINGS while she sets a table with candles and flowers.
Champagne in an improvised ice bucket, party hats and
noisemakers...The CLATTER of locks from the front door...

(CONTINUED)

10 CONTINUED:

MIRANDA

Harold?

Harold trudges in...Turns and sees the cake, the champagne...

HAROLD

What's going on?

She goes to him. Kisses him. Hands him the champagne...

MIRANDA

(cooly)

Everyone likes to open a bottle
of champagne once in a while.

HAROLD

Miranda, what happened?

(off champagne)

Look, they left the--

He blanches. GASPS for breath...

MIRANDA

What?

HAROLD

(fanning himself)

...the price...

MIRANDA

Forget about that--that's over!

HAROLD

What's over?

She SINGS the theme song from "THE JEFFERSONS"...

MIRANDA

"We're movin' on up! To thuh
East Saaahd!...

She puts a PARTY HAT on his head...He takes it off.

HAROLD

Will you tell me what's going on?

MIRANDA

Do you know a man named Buddy
Lahore?

(off his look)

He's the editor-in-chief, he runs
the whole--

(CONTINUED)

10 CONTINUED: (2)

HAROLD
I know who he is.

MIRANDA
Well, he knows who you are. He
called for you. It's on the
machine.

HAROLD
It must be a prank. Why would
Buddy Lahore bother calling me?

MIRANDA
Harold, why do you think?

HAROLD
You don't think he read my
book...

MIRANDA
Well?

HAROLD
(realizing)
...And loved my--. He'd never
call me--he must've--. Buddy
Lahore loved my book. My God--he
loved my book!

MIRANDA
All those people who said you'd
never make it can go fuck
themselves.

HAROLD
Miranda, do you know what this
means?

MIRANDA
Yes!

HAROLD
Oh my God! Buddy Lahore loved my
book!

She whoops. JUBILATION, as she pops the champagne, he grabs
her and whirls her around...They laugh and kiss...

MIRANDA
You really have a nice smile.
(beat)
I'd almost forgotten.

CUT TO:

11 INT. LATER. LIVING ROOM

Miranda in bed inside. Harold, wired, finishes the champagne as he plays the PHONE MESSAGE over and over and watches TV...

LAHORE
(on machine)
Hello, Harold, this is Buddy.
Uh, Lahore. I'd like to have you
for lunch--

Harold hits STOP. REWIND. PLAY...

LAHORE
(on machine)
Hello, Harold, this is Buddy.
Uh, Lahore...

ON THE TELEVISION

CHARLIE ROSE, the handsome, windblown Southerner, interviews NORMAN MAILER, the legendary novelist.

ROSE
It's a pleasure to welcome here
again, Norman Mailer...

BACK ON--HAROLD

As he aimlessly rewinds the message, watches the TV...

HAROLD
(mimics Rose)
Tonight, Harold Belding, author
of the electrifying new novel,
The Blue Guitar...

BACK ON--TELEVISION

ROSE
The moments of doubt that must
come for someone in your craft--
what sustains you? Craft?

MAILER
Debt.

BACK ON--HAROLD

As he pretends he's the one being interviewed...

HAROLD
(mimics Rose)
How do you do it, Harold? What
gets you through?
(more)

(CONTINUED)

11 CONTINUED:

HAROLD (Cont'd)
 (back to Harold)
 To be honest, Charlie--and it is
 so nice to see you again--
 (mimics Rose)
 Well, Harold, it's very special
 for me, too.
 (resuming)
 It was a real struggle, those
 eight years. I could never have
 done it-- anything I've done, I
 could never have done--

IN THE BEDROOM

Miranda lies awake, listening, her eyes moist with JOY...

HAROLD (O.C.)
 (from inside)
 --without my wife, Miranda.

CUT TO:

12 EXT. DAY. LAHORE'S BUILDING--PARK AVENUE

Harold arrives in a jog of excitement. A DOORMAN stops him.

HAROLD
 I'm here to see Mr. Lahore.

DOORMAN
 And your name?

HAROLD
 Harold Belding.

The Doorman eyes him skeptically, rings upstairs. JENNIFER TRENT, 20s, leggy and chic, emerges from the elevator with a FRIEND and a SMALL DOG. Harold ogles her as she exits.

DOORMAN
 (to phone)
 A Harold Belding says he's here
 to see you. Okay, sir.
 (to Harold)
 Right this way, sir.

HAROLD
 After you.

DOORMAN
 If you please.

(CONTINUED)

12 CONTINUED:

HAROLD
No, I insist.

DOORMAN
Just get in the fucking elevator.

CUT TO:

13 INT. DAY. LAHORE'S APARTMENT

Harold exits the wood-panelled elevator, rings the doorbell. A BUTLER admits him inside.

BUTLER
Mr. Lahore is in the library.

The Butler's heels click on the limestone... Harold gapes at the art, the decor, the flowers...The Butler admits him to

THE LIBRARY

Rare books and first editions...Harold gets his first glimpse of Lahore, in a cashmere turtleneck, jeans and velvet slippers, browsing in a shaft of sunlight. Then he looks up.

LAHORE
Harold! How good of you to take the time. You've caught me browsing.

HAROLD
(shaking hands)
It's an honor to meet you, sir.

Lahore opens to a jacket photo--HORACE DICKLEY, an author young in the 1940s, cigarette and big-checked suit...

LAHORE
Look at him. The jaunty angle of the cigarette, the confident posture, the light in his eyes...An optimist.
(muttering)
You'd have to be an optimist to wear that suit.

HAROLD
I never heard of him.

LAHORE
Dickley? Oh, he was promising.

(CONTINUED)

13 CONTINUED:

HAROLD

They called him promising?

He returns the book to the shelf. Takes down a second, heftier volume of Dickley. In this photo, Dickley is older, alcoholic, shabby...

LAHORE

As the books grow longer, the man is abridged. Broken, capillary by capillary. Poverty. Divorce...You're married, aren't you, Harold?

HAROLD

Yes. Eight years now.

LAHORE

(resuming)

Promising Horace Dickley. And beside him on the shelf... Dickens. That is as close as poor Dickley will ever get to greatness. Would you like to borrow it?

HAROLD

Sometimes you find Atlantis in these forgotten authors.

Lahore hands him the Dickley. Moves to his bar...

LAHORE

A real writer's writer, Dickley. I used to be a writer's editor. And then--
(gestures around)
--all this happened.
(with glass)
Scotch and soda?

HAROLD

Just soda would be fine.

LAHORE

I've read your manuscript.

HAROLD

Well, yes, I assumed that that was why...
(suddenly insecure)
And?

(CONTINUED)

13 CONTINUED: (2)

LAHORE

Well, the sentences, dear boy...

HAROLD

You liked it?

LAHORE

The vigor, the virtuoso metaphor,
the sense of danger...

HAROLD

You've put your finger, you know,
on something I tried to--

LAHORE

I'll tell you what else I
especially liked about your book.
It was the right length.

HAROLD

The right length?

Lahore burbles. Harold laughs uncomfortably with him. Lahore,
not laughing now, escorts him inside for lunch...

LAHORE

People don't want Big Books
anymore. They want little books,
that they can hold in the palm of
their hand and read in an
afternoon.

HAROLD

You mean a little book with a
large ambition?

LAHORE

I mean a thriller--you can do
that, can't you? Two hundred
pages, with an erotic drawing of
some sort on the jacket...

HAROLD

You want me to write a thriller?

LAHORE

Murder, adultery, a man with
something to prove...And the best
part of it is, it's going to be
by Robert Grand Abbott.

HAROLD

Robert Grand Abbott?

(CONTINUED)

13 CONTINUED: (3)

LAHORE
Do you know Bob?

HAROLD
I'm not following you.

LAHORE
For the Autograph series. Say a
fifty thousand dollar advance,
with the usual sweeteners if I
can get it for Spring.

HAROLD
Wait a minute--what about The
Blue Guitar?

LAHORE
Huh?
(beat)
Well, as I said, the brio of the
prose, the muscularity of the
metaphors--

HAROLD
You're rejecting it?

LAHORE
Rejecting it? I'm saying your
writing is so good we can call it
Robert Grand Abbott's!

HAROLD
I put four years into The Blue
Guitar! I can't watch four years
go up in smoke!

LAHORE
(dismissively)
The Blue Guitar is a promising
first novel. You've already
written two of those.

Harold PACES like a caged animal...Lahore lights a cigarette.

HAROLD
Someone else will buy it...

LAHORE
Trust me, nobody will buy it.
And if they do, nobody will buy
it.

(CONTINUED)

13 CONTINUED: (4)

HAROLD

What do you know? To you writing
is putting letters on a marquee.

LAHORE

You're being an infant.

HAROLD

Then I suppose that's only a
thermometer up my ass.

LAHORE

I didn't think you'd take it this
way.

(beat)

Did I mention the fifty...?

HAROLD

(pacing)

This is a nightmare...

LAHORE

This is what every writer dreams
of! You'll walk up the beach
next summer and everyone will be
wearing your book on their nose.
Your words. So what if it's not
your name? You'll know. And
I'll know.

HAROLD

Does he know? About this book of
his?

LAHORE

Leave that to me.

HAROLD

I can't believe he'd allow it.

LAHORE

(slyly)

He might not think you could pull
it off.

HAROLD

Oh, bullshit--I could write that
crap with my left hand. If he's
so worried, let him write it.

LAHORE

He's busy writing his Big Book.

(CONTINUED)

13 CONTINUED: (5)

HAROLD
I'm sure he can find an opening.
Between openings.

LAHORE
(confidentially)
The truth is, he's having trouble--
Bob's having trouble, you know--
he's having trouble--

HAROLD
So are you.

LAHORE
--finishing.

HAROLD
He's stuck?

LAHORE
For God's sake--you know that
terrible violent streak he has.
If he asks what I told you--don't
breathe a word of this.

HAROLD
Don't worry. I won't get the
chance.

LAHORE
Would you want Melville to stop
writing Moby Dick in the middle
of the chase? Literature could
be forever deprived of Robert
Grand Abbott's last testament.

HAROLD
This has--you have--nothing to do
with literature. It's dishonest
and corrupt and--

LAHORE
It's real life. Someday it might
even find its way into one of
those books of yours.

HAROLD
Yes, along with murder, adultery,
and a scratch and sniff erotic
book jacket.

(CONTINUED)

13 CONTINUED: (6)

LAHORE

You're either part of history.
Or you're history. Flip a coin,
kiddo.

(off Harold's look)

I'm going to go check on lunch.

As Lahore exits, he hands Harold the book. Harold looks at
Horace Dickley, and off into the gloom of his own future--

CUT TO:

14 INT..NIGHT. BELDING APARTMENT

Miranda sits in an armchair, bites her knuckles nervously.
Gets up to PACE...Then the phone RINGS. She turns, GRABS it--

MIRANDA

Harold?

CUT TO:

15 EXT. NIGHT. MANHATTAN

Harold talks on a PAY PHONE.

HAROLD

Hi, honey, it's me.

CROSSCUTTING--

To Miranda, as she paces with the phone in their apartment...

MIRANDA

I got worried.

HAROLD

I just--. I didn't feel like
coming home right away.

MIRANDA

What did he say about The Blue
Guitar?

HAROLD

He says it's a promising first
novel, I've already written two
of those, so...

MIRANDA

I don't understand.

(CONTINUED)

15 CONTINUED:

HAROLD
It's not what we thought.

MIRANDA
Well, if they're not gonna get
behind it--that's the same old
shit-- just dump it in the
bookstores and hope--

HAROLD
That's not it.

An excruciating beat...Both of them fight their tears...

MIRANDA
Then I don't care if it takes
another four years. You'll just
write another book, that's all.

HAROLD
He wants me to write a thriller.
Murder, adultery, a man with
something to prove...

MIRANDA
These goddamn people...

HAROLD
Wait--it gets better. They want
to put Robert Grand Abbott's name
on it.

MIRANDA
What?

HAROLD
Robert Grand--

MIRANDA
Why would a writer like that need
a ghost writer?

HAROLD
Who the hell knows? His hands
cramped doing magic tricks on the
Tonight Show.

MIRANDA
Well, I hope you told him--

HAROLD
Oh, I told him, all right.

(CONTINUED)

15 CONTINUED: (2)

MIRANDA

Good.

HAROLD

I told him yes.

MIRANDA

Wait a minute--you agreed to this?

HAROLD

Do you think jobs like this just fall off the trees, Miranda?

MIRANDA

I guess if it's just a job--like working in the bookstore...

HAROLD

I think it's a little different. It's fifty thousand dollars different.

MIRANDA

I mean as long as that's why you're doing it.

HAROLD

I think writing a novel for Robert Grand Abbott is a little different from stacking him on a shelf.

MIRANDA

I just don't want you to forget your own work.

HAROLD

My work will be forgotten without any help from me.

MIRANDA

Don't--

HAROLD

What--don't do it?

MIRANDA

Don't talk that way.

(CONTINUED)

15 CONTINUED: (3)

HAROLD

People will buy it and read it
and talk about it, and it'll be
piled up in the window at Barnes
and Noble--just like we always
talked about. Except, you know,
with someone else's name on it.

(beat)

I'll be famous.. Just between us.

MIRANDA

You seem happy.

HAROLD

Voilà!

MIRANDA

Voilà.

HAROLD

It's magic, isn't it--to make a
man disappear?

CUT TO:

16 INT. NIGHT. ABBOTT HOUSE--KITCHEN

Abbott sits down, armed with a LEGAL PAD, PENCIL, and a CUP OF
COFFEE. Moves the fruit bowl. Sits down. Gets up, adjusts
the dimmer. Then sits again, pencil at the ready...

And sits...

Gets up. Finds another pencil, sharpens it...Sits down,
touches pencil to paper...

And sits...

Gets up, exits. Returns with a PILLOW. Places it behind his
back as he sits.

And SITS....

Sucks on the eraser. Stares out the window. Suddenly he SNAPS
the pencil--SLAMS down the pieces--SWEEPS pad, pencil and
coffee to the floor with a CRASH.

ABBOTT

God damn it!

He grabs the MANUSCRIPT Buddy sent him, throws it...The pages
FLUTTER across the room...HOLD ON--the title page...

(CONTINUED)

16 CONTINUED:

THE BLUE GUITAR: A Novel by Harold Belding

CUT TO:

17 INT. NIGHT. BELDING APARTMENT

Harold SLEEPS in his armchair, a book in his lap. Miranda watches TV on the sofa beside him. Her hand stretches out toward him, as if to reach to him as he slips away...

RACK FOCUS

To a framed PHOTOGRAPH, on the end-table between them--Harold in a rented tux and Miranda in her wedding dress, eight years ago. Unformed, bright with promise. Before. Then Miranda pulls a chain, turns off the end-table lamp--

DISSOLVE TO:

18 EXT. DAY. THE HAMPTONS

Harold and Miranda drive in Harold's battered VW BEETLE... The countryside is alive with the yearning of spring... From their faces, they might be entering an enchanted forest, perilous and magnificent--

CUT TO:

19 INT. SAME TIME. ABBOTT HOUSE

Abbott broods in an armchair--the spider in his web--as he rhythmically THUMPS the book in his hand against his fist... Checks his watch.

ANGLE ON--THE BACK JACKET

As Harold's face, on the jacket of Darkness Illumined, falls into Abbott's knuckles... Then Abbott hears the popping of the gravel outside... Gets up. Pulls aside the curtain, peeks--

HIS POV

As Harold pulls up the VW. Yanks the brake, climbs out. Then Miranda, too... Stiff from the long drive, she STRETCHES...

ANGLE ON--ABBOTT

As he admires the length of her leg, the jut of her bosom...

(CONTINUED)

19 CONTINUED:

ABBOTT
The plot thickens.

CUT TO:

20 EXT. MORNING. ABBOTT HOME

Harold stands on the front porch, rings the doorbell.

ANGLE ON--ABBOTT

As he composes his most brilliant smile, and opens the door.

ABBOTT
Well, you must be Harold.

HAROLD
And you are...?

Abbott laughs heartily.

ABBOTT
Very good. I bet you worked on
that the whole drive up.

HAROLD
Well...

As they shake hands, Abbott yanks Harold into a big mauling embrace. The physicality startles him...

ABBOTT
Who've you got there with you?

Harold follows Abbott's gaze.

HAROLD
Oh, that's my wife, Miranda.

ABBOTT
Isn't marriage marvelous? I've
done it five times.

HAROLD
We just figured, as long as I had
to make the drive out here, we'd
make a weekend out of it. We're
going to stay at the--

ABBOTT
You'll stay at the house.

(CONTINUED)

20 CONTINUED:

HAROLD
Oh, no, that's very generous, but
we were planning--

But Abbott's already past him...

ABBOTT
Don't contradict me, Harold. I'm
Robert Grand Abbott.

HAROLD
--a...romantic...

AT THE CAR

Abbott grabs a SUITCASE...Then reaches in the window...

ABBOTT
(shaking hands)
Hi. Bob.

MIRANDA
Miranda.

Miranda, puzzled, watches as Abbott heads inside with the bags.
Turns to Harold, who shrugs.

HAROLD
He wants us to stay over.

CUT TO:

21 INT. LATER. HOUSE

Harold and Miranda follow as Abbott lugs the bags upstairs. On
the walls, Abbott in an Avedon photo, a Hirschfeld
cartoon...Then into a GUEST ROOM...Opulence--and TWIN BEDS.

ABBOTT
...Welcome to Bohemia...Once
you're unpacked, Harold, we'll
get started. I hope you don't
mind the twin beds.

HAROLD
Not at all. This is really very
gracious of you.

(CONTINUED)

21 CONTINUED:

ABBOTT

Don't seem so surprised.

(gestures)

The bathroom's right across there, I'll have the housekeeper bring up some fresh towels.

Miranda sees a staircase leading to a CLOSED DOOR on the third floor...

MIRANDA

What's upstairs?

ABBOTT

That's the bird's nest where I do my writing. I like to have a view.

HAROLD

I had a view. Till the garbage strike.

(explaining)

We live in a, uh, basement apartment.

Miranda moves to head up the stairs...

MIRANDA

Would you mind if--

Abbott stops her. Freezes her with a look...

ABBOTT

I'd appreciate it if you didn't go up there, actually.

(then smiling)

The pool out back, on the other hand, is ninety degrees and all yours, if you'd like a dip.

MIRANDA

I was thinking I'd go out--I'm looking for some Shaker boxes.

ABBOTT

Can you believe the prices they're getting for those?

MIRANDA

For a client.

HAROLD

Miranda's a decorator.

(CONTINUED)

21 CONTINUED: (2)

MIRANDA

A designer.

ABBOTT

Oh?

MIRANDA

I wouldn't say I'm the Prince of Chintz.

ABBOTT

Perhaps the Princess of Wales, then.

(off their looks)

Wales--the texture of a fabric. It's a weaving term.

Abbott laughs. Miranda laughs uncertainly. Harold joins in, a little too hard...

HAROLD

The Princess of Wales! That's priceless!

As Harold turns to hang his clothes in the closet, Abbott presses his CAR KEYS into Miranda's hand.

ABBOTT

Take the Mercedes. They'll treat you with the proper deference.

She moves to take the keys, but he holds onto her hand...Then lifts it to his lips...

ABBOTT

And welcome to the castle, Princess.

Behind Harold's back as he hangs clothes in the closet, Abbott kisses her hand. Then he thuds away down the farmhouse stairs...Miranda parachutes into the down of the bed...

HAROLD

You'd better call the hotel. I don't want to lose that deposit.

Miranda's fingers secretly COVET the lace of the duvet...

MIRANDA

By the way, I'm not a decorator. I'm a designer.

(CONTINUED)

21 CONTINUED: (3)

HAROLD
I still don't know what the
difference is.

MIRANDA
He knows what the difference is.

CUT TO:

22 INT. LATER. LIBRARY

Harold at a desk in the piney lair...Abbott in a leather chair
with his back to him, flipping through Vogue...A Chuck Close
PORTRAIT of Abbott dominates one wall...

HAROLD
...I see our hero as a cop,
suspended for brutality. But a
gentle man. The product of a
brutal world.

ABBOTT
(half-listening)
Unh-huh...

HAROLD
He meets a woman--herself a
victim of brutality. But a
fighter. They fall in love.

The phone rings...Abbott picks up.

ABBOTT
Excuse me.
(to phone)
Hello?...I'm just kind of tied up
right now. Tell Dave I'll call
him back in an hour.
(hangs up)
Go ahead.

HAROLD
She's married to a jealous
gangster, who beats her--

The phone RINGS again...

ABBOTT
I'm with you. Hold on.
(picks up phone)
Hello?...He said that about
me?...
(more)

(CONTINUED)

22 CONTINUED:

ABBOTT (Cont'd)
He was never vicious like that
before the, uh, cancer...
(winks to Harold)
I thought everyone knew. Why'd
you think all his clients are
leaving him?...You didn't know
that either? Golly, I'd better
get off the phone before I reveal
all...Bye bye.

Abbott chuckles as he hangs up. Gets up. Goes to a CABINET...

HAROLD
(resuming)
At any rate, when the cop
discovers this--about the
gangster--

ABBOTT
Can I ask you something, Harold?

HAROLD
Sure.

ABBOTT
What exactly did Buddy tell you?

...Rummages in a drawer...Takes out a RAG...A BRUSH...

HAROLD
What do you mean?

ABBOTT
About this. About me.

HAROLD
Just that you'd work out the
broad strokes with me and then--

...A small can of LINSEED OIL...

ABBOTT
He didn't say anything to you--
why I would agree to a crazy
scheme like this?

HAROLD
Not that I can recall...

...And a loaded .357 MAGNUM. Harold blanches.

(CONTINUED)

22 CONTINUED: (2)

ABBOTT
He didn't say I was stuck, did he?

HAROLD
(nervous, off gun)
No. Nothing like that.

ABBOTT
You don't believe all those rumors, do you--that I'm stuck, I can't finish the Big Book?

HAROLD
No! No, I mean--what rumors?

ABBOTT
Well, didn't you wonder, then?
(gestures with gun)
Why Robert Grand Abbott would let some utter nonentity write one of his books?

HAROLD
It's really none of my business...

Abbott appraises Harold. Then cleans the barrel of his gun...

ABBOTT
Come on, kid. Don't tell me you want to be here. I mean, underneath all that eagerness. Why'd you think--greed?

HAROLD
Who'd ever think that of you?

ABBOTT
Alzheimer's Disease?
Desperation?

HAROLD
Why would you be desperate?

Abbott closes one eye as he sights down the barrel...

ABBOTT
Lots of things can make a man desperate. Besides an apartment in the basement. And a wife out of Penthouse.

...then opens his eye, peeks as Harold COLORS with anger.

(CONTINUED)

22 CONTINUED: (3)

ABBOTT
(continuing)
C'mon--what was it? Laziness?

HAROLD
How about "E--all of the above"?

ABBOTT
I told Buddy no, you know.

HAROLD
You did? Then--

ABBOTT
Then I read your books.

HAROLD
When did you read my books?

ABBOTT
That's what I've been trying to
tell you. You, Harold. I'm
doing this for you.

HAROLD
You--. You liked my books?

ABBOTT
The bastards...They've really
destroyed your confidence,
haven't they?
(offering)
Cigarette?

HAROLD
I don't smoke.

ABBOTT
Take the cigarette, Harold.

Harold takes the cigarette. Abbott lights them both. Abbott
wanders over to the window...

HAROLD
I have to say--well, I don't know
what to say--

ABBOTT
No one lives forever--even the
immortals. But the work--the
work can be carried on. With a
talent like yours, you should
be...

(CONTINUED)

22 CONTINUED: (4)

HAROLD
Big?

ABBOTT
Is big still a thing to be?

HAROLD
Yes, I think so.

ABBOTT
Something's holding you back...Or
someone...Like a semicolon in the
wrong place...Don't worry--we're
going to get to the bottom of it.

Harold returns to his notes. Abbott puts the gun away.

HAROLD
(flustered)
At any rate--where were we...?

ABBOTT
No sense beating this to death,
is there? Why don't you get
started and we'll sit down again
in the morning?

HAROLD
You sure there's nothing you'd
like to add?

Then Abbott STOPS...TURNS--

ABBOTT
I do have one thought.

CUT TO:

23 INT. NIGHT. NICK & TONI'S

Harold, agitated, sits with Miranda in the Hamptons trendery.

HAROLD
...I don't know what the hell
happens to these guys. It's like
they carve the Pulitzer Prize out
of kryptonite.

MIRANDA
Can't you just tell him--?

(CONTINUED)

23 CONTINUED:

HAROLD

Tell him what? Tell Robert Grand Abbott to keep his fingers out of his own book?

MIRANDA

You're the one who has to write it.

HAROLD

It's just not that easy. He's him, and I'm me, and--

MIRANDA

So what?

HAROLD

You weren't there.

The WAITER brings them a special APPETIZER.

WAITER

On the house. Mr. Abbott's favorite-- he'd be disappointed if you didn't try it.

HAROLD

On the house? I like it already.

The Waiter exits. Miranda digs into the appetizer.

MIRANDA

I thought you were the one helping him out.

HAROLD

He thinks he's helping me out. He said no to Buddy, but when he read my books...

MIRANDA

He said that?

HAROLD

What--is that so hard to believe?

MIRANDA

If he wants to help you, let him put your name on it.

(CONTINUED)

23 CONTINUED: (2)

HAROLD
You're missing the point. He'd
just got done telling me my books
are what changed his mind. And
then--

BACK TO:

24 INT. EARLIER. ABBOTT HOUSE--LIBRARY

Harold sits with his pad at the desk as Abbott expatiates.

ABBOTT
The cop has to dress up as a
woman.

HAROLD
What?

ABBOTT
That way he can come and go--
right under the gangster's nose.
(off Harold's look)
That wasn't where you were going?

HAROLD
No, but--

ABBOTT
(gestures)
Get this down.
(Harold complies)
The dress, the lingerie...The cop
rediscovers his gentle side,
buried beneath this terrible
heritage of-- what'd you call it?

HAROLD
Brutality.

ABBOTT
The cop falls in love.

HAROLD
Yes, that's more or less what I
have.

ABBOTT
He falls in love with the
gangster.

(CONTINUED)

24 CONTINUED:

HAROLD
(rubbing his head)
Of course.

ABBOTT
Write it real explicit--you know--
like I would.

HAROLD
(writing)
...He...fucks...the...

ABBOTT
You know where it's all mobbed
up? Toronto. Let's make the cop
a Canadian Mountie.

Harold erases "cop". Writes--

HAROLD
...Mountie...

ABBOTT
Hey--I'm starting to really get
excited about this!

FORWARD TO:

25 INT. SAME TIME. NICK & TONI'S

As Miranda digs with gusto into the appetizer...

MIRANDA
I'm sure he didn't mean take it
word for word.

HAROLD
You'd think he was dictating the
Torah.
(off appetizer)
Are you going to leave some of
that for me?

MIRANDA
(pushing it away)
It's not even that good.

HAROLD
A transvestite Mountie. What am
I going to call it--"Maple Leaf
Drag"?
(more)

(CONTINUED)

25 CONTINUED:

HAROLD (Cont'd)

(beat)

Meanwhile he's gesticulating the whole time with this loaded...

MIRANDA

Harold, how good does this book have to be?

HAROLD

It does have his name on it.

MIRANDA

That's his problem.

HAROLD

Yeah? Who do you think Buddy will blame?

The CHEF, in his toque, approaches their table.

CHEF

You're friends of Bob's?

HAROLD

We're out for the weekend.

CHEF

And where are you staying?

HAROLD

With him. Uh, Bob.

CHEF

At the house? He never lets anyone stay at the house.

(beat)

If you ever want to come at the last minute--that's my line in the kitchen. We always save a couple of tables for friends.

The Chef hands Harold his card, exits. The Waiter pours more wine. Harold spears the appetizer, chews pleasurably.

HAROLD

(with a swagger)

We're with Bob. At the house.

MIRANDA

Harold--

(CONTINUED)

25 CONTINUED: (2)

HAROLD
He really liked my books! Can
you believe it? He was quoting
my lines and everything!

MIRANDA
Did you tell him what you think
of his books?

HAROLD
That's not true.

MIRANDA
You just said the other day--

HAROLD
Miranda, I know what I said. But
he is Robert Grand Abbott.

MIRANDA
I can't believe you got yourself
into this.

Harold thinks a beat.

HAROLD
You're right. I have to say
something.

CUT TO:

26 INT. THE NEXT MORNING. LIBRARY

Abbott sips coffee, reads through the draft pages. Harold
nervously gets up from the desk, moves to the cabinet...

ABBOTT
...It's terrific, how you're
cranking out the pages here,
Harold.

...Then Harold leans, with studied casualness, blocking the GUN
DRAWER.

HAROLD
Now, Bob, about the, ah, new
direction--

ABBOTT
Jesus, kid, you don't want to
burn yourself out, do you?

CUT TO:

27 INT. LATER. VOLKSWAGEN

Harold drives his Beetle across the picturesque countryside. Abbott searches for comfort on the broken seat alongside...

HAROLD
...Honestly, I don't know how much of a softball player I am.

ABBOTT
What's your game, Harold--deep sea fishing?

HAROLD
I'm just worried, you know--what if I run into someone who...

ABBOTT
You mean what if they recognize you from that...
(laughing)
...jacket photo of yours?

HAROLD
What's wrong with my jacket photo?

Abbott laughs convulsively...Tears stream down his cheeks...

HAROLD
I've always modeled myself after Salinger--you know, the way he avoids publicity.

ABBOTT
You're not avoiding publicity, Harold. Publicity is avoiding you. Although I guess if my name were Robert Grand Belding I'd still be a longshoreman.

HAROLD
I could always hide a raffle ticket in Chapter Four.

...Then Abbott dries his eyes.

ABBOTT
Okay. Who are you feuding with?

HAROLD
Feuding?

ABBOTT
In my day writers had feuds. It's great publicity.

(CONTINUED)

27 CONTINUED:

HAROLD

Well, I've gone a few rounds with the dry cleaner.

ABBOTT

Feuding with the dry cleaner, huh?

Abbott groans, shifts uncomfortably on the seat.

HAROLD

I should've warned you. The springs poke out through the, uh...

ABBOTT

Now I know what it's like to be fitted for an I.U.D.

HAROLD

How long have you been living out here?

ABBOTT

You mean is there anything in your price range?

HAROLD

Ha! Me? I'm sure there isn't.

ABBOTT

You're on the Golden Escalator, kid-- you have to start trading up.

(shifts painfully)

I suggest you start with the car.

HAROLD

I just thought putting the money away would be the prudent--

(off house)

Gosh, look at that one.

ABBOTT

You know, I don't know how we're going to get this done with me out here and you stuck in, uh...

HAROLD

Park Slope.

(CONTINUED)

27 CONTINUED: (2)

ABBOTT

Summer's right around the corner.
Why don't you come stay with me?
Both of you. If that guest
room's not too...
(shifts painfully)
...uncomfortable.

HAROLD

Of course, I'll have to talk to
Miranda first.

ABBOTT

I understand. You have to ask
her permission.

HAROLD

The truth is, I'm sure she'd love
it out here.

ABBOTT

We'll put her to work, too. I've
been meaning to build a screening
room in the barn--she can design
it for me.

HAROLD

I guess if we could sublet the
apartment...

ABBOTT

Then you could buy that Jaguar.

HAROLD

What Jaguar?

Harold looks over at Abbott, who smiles. Isn't it obvious?

ABBOTT

The red one.

CUT TO:

28 EXT. LATER. SOFTBALL FIELD

WRITERS, ARTISTS, an ANCHORMAN...warming up for a softball
game. Abbott introduces HARRY, a Brit in his 50s.

ABBOTT

Harry, this is a protégé of mine.
Hamilton Bell.

Harold doubletakes--who's "Hamilton Bell"?

(CONTINUED)

28 CONTINUED:

HARRY

Bell, eh? We've been looking for
a ringer. You're a novelist?

Harold is about to say something. Abbott interrupts him.

ABBOTT

He's so good I can't decide
whether to tell everyone about
him or kill him.

HARRY

Can he turn a double play?

HAROLD

Of sorts.

ABBOTT

Mailer's not here, is he? The
kid is feuding with him.

HARRY

(admiring, to Harold)
Norman Mailer, eh?

HAROLD

He lost one of my favorite
shirts.

ABBOTT

Something young Bell here said
about his wife--it's got Mailer
all riled up.

Someone on the field calls to Harry...

HARRY

Excuse me.

Harry departs. Abbott rummages through a pile of MITTS...

ABBOTT

(off mitts)

Are you righty or lefty?

HAROLD

You tell me.

They exchange a look. Then Abbott returns to the mitts...

ABBOTT

I was just trying to help you
out.

(CONTINUED)

28 CONTINUED: (2)

HAROLD
It's bad enough to be nobody
without being somebody else.

ABBOTT
What can I tell you? It popped
out of my mouth.

HAROLD
(mimics Harry)
"We've been looking for a
ringer."

ABBOTT
Harold--Harry's the head of
Random House.

HAROLD
He is?

Abbott smacks a mitt into Harold's belly, trots out to the
field. HOLD ON Harold as he absorbs this news about Harry--

CUT TO:

29 EXT. LATER. SOFTBALL GAME

Harold cozies up to Harry on the bench as a WRITER hits a fly
ball, neatly snagged by an ARTIST in left field.

HARRY
I love to see writers and artists
having fun like this. In the
city it's all competition and
backbiting.

HAROLD
That's so true, Harry. And so
wise. So trenchant and well-
said. And poignant, in a way...

HARRY
You're up, Bell.

At the plate, Harold looks to Abbott, the first base coach, who
flashes a series of cryptic signals...Distracted, Harold
nonetheless SINGLES... Abbott sidles up to him on first base.

ABBOTT
You see the shortstop? He panned
I and Me, the little prick.

(CONTINUED)

29 CONTINUED:

HAROLD
Wasn't that nine years ago?

ABBOTT
Do you think I've forgotten?
(beat)
Look, if the ball's on the
ground...

HAROLD
You want me to break up the
double play?

ABBOTT
I want you to fucking take him
out.

Harold takes a lead off first. Evans grounds it to the second baseman, who flips to the BOOK CRITIC at shortstop...As he turns to throw he sees Harold charging him. He crouches

FLIPS HAROLD

Over his back and high in the air...Harold lands hard and the wind whooshes out of him. As the Book Critic turns to throw

ABBOTT SMASHES HIM

With a right hook, knocks him to the ground, then kicks the ball into the outfield...

A BRAWL

Both benches empty as Harry rounds the bases--

CUT TO:

30 EXT. LATER. ABBOTT HOUSE

Miranda opens the trunk of the Mercedes. Inside, books in a carton...I AND ME BY ROBERT GRAND ABBOTT...The VW pulls up. Abbott climbs out. Waves. She smiles, turns to unload her SHAKER BOXES. Then closes the trunk, turns to see Abbott hauling Harold, UNCONSCIOUS, in a fireman's carry...She runs after as he carries him into the house...

MIRANDA
Oh my God--is he okay?

ABBOTT
Just a little softball.

CUT TO:

31 INT. NIGHT. ABBOTT HOUSE--SCREEN PORCH

Harold, his eye swollen shut, sups with a high-spirited Abbott. Miranda pushes her food around the plate.

ABBOTT
...You should've seen Harold.

HAROLD
It was nothing, really.

ABBOTT
Nothing? If I had a buddy like that in Korea I wouldn't've got half my ass shot off.

HAROLD
You certainly got some good licks in.

ABBOTT
The first one was for you, pal.
(beat)
And I want you to know, we got some good work done today.

HAROLD
I thought so, Bob.

ABBOTT
How about another Scotch?

Harold toasts with his tumbler...

HAROLD
Three's a charm.

Miranda watches, disapproving, as Abbott exits to find another bottle of Scotch--

CUT TO:

32 INT. NIGHT. ABBOTT HOUSE--GUEST BATHROOM

Miranda and a wobbly Harold wash up before bedtime...

MIRANDA
...Great. Now that critic will pan your books, too.

HAROLD
Nobody there knows who I am.

MIRANDA
You can't be sure of that.

(CONTINUED)

32 CONTINUED:

HAROLD

Trust me.

MIRANDA

I'm just glad you didn't get hurt.

HAROLD

I did get hurt. Don't take that away from me.

MIRANDA

I don't know what's going on with you. You never drink.

HAROLD

What's the matter--you think I can't keep up with ol' Rob It and Grab It?

MIRANDA

I didn't realize you wanted to.

HAROLD

I didn't realize I had to ask your permission.

(beat)

I'd like to take a piss here. Would that be okay?

MIRANDA

Ask me if you're pissing down your leg.

HAROLD

I am not--

He is.

MIRANDA

Just warn me when the two of you switch over to goat's blood.

IN THE HALLWAY

Abbott listens by the door...

BACK ON--HAROLD AND MIRANDA

As Miranda washes her face and Harold blots his pajamas...

(CONTINUED)

32 CONTINUED: (2)

MIRANDA

One weekend and you turn into
some kind of a--I don't know--
hockey fan. I can't believe
we're going to be here the whole
summer now.

HAROLD

Fine. We'll spend another summer
splashing around a fire hydrant.

MIRANDA

Instead of sprucing up his horse
stalls.

HAROLD

It's a screening room.

MIRANDA

The real joke is I'm not even
sure I can do it.

HAROLD

If we're going to talk about your
insecurities, we'll need the
whole summer.

STUNG, Miranda turns away, towels off. Moves to exit...

IN THE HALLWAY

Abbott listens. Then dashes on TIPTOE down the hall, HIDES as
Miranda emerges. Harold follows her...

HAROLD

I'm sorry. I thought you'd be
happy about it. All you ever
used to talk about was spending
the summer in the Hamptons.

(beat)

You know, once I finally...

MIRANDA

You're right. Forget it.

HAROLD

Don't you see? After all these
years, I've found someone who
believes in me.

(off her look)

Someone who matters.

(off her look)

You know what I mean.

(CONTINUED)

32 CONTINUED: (3)

MIRANDA

Forget it. I'm just being a bitch.

He watches as she climbs into bed--

CUT TO:

33 INT. LATER. ABBOTT HOUSE--LIBRARY

Harold smokes a cigarette, runs his hand over the spines of Abbott's sixteen novels...Takes down the first--The Long March. Examines it, then returns it to the shelf.

IN THE MIRROR

Harold crosses his arms, lowers his chin as the cigarette smoke swirls around him--just like Abbott's jacket photo.

Then he turns to a framed PHOTO--a young Abbott with ERNEST HEMINGWAY in Africa...Rifles and a RHINO they just bagged...

HAROLD'S POV

As he FANTASIZES...Now it's him and Abbott with the rhino...

ABBOTT APPEARS

Behind him, holding a bottle of MILK and an empty glass...He takes the photo of Hemingway from Harold. Looks at it...

ABBOTT

He kind of took me under his wing in the old days.

HAROLD

(gestures to desk)

My mind is racing. I thought I'd try to get some of it down.

ABBOTT

I do the same thing--sneak upstairs and get some writing in. I'm lucky if I can get in three hours of sleep before the demons come.

HAROLD

Demons?

ABBOTT

I was wondering--you got anything else of yours I can read?

(CONTINUED)

33 CONTINUED:

HAROLD
I have a new short story...If I
can only find it under the
rejection slips...

Harold rummages in his KNAPSACK...Then hands his SHORT STORY to
Abbott.

ABBOTT
(reads title)
"Greg's Shorthand".

HAROLD
Miranda likes it, anyway.

ABBOTT
Well, g'night.

Harold watches as Abbott exits. Resumes with his pad and
pencil. Then Abbott returns with an old UNDERWOOD.

ABBOTT
This is the old typewriter I used
for The Long March. I thought
maybe you'd like to use it while
you're here.

Abbott sets it down...Harold is awed by the literary relic...

HAROLD
You wrote The Long March on this?

ABBOTT
I wrote it on that table--right
there in the kitchen. I'd get up
before dawn. Then I'd come home
from work and go half the night.
Our place was this little hole in
the wall down in The Village--I
used to stuff five sheets of
paper in at once, to muffle the
sound, so I wouldn't wake the
baby. Clarissa. She lives in
Hawaii now, and it's not far
enough for her.

Abbott squeezes Harold's shoulder.

ABBOTT
It's like all of a sudden
remembering a dream you forgot
you had--to have people in the
house again.

(CONTINUED)

33 CONTINUED: (2)

Harold watches Abbott as he exits. Then looks at the typewriter. Runs his fingers over the keys--

CUT TO:

MONTAGE

--FOLLOWING the keys of the typewriter as they tap against the page...Tap...ratta-tat-tat...tap-tap...

The rough twill...of the
uniform...chafed...against
his...freshly-shaved legs...

WIDER

Harold works at the Underwood on the kitchen table, where Abbott wrote The Long March. Pulls out a finished page, sets it alongside the typewriter--

--Miranda drives the Mercedes through town...Glances to the right, doubletakes...In the distance, another BRAWL on the softball diamond--

--Harry Evans ducks into the office of one of his EDITORS...

EVANS

...Track down this Hamilton Bell.
The novel he's working on is
supposed to be fantastic...

--Harold works. Pulls a pencil from behind his ear, scratches a note in the margin of his manuscript. Resumes typing. The pages are starting to pile up--

--The Mercedes crosses the Whitestone Bridge at sunset--

--Abbott and Harold sit along the wall at ELAINE'S. CHARLIE ROSE rushes in late and Abbott flags him down.

ABBOTT

Charlie? This is Hamilton Bell.
(they shake hands)
Come have a drink with us later.
We'll be here.

The WAITER brings them two more DOUBLE SCOTCHES--

--Miranda plays SOLITAIRE on the kitchen table--

--Abbott CRASHES into his pool with a racing dive...Harold awakens to the thrashing of Abbott's laps, rubs his head and looks at the clock. It's already ten a.m.--

(CONTINUED)

33 CONTINUED: (3)

--Abbott in his element--a BOOK SIGNING at an independent bookstore...Harold watches as Abbott charms the throng...The line forms up the block--

--At the Davis, Day offices, Lahore inspects a mockup for an ad-- "The Autograph Series...A new thriller by Robert Grand Abbott"...He SMILES--

--Harold scowls as he reads a page...Crosses out lines with a pencil...Holds the pencil in his teeth, dagger-like, as he types...Then rolls the sheet up and looks at them--

--Miranda sits out by the pool in her bikini. Gets up and walks to the diving board. Abbott ogles her from the screen porch as she dives in--

--BOOM! as a bottle EXPLODES on a fence...Harold smiles, aims Abbott's .357 MAGNUM while Abbott tutors him...Miranda arrives home, startled by the gunfire. Goes to the backyard, watches as BOOM! another bottle explodes--

--Once again, the Mercedes crosses the Whitestone Bridge...

--At a Manhattan haberdashery, Harold emerges from the dressing room in a TUXEDO. Abbott smooths his shoulders, smiles with approval--

--Harold drinks at the bar at Elaine's. A HAND taps on his shoulder. Harold turns.

HAROLD
Norman Mailer?

MAILER
You've got something to say about
my wife?

HAROLD
Oh, that. Look, I don't know
what you've heard, but--

Mailer DECKS him. Harold slides to the ground just as Abbott returns and a BRAWL ensues...

--A tent set up on Georgica Pond. Abbott introduces Miranda and Harold, a BANDAGE across his nose, to a SOCIETY LADY...

ABBOTT
Hamilton Bell. And Mrs. Bell.

SOCIETY LADY
Now, Bob, there's someone I want
you to meet.

(CONTINUED)

33 CONTINUED: (4)

The Society Lady escorts Abbott away.

MIRANDA
"Hamilton Bell"?

HAROLD
Just humor him.
(looking for the bar)
You want a glass of wine?

ANGLE ON--THE BAR

Harold sees Jennifer, the girl from Lahore's lobby, as she points him out to a GIRLFRIEND. Harold smiles shyly. Turns away. Doesn't want to turn back--but he does. They wave. He gulps at his Scotch... His life is getting complicated--

--Harold works at the kitchen table. Abbott enters, sorting through the mail. Opens The New Yorker to the table of contents. Smiles. Tosses it, folded open, onto the kitchen table. Harold EXPLODES with excitement--

--Miranda browses in Bookhampton. Flips The New Yorker open to the table of contents. Then turns urgently to an inside page

INSERT--TABLE OF CONTENTS

FICTION: "Greg's Shorthand" by
Hamilton Bell

TROUBLED, she closes the magazine...

DISSOLVE TO:

34 EXT. MORNING. ABBOTT HOUSE

The insistent green of summer. A cacophony of crickets. On the lawn, Harold's new convertible RED JAGUAR--

CUT TO:

35 INT. MORNING. ABBOTT HOUSE--GUEST ROOM

A doorbell echoes like a carillon in Harold's skull...He awakens-- long hair now, and a modish stubble of beard...Winces in the glare of the sun...Swings his legs over the edge of the bed to sit up...

AND STOPS

An overwhelming wave of nausea and headache popularly known as

(CONTINUED)

35 CONTINUED:

a hangover. His hand goes to his brow--

CUT TO:

36 INT. LATER. ABBOTT HOUSE--STAIRCASE

Harold, in a monogrammed robe-- "HB"--comes downstairs...The thud of each step hammers a nail into his brain. Finally he sits and slides gently down...Answers the door. It's LULU, 30s, a fast-talking British TV journalist, followed by her crew--cameras, booms, lights...

LULU

Good morning! Where's Bob?

He follows her into the kitchen, where she's already poured herself a cup of coffee...

HAROLD

Was Bob expecting you?

LULU

You must be that protégé of his everyone's talking about.

(off typewriter)

You're not working, are you?

HAROLD

I could always move to the--

She TAP-TAP-TAPS on his forehead. He grimaces with pain...

LULU

We can't have that tap-tap-tap in our sound man's ear, can we?

(to grip)

Help Mr. Bell carry this outside, would you?

(to Harold)

So where is the late Robert Grand Abbott, anyway?

CUT TO:

37 INT. SAME TIME. MERCEDES

Abbott drives Miranda in the Mercedes. He SINGS exuberantly along with Louis Armstrong on the radio.

(CONTINUED)

37 CONTINUED:

ABBOTT

(mimics Armstrong)

"...No one to talk with, all by myself. No one to walk with, but I'm happy on a shelf, babe. Ain't misbehavin', savin' my love--oh baby--"

(turns to her)

That's your cue, Miranda.

(off her look)

C'mon. I won't tell anyone.

MIRANDA

You just keep going.

ABBOTT

You don't know it? That's--

MIRANDA

I know it.

Abbott shrugs, resumes.

ABBOTT

(sings)

"...Jackie Horner in a corner. Don't go nowhere, and I don't care. All your kisses are worth waiting for..."

Then Miranda joins in. Abbott grins.

MIRANDA

(mimics Armstrong)

"... Don't stay out late, don't care to go. I'm home about eight; me and my radio babe..."

ABBOTT AND MIRANDA

(unison)

"...Ain't misbehavin, savin' all my love for you..."

CUT TO:

38 INT. SAME TIME. ANTIQUE STORE

Abbott and Miranda browse as MUSIC plays on the radio. Two BIDDIES exchange gossip behind the front desk.

(CONTINUED)

38 CONTINUED:

MIRANDA
...Do you have any idea what
style you want to use for the
screening room?

ABBOTT
I know what I like.

MIRANDA
Most clients can't make up their
minds.

ABBOTT
When I see what I want I'm
positively predatory.

MIRANDA
In that case we should be home by
Labor Day.

ABBOTT
I didn't realize you were in such
a rush.

MIRANDA
I know. I'm terrible.

ABBOTT
Look, I don't blame you. All
those years you put in--it's
hardest on the wife. Failure.

MIRANDA
Dad used to say Harold proved
failure doesn't build character.
(beat)
I can't believe I told you that.

ABBOTT
Hardship, sacrifice...All so that
I could have a new novel?
Who'd've thought Harold would
betray you like that?

MIRANDA
I don't know if I'd say
betrayal...

ABBOTT
What did you say?

MIRANDA
It just seemed like a job.

(CONTINUED)

38 CONTINUED: (2)

ABBOTT

You felt you had to be
"supportive". Isn't that the
word? It came in just around the
time girdles went out.

MIRANDA

Haven't you ever done anything
just for the money?

ABBOTT

I married my third wife for the
money. My point is, she told me
not to.

MIRANDA

I just thought it was a means to
an end.

ABBOTT

And is he supportive of you?
With your... "decorating"?

Miranda colors as she gets his point...

MIRANDA

It's just sensible. He's really
talented and I'm--

ABBOTT

A means to an end?

MIRANDA

You have a terrible habit of
putting words in people's mouths.

ABBOTT

Why, Miranda, it's what I do.
(resuming)

The irony is, the minute a guy
makes it, he runs like hell from
everyone who reminds him of the
tough times. That's what
happened with me and Theresa. My
first wife.

MIRANDA

This project--it's giving you the
wrong idea about Harold. He's
not like that.

ABBOTT

He's not like me--isn't that what
you mean?

(CONTINUED)

38 CONTINUED: (3)

MIRANDA

I mean all he really cares about
is his books. And as soon as
this job is done, then--

Abbott picks up an antique. Examines it...

ABBOTT

It's amazing, isn't it--how we
hold onto the past?

MIRANDA

I think it's the past that holds
onto us. Puts its arms around
you and embraces you.

ABBOTT

Like a boa constrictor, you mean.
Or is that just my past?

MIRANDA

Why do you live in an old house
with a lot of old things?

ABBOTT

It's haunted, you know.

(beat)

Ghosts.

She looks at him. He's serious. She laughs.

MIRANDA

Oh really?

ABBOTT

You've been warned.

Then he laughs. Stops to inspect a beautiful antique VASE with
a tag on it, marked SOLD.

ABBOTT

You like this?

MIRANDA

That's sold.

ABBOTT

So it is.

MIRANDA

You're not one of these clients
who only wants what you can't
have, are you?

(CONTINUED)

38 CONTINUED: (4)

ABBOTT
That's why we hold onto the past,
isn't it? Because we can't?

Abbott puts back the vase. Dances down the aisle. Miranda watches, INTRIGUED by him--and surprised by that.

ANGLE ON--THE BIDDIES

As they look their way.

BIDDY #1
I guess Bob's got another one.

CUT TO:

39 EXT. TWILIGHT. ABBOTT HOUSE

The TYPEWRITER sits abandoned on the picnic table. From inside, the sound of a PHONE RINGING...A breeze kicks up and blows a piece of paper off the table and across the lawn--

CUT TO:

40 INT. SAME TIME. ABBOTT HOUSE

The phone continues to ring, unanswered, while the CREW sets up...A SOUND MAN pulls off his headphones...

SOUND MAN
Somebody wanna kill that phone?

A GRIP goes to the phone, YANKS out the cord--

CUT TO:

41 INT. SAME TIME. DAVIS, DAY PUBLISHING

Lahore listens, PUZZLED, as the line goes DEAD.

LAHORE
(to dead phone)
Hello?

CUT TO:

42 INT. SAME TIME. ABBOTT HOUSE--LIVING ROOM

Abbott enters, finds Harold in an easy chair under KLIEG LIGHTS, as a D.P. inspects him through a CONTRAST GLASS.

(CONTINUED)

42 CONTINUED:

ABBOTT

He looks a little green, don't
you think?

Then Miranda follows inside...Lulu goes to them.

LULU

You're an Eighteenth Century man
in so many ways, you might as
well be late for everything.

ABBOTT

Gosh, I'm sorry--am I late?

LULU

Four hours, darling.
(appraises Miranda)
Who's this?

Harold starts to get out of his chair...

HAROLD

That's--

LIGHTING DIRECTOR

Don't move!

He sits back down. The Lighting Director resumes lighting.
Abbott follows Lulu into the living room...

ABBOTT

Oh Christ, Lulu--I don't want to
do it here. I'll look like a
needlepoint pillow. Let's do it
in the kitchen.

LULU

Bob--we go on in four hours.
What should I do--hire a chopper
to get the tape to New York?

ABBOTT

Great idea! C'mon--we'll have
fun! What are you doing for
dinner?

CUT TO:

43 INT. NIGHT. ABBOTT HOUSE--LIBRARY

On the TELEVISION, Abbott wears a toque, prepares MASHED
POTATOES as Lulu looks on...

(CONTINUED)

43 CONTINUED:

ABBOTT

...Now, the secret is cream--not
milk. You can get it real hot
without it curdling...

REVERSE ANGLE--HAROLD AND MIRANDA

Watching in the library as Harold smokes...From upstairs,
Lulu's orgasmic yawps rattle the timbers of the old house...

LULU (O.C.)

Oh, Daddy! Oh! Oh! Oh, Daddy!

MIRANDA

She's not even pretty.

HAROLD

(focused on the TV)

What?

MIRANDA

The potatoes are upstaging her.

HAROLD

Did you know that--about the
cream?

BACK ON--TELEVISION

As Abbott adds the cream, whips it into the potatoes...

ABBOTT

...I like to leave a few lumps in
there. We seek authenticity in
all that we do...

BACK ON--MIRANDA AND HAROLD

As they watch the TV...

HAROLD

Do you think there's leftovers?

MIRANDA

No wonder he can't finish his
book.

LULU (O.C.)

OH DADDY DADDY DO IT DADDY YES!

HAROLD

Well, if he's writing right now,
I can't wait to read it.

(CONTINUED)

43 CONTINUED: (2)

She gets up. Turns off the TV.

LULU (O.C.)
OOOOOOOOOOOOHHHHHHH GOD!

Miranda exits. Harold follows her out to the SCREEN PORCH,
where the sounds from upstairs are somewhat dimmer...

HAROLD
Talk to me. How'd it go today?

MIRANDA
Don't worry--I won't embarrass
you.

HAROLD
I wasn't worried.
(chuckles)
What, did he come on to you?

MIRANDA
Do you think I'm his type?

HAROLD
Then what's eating you? You
think that could be me up there?

MIRANDA
I don't think you're his type,
either.

Then Harold smiles. Approaches her.

HAROLD
(mimics Abbott)
Your ass...It's like two scoops
of steaming mashed potatoes...

MIRANDA
Stop it.

He caresses her...Kisses her...

HAROLD
...I'm like a little boy--I can't
help myself...

MIRANDA
Enough. Cut it out.

HAROLD
(mimics Abbott)
...I just want to lick the
spoon...

(CONTINUED)

43 CONTINUED: (3)

MIRANDA
It's not funny.

She pushes him away. Exits back inside.

HAROLD
What?

CUT TO:

44 INT. NIGHT. GUEST ROOM

Miranda takes off her blouse. Goes to hang it in the closet--
THE GORGEOUS VASE

That she and Abbott saw earlier, that had been marked "SOLD,"
with an organza ribbon and a card:

Miranda, For whom everything is
new-- Bob

CUT TO:

45 INT. MORNING. ABBOTT HOUSE--KITCHEN

Harold works. With a RAT-A-TAT-TAT, he types--

That morning

Then stops. Tears out the page. Puts in a fresh page. TYPES--

Early that morning

Then he stops. Stares. Then rubs at his forehead with the end
of his pencil. As if there's some BLOT to be erased there--

CUT TO:

46 EXT. DAY. ABBOTT HOUSE--BACKYARD

Abbott and Harold, shirtless, SPAR with boxing gloves.

ABBOTT
...You're just a little stuck,
that's all.

HAROLD
I can't figure out why she does
it. Why--because she's unhappy?

(CONTINUED)

46 CONTINUED:

ABBOTT

So her husband can find out about
it in Chapter Six.

(whacks Harold)

Keep that left up.

HAROLD

Seriously. It's a big deal,
isn't it--to have an affair?

ABBOTT

I don't know. Half the time, I
think it's just something to do.

HAROLD

But then why would the cop--the
Mountie--

ABBOTT

I've changed my mind about that
Mountie thing. I think he should
be IRS. That's how they get all
these Mob guys, right--taxes?

HAROLD

I'm just--

ABBOTT

You can keep the brutality bit.
These audits can get brutal,
believe me.

HAROLD

It's only that I'm behind
schedule already--and what with
the deadline they've given me...

Abbott signals a break.

ABBOTT

Remember I told you that
something-- someone--was holding
you back? I figured it out.

HAROLD

(joking)

My left jab?

ABBOTT

It's you.

Abbott tosses a towel to Harold. Fetches one for himself and
sits on a PICNIC BENCH. Harold joins him.

(CONTINUED)

46 CONTINUED: (2)

ABBOTT

(continuing)

This bourgeois propriety of yours. Your "schedules" and "deadlines", your Merit Badge in prose fiction.

HAROLD

I always thought it was better to think of it as a job, just like any other job.

ABBOTT

That's not writing, it's... typing. You know what the difference is? The man. The life. An artist isn't bound by the same rules as everyone else. Go, goddammit! Plunge into life's mysteries! Launch off into the Great Unknown... Violence. Insanity. Women...
(off Harold's look)
C'mon, let's see that jab again.

They square off and resume sparring.

HAROLD

Maybe I'm not an artist, then. I really can't imagine--

ABBOTT

You can imagine anything. You've spent half your life imagining you were a real writer.

Harold, angry, BLASTS Abbott with a right hook...Abbott collapses like a felled bison. Harold kneels over him.

HAROLD

Bob--are you all right? Bob!

CUT TO:

47 INT. LATER. ABBOTT HOUSE

Abbott lies on the couch with a cold compress on his head. Miranda and Harold minister to him.

ABBOTT

You've got a helluva right hook.

(CONTINUED)

47 CONTINUED:

MIRANDA

It serves you right. Both of you.

ABBOTT

The thing is, I was supposed to go to this PEN thing tonight at the Buckleys...Give a speech... God knows how Pat will take it.

HAROLD

Well, you're not going anywhere.

ABBOTT

I was thinking maybe you could go-- read the speech for me. It would really help to smooth things over with Pat.

HAROLD

I think I'm more needed here.

ABBOTT

If I need anything, Miranda can help me out.

CUT TO:

48 INT. LATER. ABBOTT HOUSE

The spit and plume of the steam shower...A VOICE fills the line with cultivated tones...

VOICE (O.C.)

(on the phone)

...To think of this poor poet languishing in that dungeon--and we could make a difference--

HAROLD

Please. I'm only happy I can fill in.

Harold emerges. Reaches inside for his tuxedo--

CUT TO:

49 EXT. EVENING. MANHATTAN

Harold, in his tux, parks his Jaguar. Locks it. Checks his

(CONTINUED)

49 CONTINUED:

watch, trots up the sidewalk. A DOORMAN holds the door--

CUT TO:

50 INT. NIGHT. PARK AVENUE

"FREE BOBO KOUGOUGOUDOU"--with a PHOTO and a PETITION. The rev and gearshift of New York chatter. Wainscoting and important art. A BUTLER with a silver tray COLLIDES with a girl in a cocktail dress as she reaches for an ashtray--

JENNIFER TRENT

The Butler triumphs balletically as Jennifer lights up. Then a flurry of air-kisses as other GUESTS descend...

GUEST #1
How's Dad, Jennifer?

GUEST #2
I loved your portrait of Naipaul
in the Voice.

IN THE DINING ROOM

Calligraphed PLACECARDS around an impeccable table. A hand SUBSTITUTES one card with another that reads "HAMILTON BELL". Then nudges it closer to another that reads...

"JENNIFER TRENT"

...As we discover that the hand belongs to...Harold. With a furtive look, he rejoins the party--

CUT TO:

51 INT. NIGHT. ABBOTT HOUSE--GUEST ROOM

Miranda lies on her bed, reads a magazine. Antsy, she tosses down the magazine, paces. Notices the lights on in the barn, and Abbott on the move inside. Then looks at the CLOCK RADIO as the digits flip--

IT'S 1:52 A.M.

CUT TO:

52 INT. NIGHT. NIGHTCLUB--VILLAGE

Harold dances with Jennifer.

(CONTINUED)

52 CONTINUED:

WIDER

Harold is the only man in a lesbian bar. As he dances with Jennifer, she peels off and dances with some women. Harold tries to play it cool. Dances with himself--

CUT TO:

53 INT. NIGHT. BARN

A dark and dangerous space, cluttered with MEMORABILIA--a poster from Abbott's run for Mayor, his orgone box...Summer RAIN taps on the windows. Abbott glances at his watch. Then turns as the door opens, as if on cue. It's Miranda.

MIRANDA

How are you feeling?

ABBOTT

Oh, I'm feeling much better, thanks.

(beat)

I used to write in here, till I built the bird's nest. Honest work in an honest barn. Blacksmith of the soul and all that crap.

MIRANDA

Do these things usually run this late?

ABBOTT

Oh, you know those Buckleys--they really know how to party.

MIRANDA

I can't believe Harold--he could've called.

ABBOTT

Poor Miranda. How she suffers. So betrayed.

MIRANDA

He's been such a prick lately.

ABBOTT

Is that why you came down here, Miranda? A shoulder to cry on?

She colors. Then recovers...

(CONTINUED)

53 CONTINUED:

MIRANDA

Did you have a chance to look at those sketches? I was thinking two leather armchairs here. And an overstuffed sofa--maybe linen, with flowers and a contrasting welting...

(off his look)

You think it's too House Beautiful?

ABBOTT

I want to see you in here. Mark your territory.

MIRANDA

Me?

ABBOTT

What you want. It's all around you, isn't it? With one thing, uh...

(looks at watch)

...missing.

MIRANDA

To tell you the truth--I think it would be kind of nice--what I said--

ABBOTT

Are you?

MIRANDA

What?

ABBOTT

Are you "nice," Miranda?

MIRANDA

(flirts nervously)

Don't you think I'm nice, Bob?

ABBOTT

No.

MIRANDA

No?

ABBOTT

The noble writer's wife. Penelope waiting for his ship to come in. Everyone feeling sorry for you.

(CONTINUED)

53 CONTINUED: (2)

MIRANDA

It's not like I want people
feeling sorry for me...

ABBOTT

You'd get the D.T.'s if they
stopped. So how could it be?
That after ten years of kissing
his boo-boos, putting the
cupcakes in his lunchbox and
calling every fingerpainting a
masterpiece, he hates you for it?

MIRANDA

You're reading a lot into a flat
tire.

ABBOTT

The truth is, it couldn't be more
perfect. You've been harvesting
pity from the relatives for ten
years and here comes the bumper
crop--"He left me."

MIRANDA

It's only my first marriage, Bob.
I guess I haven't got the hang of
it yet.

ABBOTT

Who betrayed who, Miranda? You
don't believe in him anymore--
he'd never be here if you did.

MIRANDA

You're the one I don't believe in--
you and this idiotic--

ABBOTT

Do you remember what day it was?
When that romantic little atelier
of yours was just a barren little
box, with the pitter-patter of
dirt on the lid? Send flowers.
With a contrasting welting.

MIRANDA

And what day was it, Bob, that
you realized you hated him?

ABBOTT

Hated who?

(CONTINUED)

53 CONTINUED: (3)

MIRANDA

Harold. The day we got here?
Before we got here?

ABBOTT

(chuckling)

Hate Harold? Why would I hate
Harold?

MIRANDA

Because he can write and you
can't.

Abbott stops a beat. Miranda looks at him, her heart pounding.
Then Abbott advances on her...

ABBOTT

Why would you go up to my bird's
nest, Miranda? After I asked you
not to.

MIRANDA

I didn't--.
(beat)
I was curious.

ABBOTT

About me?

MIRANDA

Why it was so important to you.

ABBOTT

Don't you have a secret place?
A place that no one else knows?

MIRANDA

Harold says I'm the only person
he knows who doesn't have any
secrets.

ABBOTT

I think you do.

He kisses her hard. She resists at first but then yields. He
lifts her up...They bang through the door, fall onto the wet
grass and make love in the rain--

CUT TO:

54 EXT. DAWN. SOHO

Harold drops Jennifer off in the Jaguar.

(CONTINUED)

54 CONTINUED:

JENNIFER

I'd like to photograph you
sometime, Hamilton.

HAROLD

Me?

(beat)

Of course, novelists like Bob or
myself, we're not averse to
tasteful publicity, so long as--

She plays seductively with his tie...

JENNIFER

Oh, don't be coy, Hamilton. Wait
and see if you get a better
offer. I know how hot you are
right now.

HAROLD

You really have no idea.

JENNIFER

We could do it right here, in my
loft. That's mine on the third
floor. The light is great in the
late afternoon...

HAROLD

Gosh, I really couldn't...

JENNIFER

...And in the early morning...

HAROLD

...kill that much time--without
a deck of cards or something...

She laughs, takes his hand. With a LIPSTICK, she writes her
phone number on it...

JENNIFER

It would mean a lot to me--you
might even be my first cover.

HAROLD

I don't know what to say...

JENNIFER

Say yes.

Jennifer kisses his cheek. He watches as she gracefully VAULTS
out on the driver's side...Barefoot and carrying her heels by
the strap, she exits into her building.

(CONTINUED)

54 CONTINUED: (2)

ANGLE ON--JENNIFER

As she collects her mail, hits the elevator button. Suddenly Harold GRABS her, plants a hungry kiss deep in her mouth. She kisses him back. He pulls on the zipper of her dress. As the elevator doors open, she pushes him away and steps inside.

JENNIFER

We have to save something for later.

She coyly blows him a kiss, as the elevator doors close--

CUT TO:

55 INT. MORNING. ABBOTT HOUSE

EGGS break into a bowl as SUNSHINE glints off it...Chopping and slicing as Abbott works happily in the kitchen...

ABBOTT

(sings)

"...I feel pretty...Oh so pretty...I feel witty and pretty and gay!..."

CUT TO:

56 EXT. MORNING. ABBOTT HOUSE

The birds chirp. Harold rolls up in his Jaguar, crashes into the garbage cans, which startles him awake. He tries to vault out the way Jennifer did, trips and falls in the mud--

CUT TO:

57 INT. MORNING. ABBOTT HOUSE

Harold trudges inside in his disheveled tuxedo, his shirttail out, rubbing the cobwebs out of his eyes...

HAROLD'S POV

From the foyer, of Abbott dancing and singing as he cooks...

ABBOTT

(sings)

"...I feel charming...Oh so charming...It's alarming how charming I feel..."

(CONTINUED)

57 CONTINUED:

Harold pauses: what the hell's that about? Enters the kitchen, goes to the coffee machine. Fixes himself a cup.

HAROLD
What's got you all lit up?

The phone rings. Abbott gestures--his hands are full. Harold picks it up.

HAROLD
Hello?...Of course. This
Saturday?

Harold fumbles for a pen as Miranda enters in her nightgown.

ABBOTT
Coffee's hot.

She goes to the coffee machine. Harold realizes that Jennifer's phone number--

IN LIPSTICK

--is still on his hand. With his back to Miranda, he wipes it on his shirttail as he stuffs it in his pants...

HAROLD
"The Moral Responsibility of the
Artist," what could be more--.
Thank you. Bye bye.
(hangs up)
As I was saying, we went downtown
afterwards--a bunch of us--and by
the time I dropped everyone
off...

MIRANDA
In a two-seater?

Abbott catches Miranda's eye. Gestures to his neck. She checks her reflection in the glass of the kitchen cabinets...

A LURID HICKEY

Blazes on her neck...Miranda picks up the newspaper, opens it. Then uses it as a shield as she sits...The PHONE RINGS...

ABBOTT
(off phone)
Must've gone well last night.

(CONTINUED)

57 CONTINUED: (2)

HAROLD
Look, you're right. I could've
called. But frankly, it's just
a lot of goddamn bourgeois
propriety. An artist has to--

ABBOTT
(to phone)
Hello?...Yes, hi, Jennifer.
How's Dad?...One second.
(with phone)
Hamilton?

As Harold turns to the phone, Miranda slips upstairs...

HAROLD
Hi...Of course! It's my own name
I don't remember...Look--could I
call you back? Great.

Harold hangs up. Abbott smiles.

ABBOTT
Jennifer Trent, huh?

HAROLD
It's not what you think.

Abbott laughs, ruffles Harold's hair affectionately.

ABBOTT
You dog!

Harold grins.

HAROLD
Yes, well...
(beat)
I'd better get back to work.

Harold exits with his coffee. Then returns for the whole POT.
Exits toward the library as Miranda returns, wearing a
TURTLENECK. She and Abbott exchange a look.

ABBOTT
Frittata?

CUT TO:

58 INT. LATER. ABBOTT HOUSE

Harold SLEEPS, his face squashed against the keys of the
typewriter. Abbott enters. Reads, over Harold's shoulder--

(CONTINUED)

58 CONTINUED:

ON THE PAGE

Early that morning

Abbott raises an eyebrow. Then continues UPSTAIRS--

CUT TO:

59 INT. SAME TIME. ABBOTT HOUSE

Abbott climbs up to the second floor hallway. Looks up the staircase to the CLOSED DOOR on the third floor. Then climbs the stairs. Looks again at the door. Opens it painfully...

INSIDE

An array of writer's weapons--an OLIVETTI PORTABLE, legal pads and pencils, the IBM computer and microdot printer he bought with his advance nine years ago, a dictaphone, a Ouija board...Too tidy, like a room in a museum...

Abbott opens the window. Then sits. Seized with a powerful emotion as he takes it in. Then finds a ream of paper. RIPS it open--

CUT TO:

60 INT. SAME TIME. DOWNSTAIRS

Harold snores a little, shifts his position. Then a sound from upstairs AWAKENS him...

TAP...TAP-TAP...RATTA-TAP...

Oblivious, Harold licks the last drops of Scotch out of his tumbler...Rises for a fresh bottle. Then FREEZES--

TAP...RATTA-TAP...TAP-TAP-TAP...

What was that? He stops, listens. Nothing. Then moves again toward the liquor cabinet. Gets as far as two steps when--

TAP-TAP-TAP RATTA-RATTA-TAP-TAP....

His eyes go wide...

A TYPEWRITER?

Harold VAULTS up to the third floor. Knocks on the door of the bird's nest. TAP-TAP-TAP...RATTA-TAP-RATTA-TAP...

(CONTINUED)

60 CONTINUED:

ABBOTT (O.C.)
(through door)
Go away, please.

HAROLD
It's me. Harold.

ABBOTT (O.C.)
Yes?

HAROLD
What are you doing?

ABBOTT (O.C.)
What does it sound like?

HAROLD
I've just never--. You're
working on the Big Book?

ABBOTT (O.C.)
If you don't mind, Harold, I'm
working.

HAROLD
Of course, but--

ABBOTT (O.C.)
Work, Harold. That's all a
writer can do.

Harold stares at the closed door... TAP...TAP-TAP-TAP...TAP--

CUT TO:

61 EXT. EVENING. ABBOTT HOUSE

Miranda returns in the Mercedes. Climbs out. PUZZLED as she
hears the TAP-TAP-TAP from the bird's nest window--

CUT TO:

62 INT. NIGHT. ABBOTT HOUSE--KITCHEN

The TAP...TAP-TAP...continues as Harold goes through his draft,
savagely x-ing out whole sections. Miranda enters.

HAROLD
Do you hear what he's doing? Do
you hear that?

(CONTINUED)

62 CONTINUED:

MIRANDA
I guess he's writing.

HAROLD
Guess where that leaves me.
(off her look)
They needed my book because he
couldn't finish. Remember?
(mutters)
Ask not who tolls for Bell. That
motherfucker upstairs.

MIRANDA
Harold--we need to talk.

HAROLD
I'm just a little bit busy,
Miranda.

MIRANDA
Harold--last night--when you were
late--

HAROLD
You want to talk about that now?

MIRANDA
Harold--

HAROLD
Will you stop for one instant
being so goddamn self-involved?

She exits as he goes back to work--

CUT TO:

63 INT. NIGHT. ABBOTT HOUSE--KITCHEN

TAP-TAP-TAP from upstairs as Harold broods over his draft.
Sucks on the eraser. Then slams the pencil down, hurls his
manuscript...The pages FLUTTER across the room--

CUT TO:

64 INT. SAME TIME. GUEST ROOM

Miranda lies awake. Listens to the TAP-TAP-TAP... Turns
fretfully in her bed--

CUT TO:

65 EXT. NIGHT. 92ND STREET Y

A sign announces,

Contemporary Authors at the "Y"
ROBERT GRAND ABBOTT

The audience files inside--

CUT TO:

66 INT. LATER. AUDITORIUM

An overflow crowd, including Lahore and others we've seen earlier...Abbott, in his three-piece blue suit, sits beside the lectern as GEORGE PLIMPTON introduces him.

PLIMPTON

...At the first reading I
attended here, Bob Abbott bit off
a piece of Gore Vidal's ear.

Appreciative laughter from the audience...

ANGLE ON--HAROLD AND MIRANDA

As they sneak inside, late. A POET, fifties, graciously gives up his seat to Miranda. Harold finds a place to stand.

PLIMPTON

...He is, quite simply, our
greatest living American writer.
Ladies and gentlemen, Robert
Grand Abbott.

APPLAUSE as Abbott rises with a sheaf of pages.

ABBOTT

Now, the anticlimax.

(laughter)

I hope you won't be too
disappointed-- I brought
something new.

(the crowd murmurs)

Just a little novella I've
written. I thought my publishers
might include it in the Autograph
Series-- for the Spring list.

ANGLE ON--HAROLD

Did he hear that right? He and Lahore exchange a look.

(CONTINUED)

66 CONTINUED:

BACK ON--ABBOTT

As he puts on his reading glasses and begins. The audience warms to him, excited--the work is vintage Abbott.

ABBOTT

It's called Desire.

(reads)

When did I know? A man with charm can confuse getting his way with something more than an improvisation of fate, and the first flash of desire for a premonition. I remember when the doorbell rang, I thought only to have the chimes changed. They were one of those couples, escaping from the city, who succeed only in bringing the city with them, their sweat and summer nerves. The husband stood at the door, wet and eager, as polite as a pickpocket who always says "Excuse me".

ANGLE ON--HAROLD

Oblivious to what he's hearing...

ABBOTT

And the wife? A bloom furled against the moonlight, with only a scent of the secrets she held close, as she sat in their tatty Volkswagen.

ANGLE ON--MIRANDA

She trembles at what she's hearing...

ABBOTT

...Did I know then? That I would drink the rain from her belly, as I spread her legs, in the sweet grass, on a summer night. That I would fuck her behind my barn, and melt, like sugar, in a moment of clarity. In the moonless August heat, in the dark of the rain. When did I know? Modern man reads his own entrails, and orders his life, not by his gods, but by his hungers. But more of this later.

(CONTINUED)

66 CONTINUED: (2)

ANGLE ON--HAROLD

As he, too, realizes what he's hearing...

BACK ON--ABBOTT

As he looks up, smiles sweetly to the appreciative audience,
turns the page. Resumes reading--

CUT TO:

67 INT. LATER. 92ND STREET "Y"--LOBBY

A champagne reception BUZZING with Abbott's triumph...Abbott
hobnobs happily with FANS and WELL-WISHERS...

ABBOTT

...It's just a little thing I did--
I dunno--

FAN #1

It put me in mind of those late
quartets of Beethoven...

A smiling Lahore approaches Abbott.

ABBOTT

Have you seen, uh...?

LAHORE

Hot on the heels of--I believe
her husband.

Sincere HURT on Abbott's face--that turns quickly to PIQUE...

ABBOTT

Well, if that isn't the rudest--

LAHORE

Bob, you know how overwhelming it
can be when you first encounter
a great work of art--

A fellow NOVELIST of Abbott's vintage slaps him on the back.

NOVELIST

You still got it, baby!

Abbott grins as the Novelist passes by.

ABBOTT

Yeah?

(CONTINUED)

67 CCONTINUED:

LAHORE

...Either that or the bit where
the girl begs for the dildo.

ABBOTT

What about me? D'y'know what I'm
saying? This is supposed to be
my night.

LAHORE

It seems I've missed a few things
out there.

ABBOTT

We'll have to catch up.

Abbott slaps Lahore's back, turns to leave. Lahore stops him.

LAHORE

And the book?

ABBOTT

You mean the new Hamilton Bell?

Another NOVELIST hugs Lahore. Abbott grins as he shakes hands
with another WELL-WISHER. Then, a plaintive look on his face,
he looks to the door, searches the crowd for Miranda--

CUT TO:

68 EXT. SAME TIME. STREET

Harold storms toward the PARKING LOT his Jaguar, burning with
rage and humiliation. Miranda runs after him.

MIRANDA

...It just--I don't know--
happened. I'm sorry. It was
just--

HAROLD

Just a little novella for the
Spring list.

MIRANDA

I had no idea he was going to do
that.

HAROLD

No bad deed goes unpublished.

MIRANDA

How do you think I feel?

(CONTINUED)

68 CONTINUED:

HAROLD
Sore, would be my guess.

MIRANDA
You'd think we're the first
couple this ever happened to.

HAROLD
You'd think you're the first
woman he ever happened to.

MIRANDA
I made a mistake. You were
swatting me away, and he was
there, and--I don't know--I was
confused.

HAROLD
You couldn't tell us apart?

MIRANDA
(pointed)
Maybe I couldn't.

HAROLD
I forgot--it was dark, wasn't it?
"In the moonless heat, the dark
of the rain. So dark, so
moonless..."

Harold arrives at the lot. Approaches the ATTENDANT...Hands
him the CLAIM CHECK for his car...

MIRANDA
You're not even listening to me.

HAROLD
"...Till I melted, like M & Ms--
in her mouth, not her hands."

MIRANDA
You got into bed with him a long
time before I did.

HAROLD
What do you want, Miranda? You
want me to forgive you? I don't.
I don't forgive you. Go back to
Bob. He'll cross you out with a
blue pencil the minute his plot
line doesn't work out.

The Attendant pulls up in the Jaguar. Harold moves to climb
aboard. When Miranda YANKS the keys out of the ignition--

(CONTINUED)

68 CONTINUED: (2)

MIRANDA

You son of a bitch! Eight years of your lousy moods and insults and tiptoeing around your so-called artistic temperament. Eight years of the worldwide conspiracy to ignore your "genius". Eating dinner alone while I watch your eyes go blank and you disappear into your own little world. Believing in you for both of us. Eight years of this fucking nightmare of being married to a writer and I forgave every minute. Except when you gave up the whole eight years for fifteen minutes of fame and...

(off Jaguar)

...fourteen miles per gallon-- without even talking to me--like I wasn't even there. You don't forgive me? Fuck you. You lost your chance.

(gives him keys)

And let me tell you something. He's not just a better writer than you are.

He clenches his fist, moves toward her. The Attendant grabs him.

ATTENDANT

Hey, man. Not in my lot.

CUT TO:

69 INT. LATER. JENNIFER'S LOFT

Jennifer, in a robe, her hair in a towel, dabs a CLAY MASK on her face as the DOORBELL rings. Puzzled, she goes inside. The doorbell rings impatiently.

HER POV--THROUGH THE PEEPHOLE

Harold, as he knocks on the door. She opens it.

JENNIFER

You caught me in the middle of--
(off his look)
Are you okay?

HAROLD

I'm here for my photograph.

(CONTINUED)

69 CONTINUED:

He pounces on her...The Full Packwood...A drooling tongue and slurred endearments... Grabbing clumsily under her robe...

JENNIFER

Stop! God, what's gotten into--

She fights him off...Pulls her robe back around her... Harold sits, unbuckles his belt and pulls off his pants...

JENNIFER

Get out.

HAROLD

You women--you're all alike. You moan about how you can't find a nice guy... Then all you want is to get fucked in a barn. With a cowbell around your neck. And a falling barometer.

JENNIFER

Leave. You're drunk and disgusting.

HAROLD

Oh, shut up and make me a sandwich, or--

Then he passes out. She scowls. Then smiles as she sees her LEICA. Then aims--his mouth in mid-snore, pants in one hand and bottle in the other--and SHOTS--

CUT TO:

70 EXT. LATER. JENNIFER'S LOFT

Harold staggers into the street in his boxer shorts just as a TOW TRUCK hoists the Jaguar...

HAROLD

Hey. Hey!

DRIVER

You're too late, pal.

Jennifer throws his PANTS out the window. Harold turns as they fall to the ground. Then sees that Jennifer is pouring his bourbon onto his pants...

HAROLD

Just one second.

(CONTINUED)

70 CONTINUED:

Harold runs to retrieve his pants...As he pulls them up to his knees, she aims the BOURBON BOTTLE...It smashes inches from him--he staggers backwards, his pants around his ankles, and falls...The Driver pulls out with the Jaguar.

DRIVER
See ya, pal.

HAROLD
Do you know who I am? I'm an important writer.

DRIVER
You look it.

HAROLD
I'm Hamilton Bell. I'm Hamilton Bell!

Harold shakes his fist as the Jaguar pulls away--

CUT TO:

71 EXT. NIGHT. PARK SLOPE

Miranda wanders stupefied through her old neighborhood. Turns the corner and sees

A SHADOWY FIGURE

Sitting on the steps...Harold! She RUNS. The figure turns...

IT'S ABBOTT

Her hopes sink...She fishes for her keys, tries to hurry past him into the apartment...

ABBOTT
Where'd you go? I've been looking all over for you.

MIRANDA
Get away from me.

ABBOTT
I wrote it for you. I thought you'd be happy.

MIRANDA
What is it with me and writers?

ABBOTT
I didn't mean to hurt you, I--.

(CONTINUED)

71 CONTINUED:

MIRANDA
You think I wanted to do that to
Harold?

ABBOTT
Gosh, Miranda. I thought you
already had.

She turns, continues inside with Abbott in pursuit...

MIRANDA
All those people wondering about
those filthy things that you...
(stammers)
Looking at me!

ABBOTT
Well, now they are. The way you
ran out like that...

MIRANDA
I don't know why you even
bothered changing the names.

ABBOTT
Harold never wrote about the two
of you?

MIRANDA
Oh, who would know?

ABBOTT
Look, I can see how you could
take it this way. But you have
to believe me, I really didn't
intend to--

MIRANDA
You planned the whole goddamn
thing. Just to get this stupid,
overwritten short story.

ABBOTT
I didn't--

MIRANDA
Oh, bullshit, Bob.

ABBOTT
I didn't plan on you, Miranda.

They exchange a look.

(CONTINUED)

71 CONTINUED: (2)

MIRANDA

You need someone to kiss your boo-
boos?

ABBOTT

What?

MIRANDA

Put cupcakes in your lunchbox?

ABBOTT

(helpfully)

I like the fudgie kind.

MIRANDA

And call every fingerpainting a
masterpiece?

Now Abbott REMEMBERS...His speech in the barn...

ABBOTT

(pointed)

Some of them are, you know.

MIRANDA

"I love you," said the balding,
paunchy novelist as he scratched
his drooping nuts." Put that in
your story.

She wheels, enters the apartment. Slams the door on him. He
presses his ear against the door to listen to her...

ABBOTT

Come on, Miranda. Come back to
the house. Finish the job. You
can stay in the guest room--take
the car-- come and go as you
please. You have to finish the
job, Miranda. I already talked
to the gal at Architectural
Digest, she wants it for January.
I promise I'll leave you--

(beat)

You really thought it was
overwritten?

ANGLE ON--MIRANDA

ALONE inside the musty basement apartment, with their
photographs and keepsakes...

(CONTINUED)

71 CONTINUED: (3)

AT THE DOOR

Abbott continues to purr...

ABBOTT

C'mon. You don't want to be in there alone--all those memories...You have to think of yourself. You need a friend now. And if I can be that friend, well, it's the least I can do. Come back with me. I've got a car waiting outside. Let me take care of you.

Then the door opens and she emerges. They exchange a look. Abbott adjusts her collar for her as they exit--

DISSOLVE TO:

72 EXT. DAY. ABBOTT HOUSE

The brilliant colors of autumn. Harold drives up in the VW, climbs out and approaches the house. A LIMO parked on the lawn. As the DRIVER loads SUITCASES and two sets of SKIS--

CUT TO:

73 INT. SAME TIME. ABBOTT HOUSE--BIRD'S NEST

On the phone, Abbott reads aloud from Interview: a full-page of Harold, in mid-snore, pants at his ankles and bottle in hand, with the headline, "HAMILTON BELL: PIG," and the byline, "Jennifer Trent."

ABBOTT

(chuckles)

"...He then demanded a sandwich, tilted his head back, and, perhaps with his new book in mind, started to snore."

(looks at watch)

I lost track of the time. Pick it up at the newsstand. I'll call you from the lift.

He hangs up. Looks out the window. Sees the VW on the lawn--

CUT TO:

74 INT. DAY: ABBOTT HOUSE--BARN

Miranda bosses a CARPENTER as he installs benches shaped like GONDOLAS. A PAINTER limns a trompe l'oeil MURAL of Venice...

MIRANDA

I thought we were going to cant these seats.

CARPENTER

Ma'am?

MIRANDA

You won't be able to see. The one in back has to be higher.

CARPENTER

(sarcastic)

Maybe we could install a system of links here in the canal.

MIRANDA

You think it's stupid, right?
You think it's bad. Just say it.

CARPENTER

I didn't say anything.

MIRANDA

You think I don't know it?

Through the windows, Miranda sees Harold's VW...

MIRANDA

Forget it. I'll deal with it when we get back.

She exits...The Painter scolds the Carpenter with a look...

PAINTER

Bob likes her.

CUT TO:

75 INT. LATER. LIBRARY

Harold packs up his books and papers while Abbott supervises, looks at his watch.

ABBOTT

...I thought you were going to be out here an hour ago.

HAROLD

Traffic.

(CONTINUED)

75 CONTINUED:

ABBOTT

Miranda said for you to take any of the books and tapes and stuff...

HAROLD

If Miranda wants to tell me anything, she can tell me herself.

ABBOTT

I don't think that's the best idea for her right now.

HAROLD

You did this for her--is that the idea?

ABBOTT

Did you ever think she did this for her?

HAROLD

Imagine how many women you could help if you took it on the road. Like the Bookmobile.

ABBOTT

Look, pal, we have a plane to catch, so--

HAROLD

"I'm doing this for you." That's what you said, remember?

ABBOTT

Maybe I was.

HAROLD

"You know what I'm going to do for you? I'm going to fuck your wife."

ABBOTT

Don't use that word.

HAROLD

As if the Decathlon were just the pole vault.

ABBOTT

Let's not do this.

(CONTINUED)

75 CONTINUED: (2)

HAROLD

You think you can just do
whatever you want, don't you?
Whenever you want--

ABBOTT

Hey--this is what you wanted.

HAROLD

Is that what it was about all
along? All of those dinners, the
softball games, all of that
taking-me-under-your-wing, and it
was all...

(beat)

How could you do that?

ABBOTT

You're a famous writer now,
Hamilton. Just not famous as me.

HAROLD

I think, grammatically, Bob, you
mean to say, famous as I.

ABBOTT

I know what I said.

HAROLD

It doesn't change what I said.

ABBOTT

What the hell do you think this
writing thing is--afternoon tea
for the old ladies in the book of
the month club, cooing over your
adjectives and their cucumber
sandwiches? My books cost me--my
wives, my children, my life--
sixteen books that I put the name
Robert Grand Abbott on. And by
the way, I type my name at the
end--when I've earned it. You
think you can breeze into my
house and take my name and want
what I have? I've got news for
you, Hamilton-- you're going to
have to kill me for it.

HAROLD

Cut it out with this "Hamilton".
I'm not--

(CONTINUED)

75 CONTINUED: (3)

ABBOTT

No, you're not. Hamilton Bell
might actually have a book in
him.

(beat)

Just pull the door shut when you
leave.

CUT TO:

76 INT. LATER. LIBRARY

Harold WATCHES out the window as the DRIVER slams Abbott's
luggage into the trunk. Climbs in and starts the car--

CUT TO:

77 INT. SAME TIME. LIMOUSINE

Miranda turns to Abbott as he reads his newspaper.

MIRANDA

Did he ask about me?

Abbott looks up from his paper.

ABBOTT

(shrugs)

No.

Abbott goes back to his paper. Miranda looks out the window--
sees the VW on the lawn, but no Harold--

CUT TO:

78 EXT. SAME TIME. ABBOTT HOUSE

Harold emerges from the house with a carton of books. Loads it
in the trunk. Watches as the limo disappears up the road--

CUT TO:

79 INT. LATER. ABBOTT HOUSE

Harold climbs the stairs to the guest room. Finds his clothes
in the closet. Grabs several hangers and lifts them out.
Turns for the rest and notices, on a shelf behind--

(CONTINUED)

79 CONTINUED:

THE UNDERWOOD

Harold looks at it like a man looking into a magic mirror and seeing the depths of his own soul, his past and his future...

Then he THROWS down his clothes, lifts up the typewriter... RUNS downstairs. Sweeps the papers from the kitchen table and slams the typewriter down...Retrieves a box of COMPUTER PAPER from the bird's nest...And then--

CUT TO:

MONTAGE

--Harold begins to WRITE...Really to write for the first time...His ordeal has stripped away his pretensions, his greed, his desire to please...It feels like a dam breaking--

--Harold writes furiously...The clack of the keys, the RING as the carriage returns...The computer paper feeds continuously into the typewriter, end to perforated end, then twists out into the kitchen--

--Harold stubs out a cigarette...Four butts in the ashtray--

--The moon rises over the house...A single light on in the kitchen and the sound of the typewriter going--

--Harold types furiously...Sentences SPILL onto the page--

--As dawn breaks, Harold makes coffee...Behind him, the pages snake across the kitchen...From the clock radio, the comforting tones of a WQXR DISC JOCKEY--

DISC JOCKEY (O.C.)
...Wishing you a pleasant Monday
morning...

--The Carpenter and Painter show up for work...Hear the RAT-TAT-TAT of the typewriter inside--

--Harold forages through the pages...Finds the passage he's looking for and reads it...Then runs back to the typewriter--

--A DELIVERY BOY brings an order of Chinese up the steps of the porch, KNOCKS...Harold answers--his appearance so shocking that the Delivery Boy drops the food and assumes a KARATE STANCE...Harold calms him, fishes for some bills--

--Harold brings the pot of coffee to the table...

DISC JOCKEY (O.C.)
...Music of Corelli for this
pleasant Thursday evening...

(CONTINUED)

79 CONTINUED: (2)

The keys of the typewriter rise and fall in a dance--

--Harold works madly, his shirt off and a towel around his neck...Then he's STARTLED by a knock at the kitchen window...It's the Carpenter, who hands him a SANDWICH and a THERMOS...They salute each other--

DISC JOCKEY (O.C.)
...Weekend weather, cloudy today
with a chance of showers...

--Night, and a STORM pounds the farmhouse... Lightning and thunder...Harold stubs his cigarette into a full ashtray--

--DAWN rises in the East...

DISC JOCKEY (O.C.)
...Music of Beethoven to greet
this Monday morning...

--A COLLAGE as Harold types madly...Letters form words... Words form sentences...Pages crank up from the typewriter--

CUT TO:

80 EXT. DAY. SAGAPONACK

Abbott and Miranda ride in the limousine. Abbott reads a MAGAZINE while Miranda gazes out the window.

ABBOTT
Here we are. Home sweet home.

As they pull up to Abbott's house, she notices something...Abbott looks up, grimaces with annoyance...

ABBOTT
What the--?

THEIR POV

Harold's VW, still parked on the lawn--

CUT TO:

81 INT. LATER. ABBOTT HOUSE

The front door opens, and Abbott and Miranda enter. Miranda moves to follow Abbott. He stops her.

ABBOTT
You wait here.

(CONTINUED)

81 CONTINUED:

Miranda waits at the door as Abbott searches the house...

ABBOTT'S POV

As he looks in the library...The hallway...Then comes upon the kitchen--

ABBOTT
What the hell--?

REVERSE ANGLE

PAGES stream across the kitchen...Coffee mugs and full ashtrays, and Harold sprawled by the typewriter, ARM STRETCHED over his head, in full SNORE...Then Miranda enters.

ABBOTT
Behold. The Statue of Puberty.
(shaking him)
Wake up. This isn't a goddamn dormitory.

MIRANDA
Oh my God. What happened?

HAROLD
What day is it?

ABBOTT
C'mon, up. Out of my house.
Now.

MIRANDA
Bob--

ABBOTT
(to Harold)
Now.

Miranda backs off. Harold folds up the manuscript pages...

HAROLD
Just give me a minute...

ABBOTT
I said now. This is my house.

Abbott grabs Harold roughly by the neck--

CUT TO:

82 EXT. SAME TIME. ABBOTT HOUSE

Abbott THROWS Harold out onto the porch and KICKS him down the front steps, then returns inside with a SLAM! Harold scrambles up. Pounds on the door...

HAROLD

I'm not leaving without my--

Abbott emerges, SHOVES the pages at Harold--he tumbles again down the steps...With a look of disdain, Abbott returns inside. Harold gathers the pages--

CUT TO:

83 INT. SAME TIME. ABBOTT HOUSE

Abbott watches from his windows as Harold drives off in the VW...Goes back into the kitchen, where Miranda has begun to tidy up. Abbott grabs a garbage bag.

ABBOTT

Let me do this.

MIRANDA

Was that really necessary?

ABBOTT

You know, I just took you skiing for a week. We walk in here, he's trashed my whole house, and you know what? I don't think he even said hello to you.

MIRANDA

What are you saying, Bob--I have to choose sides?

ABBOTT

I don't know about sides.

(beat)

You do have to choose, Miranda.

They exchange a look. Then Abbott turns back to his task. Miranda goes to the sink, rinses the coffee mugs.

MIRANDA

I'm here, aren't I?

Abbott finds a TITLE PAGE with a perforated border...

THE GREAT UNKNOWN: A Novel

(CONTINUED)

83 CONTINUED:

He looks at it. Then he CRUMPLES it up, throws it away--

DISSOLVE TO:

84 INT. DAY. FOUR SEASONS

LAUGHTER as Abbott lunches pleasurably with Lahore. WAITERS glide attentively through the Grill Room...

ABBOTT

...So he's got her up on the Xerox machine and he's fucking her--I mean, really fucking her. By accident he hits a button, it starts Xeroxing both of them. He glances over-- decides he doesn't like the look of ol' Rumplesforeskin--so he hits another button and enlarges it twenty per cent!

Lahore signals for another bottle of wine...

LAHORE

You should put that in a story.

ABBOTT

That's what I'm working on--you know, another short story. Maybe put a book of them together.

LAHORE

That's a great idea.

ABBOTT

(pointed)

Unless you've got another bright young man you want to send up to the house.

LAHORE

Well, it all seems to have worked out for you.

ABBOTT

I outmaneuvered you! Look at you, you son of a bitch--you can't admit it!

LAHORE

It's just wonderful you're working again.

(CONTINUED)

84 CONTINUED:

ABBOTT

Like I would ever--ever--even for
one second put my name on that
fucking guy's book.

Lahore stops him with a grand gesture.

LAHORE

A book of short stories is
perfectly respectable.

ABBOTT

(suspicious)

Well, you're certainly in an
expansive mood.

LAHORE

You know that dream editors have?
A manuscript comes over the
transom-- completely unexpected--
well, usually, it's some silly
piece of shit but--

ABBOTT

Yeah yeah yeah.

LAHORE

Meanwhile it happened just last
Friday. Instead of sloughing it
off to some junior editor, I took
it home and wound up reading
straight through--well, you know
how rare it is. To find a writer
who puts all of himself into a
book, who holds nothing
back...Writes only for himself,
fuck the reviews, fuck the
business...

ABBOTT

And who is the object of this
schoolgirl crush of yours?

LAHORE

Hamilton Bell.

ABBOTT

(laughing)

Who?

LAHORE

I'm serious.

(CONTINUED)

84 CONTINUED: (2)

ABBOTT

Buddy, there is no Hamilton Bell.
That's just a stupid thing I made
up.

LAHORE

Well, that's the name he put at
the end. I thought you knew
about this. He said he wrote it
on your typewriter.

ABBOTT

Oh really?

CLOSE ON--ABBOTT

As he realizes...

LAHORE

He wrote it in a week--a big
burst-- like Kerouac. You should
see the manuscript--all coffee
stains and cigarette burns--one
continuous roll of paper...I'm
telling you-- it's big.

ABBOTT

C'mon, Buddy. Who the hell
writes a great book in a week?

LAHORE

You should feel good about it.
There's no doubt you've
influenced him.

ABBOTT

So that's how I'll be remembered,
huh? For my influence on Harold
Belding?

LAHORE

(correcting him)

Hamilton--

ABBOTT

I heard you the first time,
Buddy.

(mutters)

That's about me, that he used
that name--don't kid yourself--to
piss me off--

(CONTINUED)

84 CONTINUED: (3)

LAHORE

In an odd way, it makes every book you've ever written seem like you're the one imitating him. It has that kind of originality. You really should read it.

Lahore cuts a piece of meat...Enjoys it while Abbott BROODS--

CUT TO:

85 INT. LATER. TRAIN

As the train click-clacks the length of Long Island, Abbott reads the manuscript. Then he tucks it away and sees, reflected in the window, the face of a man who has just been told, not that his life is over, but that it never happened--

CUT TO:

86 INT. LATER. ABBOTT HOUSE

Abbott enters, deep in thought. Pulls off his coat...The sound of the screen door slamming, and Miranda enters.

MIRANDA

How was lunch?

ABBOTT

Good.

MIRANDA

They're making good progress out there. You want to look at it?

ABBOTT

Sure.

Abbott reaches in the closet for a hanger. Miranda takes coat and hanger from him, does it for him.

MIRANDA

What did Buddy want--to hock you about your book?

(CONTINUED)

86 CONTINUED:

ABBOTT

I called him.

(muses)

It's amazing--how lost you can be--
like a fog that's so thick you
have no idea how far you've come,
meanwhile dry land is as close as
your fingers.

MIRANDA

What are you talking about?

She turns to him. He looks up.

ABBOTT

I finished it.

CUT TO:

87 INT. DAY. DAVIS, DAY PUBLISHING

The elevator doors open and Harold emerges onto Buddy's floor,
where people RUSH here and there--something is up. He
introduces himself to the RECEPTIONIST.

HAROLD

I'm here to see Buddy Lahore.
Hamilton Bell.

RECEPTIONIST

Please take a seat.

As Harold sits, RUBEK, an elegantly-attired GERMAN, introduces
himself to the receptionist.

RUBEK

Arnold Rubek. To see Buddy.

RECEPTIONIST

And you are with?

RUBEK

Bantam Germany.

Rubek sits beside Harold and she returns to her checklist--

INSERT--A LONG LIST OF SUITORS

...Bruce Relman, Paramount Pictures...Harold Riff-Gibbons, New
American Library, UK...As the Receptionist CHECKS OFF Rubek's
name.

(CONTINUED)

87 CONTINUED:

BACK ON--HAROLD

As he sits beside Rubek in the reception area. Rubek offers him a cigarette. Harold demurs. Rubek lights up.

RUBEK

I was on a plane all night. You wait nine years, and then one day, there it is.

Harold thinks a beat. "Nine years" rings a bell...

HAROLD

Wait nine years for what?

ANGLE ON--ELEVATOR

As two AD GUYS climb off with a large MOCKUP... Robert Grand Abbott--handsome, smoke-wreathed--with block letters--

Robert Grand Abbott THE GREAT
UNKNOWN Spring 1997

AD GUY #1

I just hope we don't miss the deadline for tomorrow's paper.

BACK ON--HAROLD

As he turns to Rubek.

RUBEK

When we bought the rights for Germany, there were two Germanies. Now Germany is Germany. It's a fucking mess.

HAROLD

He finished the Big Book?

Then Harold WATCHES as the mockup goes by...DOUBLETAKES as he READS... "The Great Unknown"...It's his title...It must be--

HIS BOOK

Harold BOLTS, follows the mockup inside--

CUT TO:

88 INT. SAME TIME. LAHORE'S OFFICE

Lahore talks into a HEADSET as his phone lights up and his E-mail bings and bongs...He mimes instructions to two SECRETARIES, shuttling with messages and documents...

LAHORE

Could you excuse me one second?

(punches button)

Oprah! I wanted you to be the first to know--

Harold BURSTS in...Lahore falls as Harold THROTTLES him... TUMULT as the Secretaries scream. COLLEAGUES rush in and pull Harold away...Lahore, shaken, picks up his bent headset--

LAHORE

(choked)

Could I call you back?

COLLEAGUE #1

Where the hell's security?

LAHORE

No, no. Let's all just take a deep breath. Please. Excuse us.

Harold angrily shrugs them off. Lahore ushers everyone out of his office, closes the door.

HAROLD

That's my book, Buddy.

LAHORE

Hold on. This is all a misunderstanding.

HAROLD

"Misunderstanding"?

Lahore moves to the bar...

LAHORE

Would you like a drink?

HAROLD

I'd "like" my fucking book back.

LAHORE

It's too late.

HAROLD

That's your problem.

(pacing)

I can't believe I sent it to you...

(CONTINUED)

88 CONTINUED:

LAHORE

You sent it to me to prove a point. And you have. Bob thinks-- and I agree--that you deserve a substantial bonus for--

HAROLD

Bob?

LAHORE

Whose idea do you think this was?

HAROLD

Did he even read it?

LAHORE

Not as carefully, perhaps, as he read your contract.

HAROLD

(fiercely)

This is not what we agreed to.

LAHORE

You never delivered what we agreed to. You really put me in a jam. "A book to be determined at Robert Grand Abbott's sole discretion," if you recall.

HAROLD

What's memorable is his soulless indiscretion.

LAHORE

Nevertheless..

HAROLD

You can't make that contract stick.

LAHORE

I can't? I could break you just by losing.

HAROLD

Are you threatening me?

LAHORE

I'm saying, be realistic.

(off phone sheet)

I could tell the tides to stop, too. That doesn't mean they'd listen.

(CONTINUED)

88 CONTINUED: (2)

Harold turns to exit...

HAROLD
Let them listen to the eleven
o'clock news.

LAHORE
Did I mention the confidentiality
clause in your contract?

HAROLD
I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll
blow your whole fucking house
down.

LAHORE
Where are you going?

HAROLD
To tell them--

LAHORE
What? That this major new novel
by Robert Grand Abbott was
actually written by the author of
Darkness Illumined? Who'll
believe you? You can hardly
believe it yourself.

HAROLD
My life. My words.

LAHORE
His typewriter. His paper--the
FBI has tests for these things,
you know. His--dare I say it?--
influence...

HAROLD
Influence?

LAHORE
Be honest. You're a different
writer than when you met him.

HAROLD
I wrote it to cut his fucking
balls off. That's not the same
as owing him something.

Harold resumes his way out the door...

(CONTINUED)

88 CONTINUED: (3)

LAHORE
You'll only make a fool of
yourself.

HAROLD
I'll call Miranda. Miranda will
back me up.

LAHORE
Will she?

HAROLD
Of course she will. Once she
knows the truth, she'll--

LAHORE
What makes you think she doesn't
already?

CLOSE ON--HAROLD

As the wind goes out of his sails.

HAROLD
(quietly)
She knows?

LAHORE
You'll spend the rest of your
life in court. No one in our
little club will publish you--not
with these messy legal claims
against you. Your wages
garnished...All of this, for
what? Petulance. Move ahead!
Forget Miranda--that's the past.
Don't--

Harold puts his finger to his lips.

HAROLD
Don't.

They exchange a look. Harold turns to leave.

LAHORE
You wrote a great book.

Harold stops a beat. Then continues out the door--

CUT TO:

89 INT. LATER. BELDING APARTMENT

Harold opens up his MAILBOX. Flips through the mail...

INSERT--AN ENVELOPE

Addressed to "Mr. Harold Belding", with the return address--

THE LUBAVITCHER PRESS

Harold opens it. Reads. And starts to LAUGH. Slides down to the floor, convulsed, as his laughter ECHOES down the hall--

CUT TO:

90 INT. DAY. ABA CONVENTION

A BANNER reads

CHICAGO WELCOMES AMERICAN BOOK
ASSOCIATION

BUYERS and SELLERS meet and greet in the Super Bowl of publishing...Celebrated AUTHORS and their EDITORS mingle...

ANGLE ON--DAVIS, DAY PUBLISHING

A magnificent booth dominated by a TOWERING MOCKUP spinning slowly on a turntable...

THE GREAT UNKNOWN

With a gigantic photo of Abbott--real SMOKE billows from his cigarette...ACTORS costumed as characters from the book mingle with BOOKSELLERS..."BOOK SIGNING WITH ROBERT GRAND ABBOTT AT TWO O'CLOCK"--

A LONE FIGURE looks up...The Great Unknown...

REVERSE ANGLE

It's Harold.

CUT TO:

91 EXT. DAY. RITZ-CARLTON HOTEL

A DOORMAN meets a LIMO as it pulls up. A MINDER emerges, followed by Abbott in a polo coat. He turns to give Miranda a hand. PAPARAZZI call "Mr. Abbott!" Abbott smiles, signs cards for the AUTOGRAPH SEEKERS...Grins to Miranda.

ABBOTT
What did I tell you?

(CONTINUED)

91 CONTINUED:

She blinks in the cameras' flash. Then they continue inside--

CUT TO:

92 INT. CONTINUOUS. HOTEL

Abbott heads toward the elevators, holding Miranda's hand...A magnet for the attention of the room...

MINDER

...We'll bring you to your book-signing, after which we've scheduled some free time to--

Abbott is stopped by a dowdy FAN and her HUSBAND.

FAN

Mr. Abbott, I just wanted to tell you I love your books.

ABBOTT

Did you love I and Me?

FAN

Who listens to those critics?

Abbott kisses the Fan--leaves her giddy. The Minder moves him along.

MINDER

...Then back here to the hotel so you can get ready for the big party in your honor.

ABBOTT

Big? How big?

MINDER

Two thousand people.

They enter the elevator and people start to APPLAUD...Abbott, supremely pleased, salutes the lobby as the doors close--

CUT TO:

93 INT. SAME TIME. ABA CONVENTION

Inside a TINY BOOTH on the fringes, LUBAVITCHERS with black hats and payess promote their Spring list... Harold sits, IGNORED, beside a sign, hand-lettered on oak tag--"MEET HAROLD BELDING." Then he turns to LUBAVITCHER #1.

(CONTINUED)

93 CONTINUED:

HAROLD
I'm'na go get a cup of coffee.

CUT TO:

94 INT. SAME TIME. ABA CONVENTION

Miranda wanders through the bazaar. SMILES as the ATTENDANT at the STAR TREK booth hands her SPOCK EARS. She tries them on, laughs in the mirror--

CUT TO:

95 INT. SAME TIME. ABA CONVENTION

Abbott tours the hall like a visiting pasha, trailing Lahore, a fawning ENTOURAGE, and a CAMERA CREW...He notices the sign, "MEET HAROLD BELDING"...DETOURS to the Lubavitcher booth.

ABBOTT
How's that Blue Guitar selling?

LUBAVITCHER #1
Not like yours, Mr. Abbott.

ABBOTT
I've read it, you know. Very promising. Very.

LUBAVITCHER #1
Can we call it a blurb?

ABBOTT
I want to order it. It's going to be my Christmas present this year. Why don't we say a thousand copies?

ANGLE ON--HAROLD

As he returns with his coffee, sees Abbott at the Lubavitcher booth, DOUBLETAKES.

HAROLD'S POV

As Abbott takes his CHECKBOOK out of his jacket pocket... Harold navigates through Abbott's entourage...

HAROLD
Excuse me.

An ONLOOKER recognizes Harold, turns to Lahore.

(CONTINUED)

95 CONTINUED:

ONLOOKER
Isn't that Hamilton Bell?

ANGLE ON--ABBOTT

As he writes out his check and Harold confronts him.

ABBOTT
Well, if it isn't my protégé!

HAROLD
Oh no you're not. I know exactly
what you're doing.

ABBOTT
I'm just buying some books.
Isn't that why we're all here?

HAROLD
You've bought one already.

ANGLE ON--THE PRODUCER

With the TV Crew, a chirpy Midwestern BLONDE in a pastel suit,
who turns to the Onlooker.

PRODUCER
What's his name?

ONLOOKER
Hamilton Bell.

PRODUCER
He said he's his protégé?

BACK ON--HAROLD AND ABBOTT

HAROLD
Writing a check--that's sort of
your genre, isn't it.

ABBOTT
(to crowd)
You know how it is. All the
other dogs bite the lead dog's
ass.

HAROLD
Just because your ass is bleeding
doesn't make you lead dog.

LUBAVITCHER #1
Harold, Harold...

(CONTINUED)

95 CONTINUED: (2)

ANGLE ON--THE ONLOOKER

ONLOOKER

Who's Harold? Why's he calling
him Harold?

LAHORE

It's Yiddish.

BACK ON--HAROLD AND ABBOTT

Harold shields his eyes as the TV crew's "sun gun" LIGHTS UP.

PRODUCER

So what brought you two fellas
together? You have a lot in
common?

HAROLD

I've idolized Bob for years. And
so has he.

ABBOTT

I've often said, if Hamilton
didn't exist, I'd've had to
invent him.

PRODUCER

So you'd read Hamilton's work?

HAROLD

Of course, I'd read all of Bob's
books. The ones that were worth
reading...

ABBOTT

Which ones might those be,
Hamilton?

HAROLD

Oh, I think everyone agrees about
that.

ABBOTT

Everyone I introduced you to.

PRODUCER

That's great! And have you read
the Big Book?

HAROLD

The Great Unknown?

Harold and Abbott exchange a long look.

(CONTINUED)

95 CONTINUED: (3)

ABBOTT
No. He hasn't.

Then Harold grabs the check from Abbott and tears it up.

HAROLD
(to Lubavitcher)
He's not buying it.

Harold navigates his way out of the crowd as the "sun gun" goes off. The Lubavitcher throws up his hands. Abbott shrugs, continues on, followed by his entourage.

LAHORE
Well...Nothing like a feud to
sell books.

CUT TO:

96 INT. LATER. ABA CONVENTION

Abbott's hand follows the curlicues of his AUTOGRAPH across the inside page of an old Abbott first edition...

WIDER

FANS approach Abbott in a long queue...Miranda and Lahore look on as FAN #1, a woman, 50s, basks in his aura.

FAN #1
Oh, I'm so happy for you! You
don't know how eager we've been
for this new book!

ABBOTT
You and me both.

FAN #1
Well, you deserve it, after all
your hard work...All those lonely
hours...

ABBOTT
This makes it all worth it.

He hands her the book, turns to BOOKSTORE OWNER #1, who hands him a copy of another old first edition...

BOOKSTORE OWNER #1
Mr. Abbott, I know it sounds
corny, but you make me proud to
be in the book business.

(CONTINUED)

96 CONTINUED:

ABBOTT
Yeah? Well, thanks.

BOOKSTORE OWNER #1
Your books are so personal, so honest. How I'd put it is, your soul is on the table--with no anesthetic.
(proudly)
You see, I write a little myself.

Abbott scratches uncomfortably.

ABBOTT
I'm sorry, but there's all these people waiting...

The Bookstore Owner, peeved, takes the book, moves on. Abbott signs another. Then the next person in line steps forward...A handsome man with a white beard and close-cropped white hair, rugged in a fisherman's turtleneck...

IT'S ERNEST HEMINGWAY

Who looks on Abbott with CONTEMPT, shakes his head as he hands him a book to sign...When Abbott looks up from signing, Hemingway is gone...He looks back at the book in his hands--a first edition of THE LONG MARCH...He turns it over...

THE YOUNG ROBERT GRAND ABBOTT

Shining with the precious and incorruptible metal of his talent, as he looks up from the back jacket--

CUT TO:

97 INT. SAME TIME. ABA CONVENTION

Miranda turns a corner. Sees The Lubavitcher Booth, as they take down "MEET HAROLD BELDING". She approaches...Picks up the mockup of The Blue Guitar and looks at it wistfully...

LUBAVITCHER #1
You know Belding? You know his work? Darkness Illuminé?

MIRANDA
Yes, I've read it.

LUBAVITCHER #1
You say that like you're disappointed.

(CONTINUED)

97 CONTINUED:

MIRANDA
Not like you think.

CUT TO:

98 INT. LATER. HOTEL--ABBOTT SUITE

Every surface cascades with fruit and flowers. Champagne in a silver bucket. Lake Michigan sparkles below. Miranda enters.

MIRANDA
Bob?

No answer. As she moves inside, she notices

A GIFT BOX

With a big PINK RIBBON, resting on the closed lid of the grand piano. Curious, she goes to it. Finds an envelope--FOR MIRANDA-- as Abbott, in a kimono, emerges from the bathroom.

ABBOTT
It's a big night--you need something to wear.

She hesitates. He pulls open the ribbon...

CLOSE ON--MIRANDA

As she opens it...Then closes the box and starts to cry...

ABBOTT
What's the matter?

MIRANDA
I don't need this.

ABBOTT
It's for me. I like seeing you in these things.

MIRANDA
(gestures)
I mean all of this.

ABBOTT
C'mon. What's the matter? Sit down with me.

Abbott ushers her to the sofa. Sets about moving the fruit baskets and bottles of wine that rest there...

(CONTINUED)

98 CONTINUED:

ABBOTT

I know what you're saying. In fact I was planning to talk to you about it--I was just going to open the champagne first...

MIRANDA

I don't want these things.

ABBOTT

I know you don't care about these things. I don't either. C'mon, sit down. That's what I'm saying. I mean, what's the point of all this?

(wipes her tears)

You want a glass of water or something?

MIRANDA

I don't want these things without--

Abbott interrupts her.

ABBOTT

I know what you're feeling. That's how you make me feel--like I could be a real writer again. Like when I was just starting out. Write my short stories and not give a damn about how "big" they are, or how many I sell, or what awards I win, or what some asshole in the New York Times thinks of me. And what do I need that house for? I already talked to a realtor--get a little apartment in the city--

MIRANDA

And eat candlelit dinners when they shut off our power...With our mismatched china...

ABBOTT

I used to buy my jackets for two bucks down on Bleecker Street. I looked great.

MIRANDA

...And put weeds in a flea market vase...

(CONTINUED)

98 CONTINUED: (2)

ABBOTT
I just want to get off this
treadmill I've been on.

MIRANDA
...Hold hands with our gloves on
till the heat comes up...

ABBOTT
(gestures to box)
Go ahead--just hold it up. I
want to see it.

Miranda lifts the dress out of the box. It's exactly the
magnificent BEADED GOWN she played with in the Barney's window.
She models it half-heartedly...

MIRANDA
It's gorgeous.

ABBOTT
How about a toast? To our last
bottle of Dom!

CLOSE ON--MIRANDA

As Abbott goes to open the champagne--

CUT TO:

99 INT. NIGHT. BALLROOM

A black tie dinner for two thousand people. A large banner
over the dais reads, "DAVIS, DAY PUBLISHING HONORS ROBERT GRAND
ABBOTT." An ORCHESTRA plays...

ANGLE ON--ABBOTT

Miranda in the gown beside him, as he hobnobs in a WHIRL of
literati...A PUBLICIST approaches with a PHOTOGRAPHER.

PUBLICIST
Mr. Abbott, we just want to get
a couple of photographs and then
we'll bring you up to the dais.

ABBOTT
Where's Miranda going to--?

LAHORE
She's next to me at my table.
(offers his arm)
Madame?

(CONTINUED)

99 CONTINUED:

She takes his arm and they head off--

CUT TO:

100 INT. SAME TIME. KITCHEN

Harold enters in a TUXEDO. Other WAITERS in tuxedos run back and forth with trays...Harold grabs a tray. Heads inside--

CUT TO:

101 INT. SAME TIME. BALLROOM

Abbott GRINS for the camera. Then goes SOMBER as he sees something...The camera strobos...The PHOTOGRAPHER, puzzled, looks over his shoulder...

ABBOTT

What the hell's he doing here?

ANGLE ON--MIRANDA

As she laughs at a joke of Lahore's, then turns and she, too, and flashes with recognition...

ANGLE ON--HAROLD

Carrying his waiter's tray...Which he sets down at a table of BOOKSELLERS...He strides purposefully toward Miranda...

ANGLE ON--ABBOTT

As he moves to intervene...Then the Publicist returns with OPRAH WINFREY...

ABBOTT

Oprah! So nice to see you again!

OPRAH

I'm so happy for you, Bob.

ABBOTT

Thanks. That means a lot to me.

Then the Photographer swoops in... Abbott smiles uncomfortably, anchored to Oprah, one eye on Harold...

OPRAH

I have to go powder my nose.
Walk with me?

(CONTINUED)

101 CONTINUED:

Abbott hesitates. Then gallantly offers Oprah his arm. As they walk together, he shoots a last look over his shoulder at Harold...

ANGLE ON--HAROLD

As he approaches Miranda...They exchange a look.

LAHORE

Are you on the guest list?

HAROLD

A man can dance with his wife
without scandalizing Chicago,
can't he?

Miranda looks at Lahore. Looks at Harold.

MIRANDA

Just one dance.

They head for the floor together and begin to dance...

MIRANDA

Harold--

Harold puts his finger to his lips.

HAROLD

I want this one thing to be
exactly the way I imagined it.

He whirls her across the floor. Harold in his tuxedo and Miranda in her gown, the eyes of the room drawn to them... The orchestra winds up. Miranda and Harold finish their dance.

MIRANDA

Was it the way you imagined it?

HAROLD

(nods)

Thanks.

Then the CHAIRMAN of the ABA ascends to the podium, his IMAGE projected on giant TV SCREENS...

CHAIRMAN

Could everyone please take their
seats?

(refers to notes)

Robert Grand Abbott is a name
with a special resonance for
anyone who loves books...

(CONTINUED)

101 CONTINUED: (2)

Harold kisses Miranda's hand. Turns to leave...

MIRANDA

What I want to know is--if you
have such a good imagination--why
can't you imagine none of this
ever happened?

Harold turns to her. They exchange a look.

MIRANDA

The truth is, Bob does really
believe in you. He thinks you're
going to write a great book
someday. It's just not going to
happen overnight. I mean, look
at Bob and The Great Unknown--

HAROLD

You don't know, do you.

MIRANDA

Know what?

They look into each other's eyes. Then Harold, impulsively--

HAROLD

Come with me.

ANGLE ON--ABBOTT

Watching them. As the SPOTLIGHT hits him...

CHAIRMAN

Ladies and gentlemen, Robert
Grand Abbott!.

A clattering APPLAUSE as Abbott, smiles and moves to the
podium. He shoots a glance at Harold and Miranda...

ABBOTT POV

As Harold talks to Miranda on the dance floor, and Abbott
thinks, What is he saying to her?

BACK ON--ABBOTT

As he shakes hands with the Chairman, clears his throat and
begins.

(CONTINUED)

101 CONTINUED: (3)

ABBOTT

I held a press conference--this was nine years ago now--stripped down to my shorts, stepped on a scale, and announced I was getting in the ring with Hemingway. I actually said that.

An appreciative chuckle from the audience...

BACK ON--HAROLD

As he takes Miranda by the arm. Looks into her eyes.

HAROLD

I want you. The way it was before. I don't care about the rest of it.

Miranda looks up at Abbott.

MIRANDA

Harold, I--. This isn't really the right time.

HAROLD

This is the right time.

(beat)

This is the only time.

BACK ON--ABBOTT

His image broadcast on the giant TV screens. Happy BOOKSELLERS glow with admiration...But he's not talking to them now...

ABBOTT

People would ask me, "What's the Big Book about?" Well, if you ever watched a salmon panic his way upstream, it sure looks like someone's chasing him. Like maybe the same thing that old salmon is running to is the thing he's running from--the new generation. Your time is up. You've been replaced. Forgotten. That's really what it's about. I don't know why we're supposed to love our young.

(more)

(CONTINUED)

101 CONTINUED: (4)

ABBOTT (Cont'd)

They can take whatever you've built, take what's yours, what you've earned, take everything--without any right--not because they're better than you, or smarter than you, or work harder--just because they're young. It's the order of things. Fuck the order of things! I resent the order of things. But then you try to fight fire with fire, steal what they have, and what are you? A monster. Unlovable.

He looks at Miranda...

BACK ON--HAROLD AND MIRANDA

As she turns to sit and he stops her.

MIRANDA

I really should sit down.

HAROLD

I'd give up everything for you.

She looks into his eyes. Looks up again at Abbott.

ANGLE ON--ABBOTT

As he stops a beat. Watches as Miranda and Harold EXIT the hall hand in hand. The Chairman looks up at Abbott as he pauses, his lip trembling. Gestures to a WAITER, who refills Abbott's water glass. Then Abbott resumes.

ABBOTT

Many of you thought I'd never finish. Many of you fervently wished that I'd fall on my face. Well, here I am.

CUT TO:

102 EXT. NIGHT. CHICAGO

Harold and Miranda RUN hand in hand, in their gown and tuxedo in the frigid night, across traffic to the SUBWAY ENTRANCE--

CUT TO:

103 INT. SAME TIME. BALLROOM

Abbott continues his speech, flanked by the giant TV screens.

ABBOTT

... "It's coming--the Big Book!"
 "Next spring--the Big Book!"
 "How's the Big Book?" "Where's
 the Big Book?" Nine years of
 this. Every year the book got
 bigger. Every year the room got
 smaller. This wonderful life a
 writer has--solitary confinement
 with consecutive sentences.
 Waiting for the phone to ring,
 and then it's like that moment in
 the old movies when the governor
 calls with a reprieve--"Lunch at
 Daniel's-- one o'clock!" So I had
 trouble finishing--everyone knows
 that. But the real trouble I had
 was starting. In fact I had so
 much trouble starting I never
 did. There's this book The Great
 Unknown with my name on it. The
 truth is, the name "Hamilton
 Bell" belongs on the cover, and
 those are the only two words in
 the whole thing I can honestly
 take credit for, but he wrote the
 rest of it. There is no Big
 Book. There never was.

A moment of absolute SILENCE. Then TUMULT as BOOKSTORE OWNERS
 rush the podium... Abbott looks into the hatred in their eyes.
 Then catches a HAYMAKER in the nose--

CUT TO:

104 INT. NIGHT. SUBWAY ENTRANCE

As Harold and Miranda come downstairs into the subway, they
 discover the entrance is FLOODED... Harold gallantly lifts
 Miranda, wades through the water... Then precipitously LOWERS
 her...

MIRANDA

Don't you--

Then she screams as he DROPS her into the murky water... She
 scrambles up, PULLS him with a SPLASH down with her... SUBWAY
 PATRONS look on as Harold and Miranda LAUGH--

CUT TO:

105 INT. LATER. HOTEL

The RIOT continues. SECURITY GUARDS hustle Abbott through the underground tunnels and into a FREIGHT ELEVATOR. As the doors close, he finds himself alone in the elevator with Lahore. Abbott dabs at his bloody nose with a handkerchief--

LAHORE

Well.

ABBOTT

Well.

CUT TO:

106 EXT. THE NEXT DAY. ABBOTT HOUSE

A gaggle of PAPARAZZI and a tabloid-TV SATELLITE TRUCK parked alongside a Sagaponack police PATROL CAR. They jockey into position as Abbott's LIMOUSINE pulls up--

CUT TO:

107 INT. SAME TIME. ABBOTT HOUSE

Abbott enters. Drops his Gladstone bag. Hangs up his coat. Draws the curtains. The house feels lonely as he looks around. Then he heads upstairs.

HOLD ON--THE FOYER

As the sound of his footsteps recedes upstairs. Then the sound of a door closing. Then the sounds of a TYPEWRITER--

CUT TO:

108 INT. THE NEXT DAY. VERMONT--INN

Harold checks into a BED AND BREAKFAST, a New England autumn visible through the windows. The battered Volkswagen, with a U-HAUL TRAILER in tow behind, parked in the gravel lot outside. The INNKEEPER listens to NEWS on the RADIO...

INNKEEPER

You folks come up to look at the foliage?

HAROLD

We'll just be staying the night.
We're settling up north.

INNKEEPER

Whereabouts?

(CONTINUED)

108 CONTINUED:

HAROLD
No place you've heard of. Unless
you're a goose.

Miranda enters. Kisses him. Harold SIGNS the register--

Mr. and Mrs....

And then, decisively...

...Harold Belding

She reads it, smiles. He kisses her.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (O.C.)
...A stunning development took
the literary world by surprise
yesterday. It seems that--

Harold reaches over, SNAPS off the radio--

FADE OUT.