

CONDENSED SHORT FORM ANTHOLOGY

Here follows our compendium of short stories, film scripts, plays and a bibliography that should give you some sense of the possibilities of the short form. The Anthology continues to be a work in progress, and we would be grateful for any suggestions you have for future inclusion in this document.

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Short Films

I. Session Man	Seth Winston	3
II. Room 716: The Misbehavers	Robert Rodriguez	27
III. The Making Of Killer Kite	Screenplay by Bob Gray Story by Mike Wallace	55
IV. Prostitutes	Stacy Cochran	81
V. John	Screenplay by Jerome A. Nachman Story by J. B. Sugar	106
VI. The Homefront (or A Short Wait Between Trains)	Michael Zaidan	126
VII. Maria & Jose	Catherine Nilsen	144
VIII. El Santo	Screenplay by Ryan Viguerie Story by Ryan Viguerie & Fernando Lebrija	160
IX. What Really Happened During the Cuban Missile Crisis	Charlie McNamara	182
X. Inserts	Jacqueline D. Hoyt	209
XI. Dogtown	Screenplay by Howard Rabinowitz & Gerardo Naranjo Story by Gerardo Naranjo	227
XII. Bender	Howard Rabinowitz	238
XIII. Nebraska	Olga Zurawska	253

Story & Screenplay

I. The Bet	Story by Anton Chekhov Screenplay by Rob Waller	261 267
II. The Girl with a Pimple Face	Story by William C. Williams Screenplay by Daryl G. Nickens	280 290
III. Among the Paths to Eden	Story by Truman Capote Screenplay by Eleanor Perry & Truman Capote	302 312

Short Story & Plays

I. Three Hours Between Planes	F. S. Fitzgerald	338
II. The Killers	Ernest Hemingway	343
III. The Wedding, a play	Anton Chekhov	351
IV. Are These Actual Miles? Why Don't You Dance?	Raymond Carver	369 376

V. From Jesus' Son: Emergency	Denis Johnson	380
VI. Girls in Their Summer Dresses	Irwin Shaw	389
VII. Going to the Dogs	Richard Ford	396
VIII. Goodbye, Shirley Temple	Joseph Mitchell	402
On the Wagon		405
The Kind Old Blonde		410

SESSION MAN
original screenplay
by
Seth Winston

FADE IN:

INT. McQUEEN BEDROOM - NIGHT

In the faint light, curled up under the covers, a Man and a woman sleep in a queen-size bed. The PHONE RINGS SHRILLY next to a clock radio. It's 1:15 A.M. Digital time.

MCQUEEN sits up in bed, collects his thoughts before he answers the phone. Mid-thirties, long hair, small gold stud in his left ear, a face that has done its share of living. The PHONE RINGS A SECOND TIME. McQueen looks over at his WIFE, who sleeps on undisturbed. Alert now, McQueen picks up the phone.

MCQUEEN

Yeah.

LEE FISHER'S VOICE (O.S.)

(over the phone)

McQueen, Lee Fisher. Got a job for you.

(beat)

You want it?

MCQUEEN

Yeah, sure. When?

LEE FISHER'S VOICE (O.S.)

Now.

McQueen's Wife stirs softly next to him.

WIFE

(whispers)

Is it a job?

(McQueen nods)

Good. We could use the money.

MCQUEEN

(into phone)

Where am I going?

LEE FISHER'S VOICE (O.S.)

Cherokee.

MCQUEEN

Who you workin' with?

LEE FISHER'S VOICE (O.S.)

I'll tell you when you get here.

McQueen's eyebrow raises. That's a little unusual...

INT. SHOWER

McQueen stands under the water, forcing himself to wake up--

INT. MCQUEEN LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

McQueen enters, almost dressed. He coughs a couple of times to clear his lungs. His house is woodsy, rustic, a large fireplace. Not luxurious. But comfortable. He slugs down some coffee, finishes buttoning his shirt. Walks past the bedroom, sees his Wife sleeping in their bed. He picks up the tool of his trade... a black guitar case. Finds his sunglasses.

EXT. MCQUEEN HOUSE - NIGHT

McQueen puts the guitar case in the back seat of a 1987 Honda Accord. Gets in behind the wheel, puts his sunglasses down on the seat next to his case. Starts the engine and heads off down the street.

EXT. CHEROKEE RECORDING STUDIOS - NIGHT

McQueen pulls into a parking lot next to a red brick building with no windows. Several limousines and a large mobile home are parked in the lot. A Security Guard comes over to the car, checks McQueen's name on a list. Waves McQueen in...

INT. RECEPTION AREA - NIGHT

No windows, gold records on the walls. McQueen enters, carrying his guitar case. LOUIS, a sixtyish Black Security Guard, sits behind a desk.

LOUIS

Hey, McQueen, how ya doin'?

MCQUEEN

Not bad, Louie, how you been? So who you got back in there?

LOUIS

Got the Raging Kings in tonight.

The name "Raging Kings" registers on McQueen's face.

LOUIS

Those boys been on top of the mountain long time now.

Louie buzzes McQueen in through a side door.

INT. CHEROKEE RECORDING STUDIOS

McQueen steps into a hallway. A lavish buffet of food and drink is laid out. Carrying his bulky guitar case, McQueen threads his way through a hip crowd of beautiful young women, scruffy hangers-on, and well-dressed industry types.

They are talking, snacking on catered sushi, Nicoise salad, French pastries, brie, Perrier, beer, single malt Scotch, the very best. McQueen passes by DAVID ABRAMS, 25, a junior "suit", who is trying very hard to impress a good-looking YOUNG WOMAN...

YOUNG WOMAN

... So you work with the Kings?

DAVID

... I'm with Goffigon Management. You know if you want, we could go out and catch some breakfast later with Torrey and Chris...

The Young Woman's eyes light up. McQueen makes his way past a Photographer, reaches the end of the hall. LEONARD, the Kings' efficient bodyguard, stands by a thick door. When he sees McQueen, Leonard looks him up and down...

LEONARD

You McQueen?

McQueen nods. Leonard opens the door, admitting McQueen into the inner sanctum...

INT. MIXING ROOM

Absolutely state-of-the-art. The session's Producer, LEE FISHER, the Engineer, STUART, and Assistant Engineer, NEAL, sit behind the mixing board. Rock royalty are in the studio tonight, and the people working are the best in the business. Tonight the situation is very tense and volatile, and no one turns their head when McQueen enters. LOUD ANGRY VOICES from the studio come over the speakers. McQueen looks through the glass wall separating the Mixing Room and the Studio. What McQueen sees surprises even him, a longtime veteran of the rock wars. The four members of the legendary rock group Raging Kings are attempting to record their next album. But years of turmoil and in-fighting have taken their toll, and the Kings are starting to burst apart at the seams. DEAN STORM, the flamboyant guitarist of the Kings plays a few angry notes on his guitar. TORREY COLE, vocalist and frontman of the Kings, is not happy.

TORREY

We've got three bands out there doing what we did last year, and you wanna play it again?

DEAN

They're just cheap imitations of me anyway. This is what I do.

CHRIS MANNING, the lanky bass player, lights up a cigarette.

CHRIS

You've gotten lazy, man. What happened to trying something new?

DEAN

What happened to you shutting the fuck up?

Chris has had enough. He yanks his pickup out of his amp, goes over and stands next to the drum kit. SPIDER MOORE sits uneasily on his stool, pointedly avoiding taking sides. From a working class background, Spider is the member of the group who most personifies the rock and roll spirit.

INT. MIXING ROOM

Standing behind the mixing board, McQueen overhears Lee Fisher talking to PETER GOFFIGON, the trim, balding, savvy Manager of the Kings. Goffigon wears a coat and tie.

GOFFIGON

It's never been this bad before. We've spent \$600,000 dollars, and what have we got?

FISHER

Two great tracks.

GOFFIGON

Yeah. In six weeks.

Neal gets up from the board and comes over to McQueen.

NEAL

Hey, McQueen. How you doin'?

MCQUEEN

Doin' all right.
(glances into studio)
What's the problem?

NEAL

They fuckin' hate each other.
That's what the problem is.

Neal sits back down behind the board. A feisty, slightly overweight Woman catches McQueen's eye from across the room. He nods back. Like McQueen, DARCY VANCE has been around a long time. She is a singer and a damn good one. But her niche in life is as a Backing Vocalist. Suddenly BONE-JANGLING ELECTRIC GUITAR -- Darcy looks away from McQueen, watches the Musicians on the other side of the glass...

INT. RECORDING STUDIO

Dean is purposely playing ear-splitting out-of-tune noise on his guitar. Just to irritate the other members of the band. As Dean loudly screeches away, Torrey is fuming. He goes over to Dean, threateningly --

TORREY

Why can't you do me a personal
fucking favor and play it the way
we want?!

DEAN

'Cause it sucks.
(approaches the drum kit)
That right, Spider? Is that what
you wanna do, man? You wanna play
it the way --
(glances sharply at
Torrey)
"we" want to play it?

SPIDER

We could try it. It'd be better
than just fuckin' sittin' here.

Dean realizes it's three against one. Turns to the mixing room, calls over to Lee Fisher...

DEAN

Sure. Play it back.
(sarcastic)
Sorry I've been fucking this up for
everybody.

Torrey shoots Dean an "It's about time" look.

INT. MIXING ROOM

Neal, the Assistant Engineer, punches up the PLAYBACK. McQueen listens carefully to the tracks which have already been recorded. Drums, bass, vocals, backing vocals, rhythm guitar, all the tracks but the solo voice of the lead guitar. McQueen watches Dean Storm prepare to play. Darcy Vance comes over to McQueen. They're old friends...

MCQUEEN

Hey, Darcy. You working?

DARCY

Backin' up Torrey Cole. With me behind him, I never heard him sounding so good...

(looking at his guitar case)

What are you doing here?

Before McQueen can answer, the SOUND OF DEAN STORM beginning to play the guitar solo. McQueen turns to watch.

ANGLE - DEAN STORM

Playing by himself, with the other members of the band standing and watching. Dean is sounding pretty good, but suddenly he looks up from his guitar, and abruptly changes into a totally different song -- Chuck Berry's "Johnny Be Good" -- and then into an angry Hendrix staccato burst of notes before stopping altogether.

INT. MIXING ROOM

Lee Fisher pounds the board in frustration. Stuart snaps off the playback. McQueen and everyone else in the mixing Room are walking around on eggshells. Dean turns to Torrey --

DEAN

I told you it sucks.

TORREY

Fuck you, man.

DEAN

Fuck you!

FISHER

All right, that's enough! Let's take a break.

McQueen's not sure if he should stay or step out of the room, but Lee Fisher indicates to McQueen that he should stay.

Everyone near the board holds their breath as a furious Dean slams his way into the room. Dean goes over to Stuart the Engineer, says loudly --

DEAN
How does it sound to you, Stuart?

STUART
(not intimidated)
Hey, Dean, come on, let's just take a break...

Dean looks over at McQueen, standing there holding his guitar case, Darcy still standing beside him.

DEAN
What the hell's he doing here?

As Dean starts over to McQueen, Darcy discreetly melts away. Lee Fisher senses trouble, gets right over there --

DEAN
I said what's he doing here?

TORREY'S VOICE (O.S.)
I told Lee to call him.

Dean turns to see Torrey standing behind him.

TORREY
We've wasted enough time on this.
You wanna finish the track, fine.
But I want somebody here backing you up in case you don't.

Torrey has flung down the gauntlet now. McQueen watches Dean carefully, ready for an explosion.

DEAN
He doesn't play in this band. I play the guitar in this band.

TORREY
Didn't sound that way to me. Play that last take back, Neal.

A furious Dean kicks over a speaker. Some people in the room gasp --

DEAN
I'm not dealing with this shit anymore! I've had it! Maybe it's time for me to go solo.

TORREY

Maybe it is. I said play it back,
Neal.

DEAN

You know somethin', Torrey, you've
lost it. This band is over. You
hear me? Over! I quit!

Dean stomps off towards the exit. Peter Goffigon goes after
him, tries to intercede --

GOFFIGON

Dean, don't do this, we can work it
out --

But Dean slams his way out the door. McQueen watches as
Dean's Girlfriend, another crony, and his Roadie follow him
out. The Kings and the members of their inner circle stare at
the closed door. Too stunned to speak...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MIXING ROOM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

People have divided up in little groups. Speaking in hushed
tones. Everyone is in shock. McQueen and Darcy sit off in a
corner by themselves.

MCQUEEN

We saw a piece of history go down
tonight. The Kings... they were one
of the all-time greats. They had a
sound. And lots and lots of people
listening to it...

DARCY

Don't forget the money. I wouldn't
mind having some of theirs...

MCQUEEN

They got lucky.

DARCY

Remember when we used to gig
together?

MCQUEEN

(laughs))
The band with no name?

DARCY

We had a name. Different one every night, but we had a name.

They smile at each other.

MCQUEEN

We've both been in lots of bands. We're making a helluva lot more money now than we ever did knockin' ourselves out in some never-went-anywhere band.

DARCY

Don't shit me, McQueen. Reg told me you're trying to put together another band. You still want to put yourself out there, don't you?

(shakes her head)

You and me, we're players. We come in, we do our jobs, we make our money and we go home. But we're good at it. That's a lot, McQueen...

McQueen shrugs. Maybe. Peter Goffigon is talking to Lee Fisher...

GOFFIGON

... It's really over. After all the goddamn wearing and tearing each other down. It's over. I shouldn't be surprised. But I am.

FISHER

(long pause)

So what's going to happen now?

GOFFIGON

Band still owes the label a record. That's what is real. That's what I have to deal with. Someone's got to keep it going, try to get it done.

FISHER

I don't know, Peter. I'm not sure if I want to be around for this.

GOTTIGON

I know.

Goffigon goes over to talk to Torrey and Chris.

GOFFIGON

Dean leaving is news. Big news.
Goddamn media's gonna be beating
down our door wanting to know why
Dean left.

TORREY

(tossing his empty Coke
can into a wastebasket)
Yeah, I know.

GOFFIGON

This has got to be handled right. I
don't want it leaking out. We
better release a statement to the
press...

CHRIS

What kind of "statement"?

GOFFIGON

Something short and simple. Dean
has left the band over "creative
differences". An amicable parting.
The usual bullshit. I'll take care
of it this morning.

Torrey and Chris nod. The reality is starting to sink in now.

CHRIS

We come from out of nowhere and we
scratch and claw our way up from
nothing. For what?

(glances around the
studio)

Just to get here... I didn't think
it'd last forever, but I always
thought I'd see the end coming. But
I didn't. Not tonight.

TORREY

Should have happened a long time
ago. I play music cause it's fun.
'Cause it's all I know how to do.
Not because of some contractual
obligation...

Torrey looks across the room. Sees McQueen in the corner.
McQueen watches, as Torrey Cole, one of the biggest stars in
the business, gets up and heads over to talk to him.

TORREY

Hey, McQueen, good to see you, man.

MCQUEEN

You, too. So things get a little dull around here and you give me a call.

Torrey laughs. He likes McQueen.

FISHER

Let's call it a night. Send everybody home.

GOFFIGON

I think that's a good idea.

CHRIS

Why? 'Cause Dean left? We're all still here. Let's get this track done and move on.

TORREY

Fuckin' A. Let's finish this tune.
(to McQueen)
Make us some music, man.

MCQUEEN

What kind of feel you going for?

TORREY

No more of this corporate shit. Somethin' raw, but don't lose the hook.

MCQUEEN

Okay. Let's rock.

FISHER

I'm getting something to eat. Be right back.

Fisher heads out of the room to the buffet. Neal comes over --

NEAL

Come on, McQueen, let's do this quick before they change their mind...

McQueen heads into the studio with his guitar.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO

KEITH, long ponytail, the band's long-time equipment manager, comes over to McQueen.

KEITH

Hi. I'm Keith. What you need?

MCQUEEN

You got a couple of SPX-90's? And I'll need a multiple rack mount.

Keith nods. The studio is empty now, except for McQueen and Keith. McQueen puts down his guitar case, snaps it open. Takes out his Les Paul, wipes it off gently with a cloth. Darcy discreetly gives McQueen the "thumbs up" gesture of encouragement. McQueen smiles faintly, already into his mental preparation for what he's about to do --

Keith wheels over the twin amps. McQueen looks through the glass at the board. Peter Goffigon and the band members don't seem real interested...

MCQUEEN

(to Keith)

Can you patch me in? So... You been with the Kings a long time?

Keith takes McQueen's guitar, plugs it in...

KEITH

(as he works)

Since the beginning. What happened tonight... it's been coming for a long time. It's a relief it finally happened.

MCQUEEN

Can I hear myself?

Keith nods, hands the Les Paul back to McQueen. McQueen strums a chord. It reverberates loudly in the room. McQueen makes an adjustment, starts tuning. From behind the board, NEAL'S VOICE ON THE TALKBACK --

NEAL (O.S.)

Okay, McQueen, here's the playback.

McQueen slips on some headphones, listens as the SONG BEGINS to play in his head. Nice driving melody, rumbling bass, kickass drums, Torrey doing the vocals. McQueen begins to warm up. The song builds up to it's peak... but to a gaping hole in the sound where the guitar solo belongs. Right now it's just the backing tracks of drums, bass, and a female vocal. Darcy grooves to her voice singing on the track. She smiles at McQueen from behind the glass. The MUSIC STOPS. Neal rewinds the tape. Stops it. Punches it up again. The SONG BEGINS AGAIN.

McQueen noodles around on the guitar, trying to find the notes, just trying to loosen up. He sees Lee Fisher coming back into the Mixing Room. McQueen uses his years of experience to stay composed, cool, ready. Ready to rock. Keith brings over a chair for McQueen to sit on. McQueen shakes his head no, he'll stand. McQueen looks through the glass into the Mixing Room.

INT. AT THE MIXING BOARD

Stuart and Neal finish adjusting the levels on the board. Lee Fisher sits down next to them, eating some sushi, but ready to do a take. Fisher flips on the talkback --

FISHER

We're ready, McQueen. You?

In the studio, McQueen nods. Torrey sits down next to Fisher behind the board. Neal presses the playback button. Red Digital Numbers fly by, the INTRO OF THE SONG BEGINS. As the song builds, Darcy takes a deep breath, looks into the studio, eager to see McQueen do well.

ANGLE - MCQUEEN

Listening on the headphones, readjusting his guitar strap to sling the Les Paul just right. In the Mixing Room he can see everyone staring at him through the glass.

McQueen gets more and more caught up in the music, his emotions rising. The song builds towards the guitar break. To the hole in the sound. McQueen closes his eyes, shuts everything off except the music. And there it is -- the moment -- his moment --

A RUSH OF ADRENALINE as McQueen begins his guitar solo. His hands fly over the frets, his whole body swaying to the music. At first, his solo builds simply and sweetly on the rhythm. But then McQueen begins to double the tempo, ripping off some explosive runs on the guitar. McQueen is pouring every fibre of his being into the solo, giving it all he's got, building it to a fiery roar, and then cutting it off sharply as the solo ends.

As the playback continues, McQueen opens his eyes, looks around to see the reaction. The people sitting behind the board betray no emotion. The reaction to his playing is no reaction. Everyone just sits there, like it never even happened...

INT. MIXING ROOM

Darcy shifts her weight uneasily. Stuart turns to Torrey and Lee Fisher.

STUART
Sounded good to me.

Fisher doesn't say anything. Spider and Chris exchange glances, look over at Torrey. Everyone's looking at Torrey.

TORREY
Play it back.

Neal punches up the playback. The red digital numbers fly by. The SONG BEGINS AGAIN...

INT. RECORDING STUDIO

It's happened so fast, McQueen is still out on the floor all by himself. Feeling embarrassingly naked as the song starts again.

INT. MIXING ROOM

As the guitar break begins, Torrey starts smiling and whooping along with McQueen's powerful guitar. Chris and Spider and Lee Fisher all hear it now. The guitar break is HOT. When the solo ends, Torrey stops the tape himself, turns to Chris.

ANGLE - MCQUEEN

McQueen realizes he did well. Just as the feeling starts to sink in, Torrey and Chris come out of the booth --

CHRIS
I dug it, man... that guitar of yours...
(smiling at McQueen)
It's alive...

TORREY
You nailed it. Those edges you got are unreal.

McQueen looks over at a pleased Darcy. She blows him a kiss. Spider slips in behind his drums, starts bashing around.

SPIDER
Play it back. I got something I wanna try.

INT. MIXING ROOM

Stuart makes some fast adjustments an the board, STARTS THE PLAYBACK AGAIN. But this time Spider lays down a cool Lou Reed backbeat, which adds a whole new seductive dimension to the song. Chris picks up his bass guitar, rumbles in on the bottom. McQueen joins in on guitar. Torrey goes to the microphone, starts to move in time to Spider's beat. McQueen is kicking ass on the guitar, and when Torrey comes in on top with the lead vocals McQueen can't help but smile. He's playing guitar with The Raging Kings.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. RECORDING STUDIO

The clock on wall. 5:30 in the morning. Rock and roll time. McQueen wailing on the guitar. He and the three members of the Kings are cooking. Everyone in the studio is in an up mood, excited to be actually making music again. The four players finish up another take. They are tired, sweaty, but happy. They put down their instruments to take a break. Spider comes over, pats McQueen on the back.

SPIDER

I dug your work on Rod's last record.

(beat)

Didn't we jam together one time... at the Record Plant?

MCQUEEN

The Record Plant? Yeah... well... maybe. Shit, I can't remember anymore.

Spider laughs. He goes over and joins Torrey and Chris, who are sitting down on some folding chairs in the corner. They talk amongst themselves a moment, look serious.

McQueen doesn't want to intrude, sets down his guitar, goes over and takes a sip of water. The three members of the Kings come over to him...

CHRIS

We think you're great, man. The energy really feels right.

TORREY

Look, McQueen, uh... we didn't anticipate someone just comin' in like this.

(beat)

(MORE)

TORREY(cont'd)

I don't know if this is something
you're even interested in, but...
Are you available right now?

MCQUEEN

Yeah. Why?

TORREY

We want you working with us... full-
time...

MCQUEEN

Great. I'd like to do the record
with you.

The Kings look at each other, a little puzzled...

CHRIS

Not just on this record, man. We
want you to join the band.

McQueen smiles wryly. He's heard this kind of thing before.

MCQUEEN

I appreciate it, man, but I only
entertain serious offers.

TORREY

Hey, we are serious, McQueen.

MCQUEEN

Is that right?
(pause)
What about going out on the road?

CHRIS

Yeah, sure. You don't like the
road?

McQueen sees how earnest the members of the band are. They
really want him...

MCQUEEN

I love the fuckin' road.

The band laughs.

TORREY

Alright!! Come on, let's have a
drink.

Peter Goffigon, the manager of the Kings, sees and hears what
has happened. Goffigon's face betrays no emotion. But next to
him, Darcy is beaming...

INT. BY THE BUFFET

The Kings and their crew help themselves to some food and drink. McQueen is being cool and laid-back, like nothing has happened. He nods and smiles, then casually makes his way down the hallway. He turns around, looks over his shoulder, sees no one is watching him. He goes into the john --

INT. BATHROOM

The bathroom is empty. McQueen enters. Goes into the stall, closes the door. As McQueen stands in front of the toilet, gets ready to take a piss, the STALL DOOR BURSTS OPEN --

It's Darcy, who is as excited as hell and gives McQueen a giant happy bear hug --

DARCY

I don't believe it. You're in the Raging fucking Kings!

MCQUEEN

Sssh. Come on... somebody'll hear you.

(a big smile)

But thanks. Now come on, get outta here. I've got to take a wicked piss.

Darcy smiles and leaves. McQueen shakes his head, smiling to himself. He zips up his pants, leaves the stall, looks into the bathroom mirror. Alone for the first time, McQueen looks at himself in the mirror. He clenches his fist and experiences a moment of total personal exultation.

MCQUEEN

Yes!

INT. RECORDING STUDIO - LATER

The four members of the Raging Rings are playing again. McQueen is wailing away on his guitar. The PLAYBACK STOPS. They're all primed and ready to do another take.

TORREY

... I'm hot. Como on, let's do it...

The PLAYBACK STARTS. Torrey belts out a vocal, his best take yet, he's totally into it, until he forgets the lyrics. Chris laughs. The PLAYBACK STOPS. As Torrey laughs at himself now, McQueen is feeling good, and starts playing the ringing guitar intro to "Satisfaction".

Spider smiles, comes in on the drums. Chris lays down the bottom and Torrey, a beer in his hand, starts to sing --

TORREY

When I'm watchin' my TV
 And a man comes on and tells me
 How white my shirts should be
 But he can't be a man 'cause he
 doesn't smoke
 The same cigarettes as me
 I can't get no... satisfaction...

INT. MIXING ROOM

Everyone's having a great time. The time is 7:15 A.M. Suddenly the door to the Mixing Room opens.

ANGLE - DEAN STORM

Dean is back. Stuart and Goffigon and Lee Fisher are startled to see him. Dean peers into the studio.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO

As yet, none of the Kings are aware that Dean Storm is in the room. But one-by-one the musicians see Dean, and the sounds of "Satisfaction" fizzle to a halt. McQueen is the last to notice Dean's arrival. He stops playing. His eyes dart back and forth as Dean comes into the recording studio, doesn't acknowledge McQueen's presence. The tension in the room is about to explode.

DEAN

I got somethin' I want to say to
 you. Alone.

Torrey, Chris, and Spider exchange glances...

CHRIS

I've had enough, man...

DEAN

(pointing to an anteroom)
 In there. It'll just take a minute.

McQueen watches the four of them go into the anteroom, close the door. McQueen stands there a moment. Everyone paces restlessly, the smokers light up...

INT. ANTEROOM

Dean has a six-pack under his arm. Four cans left. He pulls one out, tosses it to Chris. One to Spider. And one to Torrey. No one says anything. They pop open the beers.

CHRIS

What do you want to say, man?

DEAN

I just didn't like the way it went down tonight. It hasn't been working for a long time, which is the way it is. Which is cool. It's over. But we were good together for too long to have it end up with us hating each other.

Dean downs some of his beer.

SPIDER

I don't hate you, man. As long as I know I don't have to play music with you anymore.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO

A restless McQueen casually starts to noodle around on his guitar. Working on the song he was playing before "Satisfaction". He sneaks a glance back over at the anteroom door...

INT. ANTEROOM

Torrey sits in a corner, away from the others. They are talking about nothing in particular. The old days...

SPIDER

... Cobo Hall, Detroit. The '85 tour.

DEAN

Yeah. That was a good night. When we were good... man, we were as good as anybody. Anybody.

Chris looks over at Torrey. Torrey still doesn't say anything. Chris tries to draw him into conversation...

CHRIS

Hey, Torrey. Remember when we used to practice at your Koala?

Torrey can't help himself, a smile comes to his lips...

TORREY

My poor mother, man. Do you remember some of the shit we pulled in that house?

DEAN

She must've walked in on me screwing some chick about a dozen times. Remember how pissed off she used to get?

CHRIS

Your mother used to scare me to death, man.

Spider slugs down a sip of his beer, says quietly...

SPIDER

She gave us a hard time. But she was the one who lent us the five hundred bucks to buy new equipment. Back then no one else would lend it to us.

No one says anything. They just sit there quietly...

INT. RECORDING STUDIO - LATER

The studio clock says 7:56. A.M. Everyone in the studio is bleary-eyed and spacey. But no one leaves. Darcy casts a glance ever at the closed anteroom door. McQueen is sitting on a chair, still noodling around on his guitar. THE SOUND OF THE ANTEROOM DOOR OPENING. McQueen turns his head to see --

Torrey, Chris, Spider and Dean come out of the anteroom together. They are quiet, strangely subdued. Torrey comes over to McQueen, takes him aside...

TORREY

Hey, man, you were great tonight. Thanks again. We'll send you a tape when we finish the track. And let's stay in touch.

McQueen glares into Torrey's eyes. An embarrassed Torrey looks down at the floor.

TORREY

I don't know what happened to Dean tonight... I guess he just went off... and uh... it got a little out of control.

(beat)

Look, man, Dean's back...

(relieved it's been said)

And that's what there is to say... Sorry.

The impact of Torrey's words doesn't seem to register on McQueen's face. No surprise. No disappointment. A few feet away, Darcy lowers her head, achingly disappointed for McQueen.

MCQUEEN

(to Torrey, tersely)

It's cool, man. I understand.

(beat)

It was fun.

TORREY

Yeah. It's time to go home.

Torrey turns away, heads over to talk to Peter Goffigon. McQueen grabs his guitar case, carefully packs away his Les Paul. Peter Goffigon and Torrey are still engaged in whispered important conversation. McQueen closes his guitar case, heads for the Mixing Room. Peter Goffigon watches him go. The two men make eye contact. Goffigon signals his thanks to McQueen. McQueen nods back...

INT. MIXING ROOM

As McQueen enters the room, no one notices him. The members of the Kings' inner circle are too busy happily chattering and celebrating the return of Dean Storm and normalcy... Only McQueen and Darcy have been affected.

FISHER

(to no one in particular)

Jesus, what a night.

Guitar case in hand, McQueen is heading for the door. Darcy catches up to McQueen before he leaves.

DARCY

(quietly)

Hey, you all right, McQueen?

MCQUEEN

Yeah. Look, it's late. I gotta go...

Darcy looks at McQueen a long moment...

DARCY

Not anybody could have walked in here tonight and did what you did, you know?

MCQUEEN

I'll talk to you...

Darcy nods, lets him go. On his way out McQueen passes by the leftover remains of the buffet. David, the Young Woman, the Photographer look at McQueen in awe. They part like the Red Sea to let him through.

EXT. CHEROKEE RECORDING STUDIOS - MORNING

McQueen steps out into the bright Los Angeles sunshine.

INT. MCQUEEN'S CAR

McQueen stuffs the guitar case in the backseat. Gets in behind the wheel. He looks around. The parking lot is deserted. McQueen sits there a moment...

MCQUEEN

Shit!

McQueen pounds the steering wheel. Then hangs his head in pain, realizing just how much it meant to him. But he recovers quickly, reaches over to the passenger seat, picks up his sunglasses, puts them on. He starts up the car... heads out of the parking lot...

EXT. SUNSET BLVD. - DAY

Morning rush hour traffic. A suddenly very tired McQueen sits in his car, stuck with all the commuters on their way to work. Finally breaks free and drives up into the hills.

INT. MCQUEEN'S HOUSE

McQueen enters, tosses down his keys. He wearily puts the guitar case down on a nearby chair. Heads for the bedroom, unbuttoning his shirt.

INT. MCQUEEN'S BEDROOM

His Wife is still asleep. McQueen quickly undresses, slides back into bed. She wakens momentarily...

WIFE

How'd it go?

MCQUEEN

Okay... Just another session.

That's all he says. McQueen's Wife smiles, gives him a little tender kiss,, then goes back to sleep. McQueen closes his eyes, starts to drift off to sleep. CAMERA MOVES IN TIGHT on McQueen's face, as softly at first, then louder and louder, we HEAR the backing track from the session build toward that hole in the sound.

And then the strains of McQueen's guitar come ringing in, ringing in loud and true. McQueen smiles to himself and we FADE TO BLACK as the guitar solo builds...

THE END

THE MISBEHAVERS

by

Robert Rodriguez

FADE UP:

INT. THE FRONT DESK SUPER - NIGHT (10:30 P.M.)

Ted is relaxing at the front desk. He breathes slowly. He finally has one moment's peace after an already long night. He even has a chance to straighten his tie.

The phone RINGS.

TED
Front desk?

INT. ROOM 716

CLOSE-UP of a cigarette hanging out of a Man's mouth as he speaks into the telephone.

MAN
Bottle of Moët at Chandon. Fast.

Man hangs up the phone and stubs out his cigarette into an already overstuffed ashtray by the bed. Man turns around to face the camera. He is a dark and handsome Latin male in his mid-30s. Dangerous. Impatient.

He walks toward the camera as he continues straightening his tie.

He stops at the door of the bathroom and watches his Wife and two kids get ready for the party. Wife seems to be a beautiful woman in her mid-30s. The children are Sarah, nine, and Juancho, six.

Man strikes up another cigarette and finishes his tie.

He watches his Wife comb Juancho's hair down and to the side like an idiot.

Not being able to stand it any more, Man tears Juancho away from his Wife and snatches the comb.

MAN
Give me that...

Man begins to slick Juancho's hair back.

MAN
There... see? You look cool with
your hair up like this.
Like me...

Juancho is smiling now. He's happy he's going to look like his dad.

MAN

Not down and to the side, all
stupid like your mom likes to comb
it.

Juancho looks over at Sarah, who is going through the tortuous ritual of having her mother brush the tangles out of her long, unmanageable hair.

Wife seems to be taking out her aggressions on the tangled mess.

Man is starting to have problems of his own with Juancho's hair. Juancho's hair is thinner than Mans, so it won't stay up.

Man puts down his cigarette in order to get a better handle on it. We see the frustration growing in his face.

Juancho picks up the cigarette and pretends he's smoking too, just like his dad.

Man tears the cigarette away from Juancho and smokes it down to the filter. He looks at his own cool hair, and then down at Juancho's, which won't stay up.

Man flicks the cigarette butt into the toilet in frustration.

MAN

You've got your mother's hair.

In anger, Man starts messing up Juancho's hair.

MAN

I can't do anything with it.

Furious, Man simply swipes Juancho's hair back down and to the side, the way Wife had it before. Juancho looks like an idiot again.

MAN

There. Go.

Juancho slouches past everyone as he exits the bathroom.

Sarah watches him leave as her own hair is finished.

WIFE
(putting a plastic clip in
Sarah's hair)
There. Go.

Sarah exits.

Wife then finishes her own gorgeous hair. Man lights up a new
cigarette.

WIFE
(mocking)
So, are we gonna have fun tonight?

Man blows smoke in Wife's face as he walks out of the
bathroom.

WIFE
I didn't think so.

Sarah has joined Juancho in watching television.

Man watches the children watch TV. We can see the wheels
turning in Man's head.

He turns back to the bathroom.

He watches Wife now. Wheels turning. Practically burning
rubber.

MAN
Hey.

Wife puts the lipstick down and turns to her husband. She is
beautiful.

MAN
(shrugs)
Let's just leave the kids here.

Wife glances out at the children, eyes glued to the tube.

WIFE
Here in the room? By themselves?

MAN
No... with the television.

Wife thinks about it for a second. She shrugs a "sure."

MAN
You want to have fun tonight, don't
you?

WIFE

Yes.

MAN

They'll be fine.

He kisses Wife's face and exits the bathroom. She covers the wet spot with more cake makeup.

MAN

Hey.

The children turn to face him.

MAN

You guys are going to stay here and watch TV.

The children look at each other.

MAN

I want you to be in bed asleep before twelve. Your mother and I will be back later on.

Wife goes straight for the door.

MAN

Okay?

He blows one kiss. One for both of them.

As Man and his Wife walk out the door, Man turns back to the children...

MAN

Don't misbehave.

He closes the door.

Sarah stands in the middle of the room. She's looking at the door Man and Wife just disappeared through. Stunned.

Her dress looks frilly and beautifully uncomfortable. She touches the edges of the fabric.

SARAH

Why did we have to get all dressed up if we weren't going with them?

INT. HALLWAY

Man and Wife are walking down the hall.

Man stops in his tracks. Wife stops too, and looks at Man.
They wait.

INT. ROOM 716

Juancho shuts off the television. He drops the remote to the floor. His attention is on the fireworks outside. He leaps to the window, and begins unlatching it.

SARAH
What are you doing?

JUANCHO
Escaping. Stinks in here, anyway.

Man bursts through the door of the hotel room and stands in the doorway, glaring at the mischievous Juancho.

Juancho bangs his head on the window trying to get back inside. He leaps to the floor and tries to turn on the TV with the remote.

MAN
(stern)
What did I say?

Juancho turns to Man as if he'd been sitting there watching television the whole time.

MAN
Behave.

JUANCHO
Yes, Papa.

Ted appears at the door with Man's champagne.

TED
The champagne you ordered, sir.

MAN
No time for this. Leave it on ice.

Ted proceeds to place the champagne in the room.

WIFE
But I want some now...

Ted is torn. Man pushes him into the room.

MAN
There'll be plenty for you at the party, baby, you can bomb yourself all you want at the party.

WIFE
What a waste.

Ted places the bucket near the bed. After setting up the bottle, he turns to leave, but now Man closes the door, trapping Ted inside with them.

MAN
(to Ted)
Hey.

Ted looks around, bewildered. Now what?

Man is reaching into his coat pocket.

MAN
You want five hundred bucks?

TED
Sure!

Man hesitates a moment, then pulls out his wallet. That was too easy.

MAN
How about three?

TED
Three hundred?

MAN
Yeah.

TED
Three's good.

MAN
My children are staying here tonight watching TV. I want you to check up on them every thirty minutes.

TED
Check up on 'em?

MAN

Make sure they're all right, make sure they're fed, make sure they go to bed.

TED

We can call out and hire a baby-sitter.

MAN

I don't trust baby-sitters. My children are safer alone than with some fucked-up pedophile baby-sitter I don't know from the man in the fucking moon.

WIFE

What about him? What makes you think you can trust him?

Man grabs Ted's face and tilts it toward Wife.

MAN

Tell me that's not a face you can trust.

Man lets go of Ted's face. He feels his jaw. It's still there.

TED

Look, sir, I'd like to help you out, but I really can't. I'm all alone here tonight.

Man whips out his wallet and counts out money in Ted's face.

MAN

One hundred... two hundred... three hundred...

TED

I thought you said five hundred.

Man glares at Ted.

MAN

I said three hundred.

Ted doesn't back down.

TED

No, you distinctly said five hundred.

The angrier Man gets, the quieter he talks.

MAN
You calling me a liar?

Ted, while not backing down, massages the situation.

TED
No, I'm not saying you're lying.
I'm saying you accidentally forgot
that what you first said was five
hundred.

Man has never been challenged like this by a fuckin' bellboy.

MAN
I don't do anything accidentally,
jerk. I might've first said five
hundred, but what I last said was
three hundred, and what you say
last is what counts.

Ted not only doesn't back down, but psychologically pokes his
finger in the scary Man's chest.

TED
Well then, if you say five hundred
one last time, we got a deal.

Man's eyes narrow. He physically pokes his finger in Ted's
chest.

MAN
You fuckin' with me, Pendejo?

Now Ted takes a step backwards.

TED
No, not at all. It's New Year's Eve
and I'm here alone. If there was
somebody else here, no problem, but
I'm by myself. And looking after
your kids is a pain in the ass I
don't need --

MAN
You callin' my kids a pain in the
ass?

TED
No, they're not a pain in the ass,
it's the situation that's a pain in
the ass.

Man drops the tenseness.

MAN
No, you were right the first time.
You win, tough guy, five hundred.

Man respects Ted for not backing down, but not insulting him either. A skill Man never learned. Wife shoots a look at the children.

WIFE
(disgusted)
You kids are getting expensive.

Juancho turns back to the TV.

Sarah stares down Wife.

MAN
(looking at name tag)
What's your name? Ted?

CLOSE-UP of name tag.

TED
Yeah. It's Ted.

Man tears off Ted's name tag and throws it to the children.

MAN
(to the children)
His name is Ted. If you need
anything, dial 0 and ask for Ted.

Sarah catches the name tag and reads the name on it: "TED - BELLHOP."

Sarah looks up at Ted. She clips the pin to her dress and smiles shyly at him.

Man puts the money in Ted's pocket and then grabs his ear, pulling him close.

MAN
(deadly whisper)
If something happens to my
children, I wouldn't want to be
you.

WIFE
Make sure they're in bed before
midnight.

TED
(thinking)
Before midnight? Then should I wake
them up for the countdown to the
New Year?

Wife looks disgusted.

WIFE
No...

As Man and Wife exit, he turns to the kids and says:

MAN
Don't misbehave.

Man closes the door.

INT. HALLWAY

Man and Wife book it down the hall before Ted can change his
mind.

INT. ROOM 716

Ted is standing facing the door the Man and Wife just
disappeared through. He turns around slowly to face the
children.

His eyes are wide. His face is quiet. Stern.

The children are staring at him.

TED
Okay. These are the rules. Don't
break the rules and I won't break
your necks.

The kids look at each other.

TED
(smiling)
I always wanted to say that.
Someone said that to me when I was
a kid.

Sarah laughs at his joke.

TED
Except they weren't joking. I am.

Ted goes to the door.

TED

The rules are simple. Don't do anything you wouldn't do if your parents were here. If there's an emergency, call me on the phone, like your dad said.

SARAH

That's not what he said.

Ted's surprised by a challenge this early in the game.

SARAH

He said to call if we need anything.

TED

Well, I've got a lot of work to do and I can't have you calling me every time you want a drink of water, so please limit your calls to emergencies only.

SARAH

We paid you five hundred dollars. We'll call you if we need anything. You don't want to upset my dad.

TED

Okay. Please. Try to call only when necessary. Watch TV, and if you're good, I'll bring up some milk and cookies. Bye.

Ted leaves.

INT. HALLWAY

Ted walks briskly down the hall, counting his money the whole way.

INT. ROOM 716

Juancho takes off his socks and shoes and throws them onto the floor. Sarah looks at the discarded shoes and socks.

CLOSE ON the shoes and socks.

Sarah looks over at Juancho's bare feet. Her nose twitches.

SARAH

Your feet stink.

Juancho smells his feet.

JUANCHO
They don't stink.

Sarah throws his shoes and socks behind her. They land on the bed.

Juancho is flipping channels and finds an interesting show.

JUANCHO
Check it out. T & A.

Sarah realizes he found a Nudie station.

SARAH
Change it. You're not supposed to watch this.

JUANCHO
We're supposed to watch TV.

SARAH
Not this kind of TV. Change it.

Juancho rolls up in a ball, the remote tucked in some recess of his stomach.

Sarah hits him, then goes to the phone. She punches 0, sits on the bed, and checks the name on the name tag pinned to her shirt.

INT. FRONT DESK

Ted walks up to the front desk just as the phone rings.

TED
Front desk.

INT. ROOM 716

Sarah is taking off her white winter tights.

SARAH
Ted? Hi. It's me, Sarah. You're our sitter for tonight.

TED
Oh, Jesus, what did I tell you? I said if you don't bother me, you'll get milk and cookies. Now, do you want them or do you not?

SARAH

I want you to turn off the Nudie station in our room.

Ted checks the computer.

TED

(reading stats on room 716)

I can't turn on an adult station without permission from your parents.

SARAH

No.

(struggling with winter tights)

Not turn it on, turn it off. It's already on.

TED

That's not what the machine tells me.

SARAH

Well, stop listening to the machine and listen to me. There's naked ladies dancing on my TV and I want 'em off.

TED

If you're good, you'll get milk and cookies, so leave me alone, please. I'll be up later to put you both to sleep.

He hangs up.

INT. ROOM 716

Angry, Sarah slams down the phone. She has an unusually adult temper. We know where she gets it from. She looks up and sees that the nudies are still in full force.

SARAH

Change the channel, now!

Juancho turns around. He has a face like someone just laid a fart in his nose.

JUANCHO

Man, you're the one with the stinky feet!

Sarah smells her feet. Twice.

SARAH
They don't stink.

JUANCHO
Yeah, they do.

SARAH
Here, smell for yourself.

She sticks her foot out for Juancho to smell. He's reluctant. Fearful.

SARAH
Go ahead.

He slowly, very slowly... climbs onto the bed and lowers his head to her foot. Very slowly.

Sarah waits until he's close enough to her foot before she kicks him in the face, sending him somersaulting off the bed and crashing to the floor.

She grabs the remote control he left behind and changes the channel to a cartoon.

Juancho gets up and realizes his defeat. He decides to wander about. Looking for something to do...

Sarah tries to ignore him as he stalks the room. It's only a matter of time before he finds mischief.

Juancho sees the champagne bucket and Bingo!, he goes for the bottle.

JUANCHO
(holding up the bottle)
Hey, get a bottle opener!

Sarah opens her mouth, as if about to tell him to leave the champagne alone. She stops herself when she realizes she wants some champagne too.

She quickly scrambles about for a bottle opener while Juancho unwraps the bottle top.

Sarah opens the dresser drawer with such force that a few hidden contents long forgotten in the back of the drawer slide forward.

Some coins, a paperclip, and a hypodermic needle. She looks down at the needle that lays beside the Gideon Bible and casually picks the phone back up and punches 0. The phone rings.

INT. FRONT DESK

Ted, bucket of ice in his hand, gets ready to go to room 404. As he crosses the desk, the phone rings. He looks at the board and sees room 716's light blinking. He sighs in exasperation.

INT. ROOM 716

Sarah sees Juancho shaking the champagne bottle violently.

SARAH
Don't shake it!
(into phone)
Ted? Hi. It's me. Sarah.

TED
Yeah. Who died? No one? Then don't call me.

SARAH
I just thought I'd tell you that your cleaning ladies are doing a bum job. There's all kinds of leftover stuff around here.

Sarah picks up the needle and rolls it over in her hand several times.

SARAH
Needles and things. We're not supposed to have needles here, are we? I mean, they don't come with the room, do they? Send someone up here to clean this place up right.

The champagne bottle explodes all over Juancho. He looks surprised.

SARAH
(to Juancho)
I TOLD YOU NOT TO SHAKE IT!
(to Ted)
I gotta go. My brother just exploded the champagne all over the room. Oh, and bring us a couple of toothbrushes.

(MORE)

SARAH(cont'd)

There's a card in the bathroom that says you'll bring free toothbrushes if we ask for them.

She hangs up.

A frustrated Ted hangs up the phone. He walks briskly to the elevator.

Sarah and Juancho are pouring themselves champagne. They turn up the television and drink. Juancho shudders at the taste, but tries to drink as much as Sarah.

Sarah clearly doesn't like it, but tries to pretend like she does.

Sarah picks up an instruction card near the phone to see how to make room-to-room calls.

SARAH

I'm calling another room, give me three numbers.

JUANCHO

4-0-9.

Sarah punches in the room number. The phone rings.

She holds the needle up to the light to examine it.

SARAH

Hello? Hi. You don't know me, and I don't know you, but... do you have any needles? We've got needles here and I was wondering if they come with the room or not. Don't have any? Thanks. Just checking.

She hangs up.

Juancho puts down his champagne glass and searches his father's coat pocket. He finds a pack of cigarettes and takes one out. He puts it in his mouth and pretends to smoke.

Sarah checks out the hypodermic needle carefully. She has an idea.

MONTAGE:

In the bathroom, Sarah seeks out her mother's lipstick.

INT. ROOM 716

Sarah stands atop the chest of drawers and uses the lipstick to draw a bull's-eye on one of the hotel art paintings. She writes numbers next to each circle representing points.

Juancho is standing at the foot of the bed, cigarette hanging out of his mouth, as he practices his dart-throwing technique.

SARAH

(pointing out the rules)

The center is the bull's eye, 100 points, this one's 10 points, this one's 20 points.

WHACK! The needle lands an inch from her face in the 20-point slot.

SARAH

Hey, wait a minute. Let me get out of the way!

Sarah, a little tipsy now, grabs the needle and staggers to the bed. She hears the key in the doorway and throws the needle into the curtain to hide it.

Ted enters the room, somewhat disheveled from his encounter with Sigfried. He has a tray and a new bottle of champagne.

He puts the champagne bottle into the empty bucket. He spots the original bottle lying on the floor half empty and dripping into the carpet.

TED

I brought you some milk and cookies. If you want some you have to eat them now, because you're going to sleep.

SARAH

We're going to sleep now?

TED

Your parents said to put you to bed before midnight. Well, it's before midnight. Maybe that way you'll leave me alone.

SARAH

Those aren't milk and cookies.

TED

We were out of cookies, so I brought you milk and Saltines. Don't complain! Now hurry up and eat. You're going to bed right now.

Juancho bites into a Saltine. Sarah simply examines one.

JUANCHO

These are old.

SARAH

They're stale.

TED

(impatient)

Dip 'em in the milk! The milk will make them soft.

Sarah gives up and throws the cracker back onto the tray. She's a little drunk.

Ted picks up the ruined champagne bottle.

Juancho dips his crackers and eats them. He makes a face and drops a soggy cracker onto the tray.

TED

No crackers? Okay, fine. Sleepy time. Now, I don't want you guys wandering around, so if you need to go to the restroom, go now.

They go to the bathroom. Ted sits on the bed. Waits.

He sees the painting on the wall but can't figure out what's different about it. The red lipstick blends right into the aesthetic value of the painting.

Ted smells something funny. He looks down and sees the socks on the bed. He grabs a fork from the tray and uses it to throw the socks across the room.

The kids come back out.

JUANCHO

What about our pajamas?

TED

You wanna look nice in case there's an earthquake, don'tcha?

The children nod.

TED

Okay. Then stay in those clothes.

The kids lie on the bed.

Sarah notices a jar of Mentholatum ointment on the dinner tray.

SARAH

What's that?

TED

Oh, this is just some Mentholatum ointment. Come on, under the covers. Close your eyes and I'll tell you a story.

The children close their eyes. Ted opens the jar of the ointment and sniffs it. Strong stuff by the look on his face.

TED

Your dad says he doesn't trust baby-sitters. I don't blame him. You know what my baby-sitter did to me once?

(confiding)

I never told my parents, either.

The children lie in the bed, eyes closed, listening intently.

Ted dips his fingers in the jar of vaporous ointment.

TED

I hated going to sleep. You know, it's nighttime and you wanna run around and act crazy. So what my baby-sitter did to make sure I'd go to sleep and not be tempted to get up, was, she'd take some of this vapor rub stuff... Can you smell this?

Eyes closed, the kids inhale. They smell the ointment and nod yes.

TED

Well, she'd just dab a little of this over each eyelid, so that I would be sure and keep my eyes closed all night.

Ted spreading the ointment over their eyelids as he says this.

TED

There. Now you've got some, too!
Don't open your eyes or it'll
burrn, burn, burn. The smell helps
clear your sinuses too, so it's
doing double duty.

JUANCHO

What happens when it's morning?

TED

If you keep your eyes closed all
night, it will wear off by morning.
But DON'T OPEN YOUR EYES BEFORE
THAT...

SARAH

Did you ever open your eyes?

Extreme CLOSE-UP on Ted's eyes.

TED

Yes... I did.

The children are quiet.

TED

And now look at me.

CHILDREN

(in unison)

We can't.

TED

Good. You'll do just fine. Sleep
well and I won't tell your parents
about the champagne.

Ted leaves.

AFTER A MOMENT OF DARKNESS

After a moment of darkness, the night is disturbed by the
loud crashing of fireworks outside the window.

Sarah sits up, eyes closed. Her face feels the warmth coming
from the window and she tilts her head toward it.

The light of the fireworks dances its reflections off her
face.

She inhales deeply... then makes a sour face. She goes for
the bathroom, arms outstretched like a blind girl.

She gets to the bathroom, turns on the light, and searches for the sink.

She begins to wash the ointment off her eyes very carefully. She dries her eyes thoroughly and opens them... checks them in the mirror. A little red, but otherwise fine.

She goes back into the bedroom, turns on the television and grabs the new champagne bottle. She shakes it violently.

Juancho wakes. He turns his head to her. His eyes are still closed.

JUANCHO

Are you watching TV?

The champagne bottle explodes. She pours herself a glass.

SARAH

Yep. If you wanna watch too, you have to go wash your face.

Juancho gets up smiling and tries to run to the bathroom. He slams into the wall, hard.

SARAH

Be careful...

Juancho walks into the bathroom a little slower, more cautious.

Sarah pours herself another glass. She downs the glass and shudders.

She smells the bad smell again. Only now she really smells it.

She smells her feet. Nothing. She smells the champagne. Nothing.

Juancho enters the room and sits on the bed. Sarah grabs his foot and smells it. She drops his foot.

Juancho stares blankly at her.

Sarah looks down at the mattress. She smells the mattress.

Juancho looks at her as if she's drunk.

Sarah leaps off the bed and turns on the room lights. She takes a huge swig from the champagne bottle, then stalks toward the mattress.

Juancho leaps off the bed as well and stands back.

Sarah pulls the mattress off of the bedsprings enough to see what is underneath it.

Juancho screams. Sarah is too stunned to scream. Stuffed into the bedsprings is a woman's dead and beaten corpse.

INT. FRONT DESK

CLOSE ON

Ted's phone ringing.

Ted looks at the phone as if pondering whether or not to answer it. He taps his fingers. Finally he answers the phone.

INT. ROOM 716

SARAH

Ted!

TED

What do you want now, for Christ's sake! Who died?

SARAH

(near tears)

I don't know, but she's in my bed!

TED

What?

SARAH

There's a dead body in my bed!

TED

That's just your brother! Sound asleep.

SARAH

No, there's a woman's dead body inside the bed, in the mattress!

TED

You saw the body?

SARAH

Yes!

TED

Impossible. You've got ointment on your eyes! You can't see shit. Now go to sleep!

Ted hangs up the phone.

Sarah redials.

Ted answers.

TED
Godammit, go to sleep!

SARAH
(crying now)
I washed it off...

TED
You washed off the ointment?

SARAH
(pissed, drunk)
Yeah, didn't you ever think to do
that?

Ted is quiet on the line. Thinking.

Juancho lights up a cigarette for real and takes nervous puffs.

Sarah carries the phone over to Juancho and snatches the cigarette away from him. She stuffs it in her own mouth and nervously takes a long drag on it.

SARAH
(through cigarette)
You never tried it, did you? Then
you agree that I'm smarter than
you...

TED
All right. Now you listen to me...

SARAH
Get your ass up here and call the
police, because there's a dead body
in my bed and it smells like shit
and it looks even worse, and if you
don't help us, my dad is gonna lay
you down right next to her, I swear
to fucking God!

She drinks from her champagne bottle. She's pulling the mattress back over the corpse again.

JUANCHO
Go, sis.

She's drunk all right.

TED
(incensed)
I'm coming up and if there isn't a
dead body by the time I get there,
I'll make one myself. You!

INT. FRONT DESK

Ted slams down the phone.

As he walks away from the counter, he spots the children's
parents driving up to the valet out front.

TED
Oh shit!

Ted breaks into a sprint and dives into a closing elevator.

INT. ROOM 716

Sarah continues to cover the body with the mattress.

INT. ELEVATOR

Close on Ted's face as the elevator car races up seven
floors.

INT. LOBBY

The Man is carrying his drunk Wife through the lobby. Not
happy.

INT. ROOM 716

Ted bursts into the room. He sees the disarray.

Ted pushes the champagne out of Sarah's hand, spilling it
onto the floor.

TED
What the fuck is going on!

He sees Juancho, with the cigarette hanging out of his mouth
and rips it away from him. The butt goes flying onto the
carpet near the spreading champagne spill.

TED
Your parents are on their way up
and I'm not taking responsibility
for this mess!

SARAH
Check under the mattress!

TED
For what?

SARAH
(crying)
For the body, can't you smell it?

TED
It's your feet!

Sarah grabs the mattress and pulls it off herself.

Ted sees the rotting corpse.

Vomit spews out of Ted's mouth.

TED
(gargles through vomit-
spewing lips)
Jesus fucking Christ! What the fuck
is this!

He tears at the phone.

TED
(into the phone)
Police, it's an emergency!
(pause)
Hello, Police, this is the Mon
Signor Hotel, get someone up here
right fucking now, there's a DEAD
WHORE stuffed under the mattress!

Tears well in Sarah's eyes as she looks at the body.

SARAH
Don't call her that...

TED
(into the phone)
I'm dead fucking serious, there's a
dead fucking Whore stuffed in the
bedsprings of the fucking bed!

SARAH
Stop calling her that!

Sarah grabs the hypodermic needle from under the curtain and
stabs it into Ted's leg.

TED

FUCK!

Sarah steps back, almost tripping over the champagne bottle. She picks up the bottle and holds it up defensively in case Ted tries to retaliate. Ted spins around, now noticing the needle sticking out of his leg.

TED

Jesus!!

Juancho lights up another cigarette.

The champagne spill has spread to the fallen cigarette butt. The carpet bursts into flames around the spill.

EXT. ROOM 716

CLOSE ON a key going into the keyhole outside.

INT. ROOM 716

Ted tries to pull the syringe out of his leg, but yanking it makes it break in two, the plunger in his hand and the needle still stuck in his leg.

Ted staggers and grabs hold of the dead woman's foot for support as he steps on the remote control, flipping the TV on to the Nudie channel, just as...

Man opens the door.

Man stands at the door, drunk Wife unconscious on one arm, the door knob in the other hand. He's looking mean.

Man's POV: focused on the dead woman in the bedsprings. We pan up the dead woman's leg to find Ted holding her foot. We pan down Ted's leg to find the hypodermic needle jutting out... then pan over to the other hand holding the broken syringe plunger.

We pan over to the Nudie channel, then down to the fire blazing behind the children. Pan up to the dripping champagne bottle in Sarah's hand, then over to the cigarette hanging out of Juancho's mouth. Juancho tosses his cigarette out of his mouth to an area behind him. Another blaze starts immediately.

Man drops his Wife to the floor.

In the WIDE SHOT of Ted and the children, we see that the fireworks are bursting big and bright outside the window behind them. Almost as bright as the flames eating through the room.

Man simply glares at Ted. Finally Man speaks...

MAN

Did they misbehave?

Ted stares blankly at Man (the camera) as the sprinklers burst on... drenching the room as the picture

FADES TO BLACK.

THE MAKING OF KILLER KITE

Story
by
Matt Stevens

Screenplay
by
Robert S. Gray

FADE IN:

EXT. HARLAN LARUE'S MANSION - NIGHT (FILM)

The ancient stone building sits dark and lifeless. A single light shines from a room near the roof. Lightning flashes as THUNDER ROARS.

INT. LARUE'S MANSION - NIGHT (FILM)

The laboratory is cluttered with giant batteries, transformers and dials.

PROFESSOR HARLAN LaRUE, an elderly, disheveled man in a white lab coat, hurriedly makes a last minute inspection of a melange of coiled wires, flashing lights and bubbling beakers.

His assistant, JONATHAN SCOTT, a young, handsome all-American lad, stands looking out the window.

Lightning flashes.

JONATHAN

(checking his watch)

It's moving in this direction, Professor LaRue. In five minutes, we'll be in the center of the storm.

PROFESSOR

All right, Jonathan. No time to waste. Ten years of research and it all comes down to this moment. Prepare the kite.

Jonathan throws a large switch and a glass case begins to pulse with green light, growing brighter until a black, bat-shaped kite becomes visible inside. The two stand staring into the case, their faces an eerie green.

PROFESSOR

Think of it, my boy. In the future when they power an entire city with the power from one storm, men will speak of this night. The night Harlan LaRue changed the course of history.

Jonathan opens the glass case and connects two wires to either "wing" of the bat kite. He carefully removes the kite from the case.

JONATHAN
The kite is ready, Professor.

PROFESSOR
Onward, into the future.

The two go up the stairs to the roof.

EXT. ROOF - NIGHT (FILM)

The Professor and Jonathan, with kite in hand, come out onto the roof. They set the kite to sail almost effortlessly. The Professor grabs the kite string and holds on tightly, wind gusting, lightning flashing and THUNDER CRACKING.

PROFESSOR
(yelling)
Check the connections.

Jonathan runs back down into the laboratory as the Professor looks mechanically into the sky.

Suddenly, a bolt of lightning hits the kite and the Professor.

Jonathan returns to the roof.

JONATHAN
It worked. The batteries are
charged. Professor?

He sees the Professor's empty shoes sitting on the roof, smoking.

JONATHAN
Professor LaRue?

He looks up to see the kite as it flies off. Now, there is the hint of an evil smile on its face.

EXT. LABORATORY ROOF - NIGHT (VIDEO)

From a different angle, we see Jonathan standing on the roof, watching the kite.

LIZ (O.S.)
Cut.

The VIDEO CAMERA zooms out until we see a film camera on a dolly sitting only a few feet in front of Jonathan. Behind the camera is COLIN KISHMAN.

As the shot continues to widen, we see the roof is actually a set on a soundstage. CREW MEMBERS wander about.

COLIN

Perfect everybody. Really. Good job. Let's just do it one more time.

GROANS are heard from the Crew.

INT. COLIN'S OFFICE - DAY (VIDEO)

Colin Kishman is in his late 20's and very hip; in a black shirt, buttoned to the throat, wire rim glasses and hair that is lacquered straight back.

Awards, film posters and books decorate his tastefully-conservative office. He sips a mineral water as he sits back casually in his over-stuffed chair.

COLIN

"Kite" had been a dream of mine since I was in film school in Iowa, but it was too far ahead of its time for school and none of the studios were interested So we did it as an independent.

JUMP CUT:

COLIN

It's set in the horror film genre but it's actually a neo-expressionistic vision of the classic struggle between man and his inner demons.

INT. BARREN ROOM - DAY (VIDEO)

CARL KISHMAN, mid-thirties and looking older, is dressed in a plain blue work shirt as he sits at a metal table. Behind him is a cold concrete wall.

He smokes constantly as he runs his fingers through his hair. There is a nervous tic in the corner of his eye.

CARL

Well, yeah, that's the great thing, you know, it's got something for everybody. I mean, it scares your pants off to begin with plus, it's got a little...

He uses his hands to indicate breasts.

CARL

You know? I mean, you've got to show a little skin if you're going to sell the thing.

INT. COLIN'S OFFICE - DAY (VIDEO)

COLIN

I just didn't want to do that same old, tired, bedroom love scene that's been done to death. Setting it in the laboratory, I thought, was not only thematically correct but very sensual.

INT. CARL'S ROOM - DAY (VIDEO)

CARL

And, where the guy ends up buffing the broad right on the giant battery... I mean, is that great, or what?

INT. COLIN'S OFFICE - DAY (VIDEO)

COLIN

Casting? Don't remind me. No, honestly, ours was tough but worth it. We ended up getting the best talent in Hollywood.

EXT. KISHMAN PRODUCTION TRAILER - DAY (VIDEO)

An old trailer sits on a vacant lot. Concrete blocks serve as stairs. Next to the door is a sign that reads, "Kishman Brothers Productions - Hollywood, Florida."

There are about a DOZEN ACTORS lined up in front.

LIZ BOWDEN exits the trailer and addresses the actors.

LIZ

All right, who hasn't filled out a form?

A few actors raise their hands. She goes to the FIRST ACTOR and offers him a form.

LIZ

(coldly)

Any union affiliations?

FIRST ACTOR

No, ma'am.

LIZ

Good.

A COWBOY exits the trailer, slamming the door.

COWBOY

Don't waste your time, boys. These idiots don't know talent when they see it.

LIZ

Well, I do. And, believe me, I didn't.

EXT. TRAILER - DAY (VIDEO)

An OLDER ACTOR is practicing his lines in a baroque and theatrical voice.

OLDER ACTOR

The night Harlan LaRue changed the course of history.

(beat)

The night Harlan LaRue changed the course of history.

EXT. TRAILER - DAY (VIDEO)

A definite CHARACTER ACTOR.

CHARACTER ACTOR

I'm going to read for the lead.
I've paid my dues doing characters
and I think I'm at that leading-man
stage in my career, now.

EXT. TRAILER - DAY (VIDEO)

A precocious YOUNG GIRL stands reading her lines while her doting STAGE MOTHER kneels beside her, brushing her hair.

YOUNG GIRL

Mother, do you mind? I'm trying to learn this.

STAGE MOTHER

Sorry, honey. Go ahead.

The Young girl goes back to the script, pauses and then lets out a blood-curdling SCREAM.

INT. KISHMAN PRODUCTION TRAILER - DAY (VIDEO)

The two Kishman brothers sit at a table stacked with resumes and photos. Carl is now wearing a shirt and tie that is loosened at the neck. He does not run his fingers through his hair or have a nervous tic.

Colin has much longer hair than before and wears a T-shirt that says, "Film Iowa". Film and Iowa share the letter "I".

The two appear very fatigued.

COLIN
(unenthusiastically)
Very good. Really.

He looks to Carl for confirmation but gets only a glaze of disinterest.

COLIN
Really, very nice.

We see that it is the Character Actor.

COLIN
It's not exactly what we had in mind for the lead but, if we decide to go that way, we'll be in touch.

We jump through a series of lines being read by different actors. Each one is worse than the last:

FIRST ACTOR
It's moving in this direction
Professor LaRue.

SECOND ACTOR
I can't stop seeing that poor
child's face and that... thing.

OLDER ACTOR
The night Harlan LaRue changed the
course of history.

THIRD ACTOR
Tammy, it's too dangerous. We
should... wait, can I start over?

FOURTH ACTOR
We should leave it to the
authorities. That fiend has already
killed five red-haired children.

FIFTH ACTOR
 (snickering)
 Make love to me, Jonathan.

SIXTH ACTOR
 (seductively)
 Make love to me, Jonathan.

SEVENTH ACTOR
 (sternly)
 Make love to me, Jonathan.

The Brothers are rocked awake by the Young Girl's SCREAM.

YOUNG GIRL
 Shall we proceed with the audition,
 gentlemen?

INT. LABORATORY - DAY (VIDEO)

ASHLEY DAVENPORT is sitting on the laboratory set for her interview.

ASHLEY
 Tammy is the pivotal character here. It's really her story and I want to give her a very positive, can-do, sort of 90's-woman quality.

JUMP TO:

ASHLEY
 (proudly)
 Yes, I was the "Love-My-Floor-Wax" lady. It ran for six months in the Jacksonville area.

JUMP TO:

ASHLEY
 I'd rather continue doing dinner theatre here than move to California. It's just that whole L.A., show-biz, starlet thing is definitely not me.

CUT TO:

BILL PRINZ is sitting on the same set.

BILL

This is Jonathan's story. He is the central character around which all the supporting characters revolve. I mean, he helps build the beast, he destroys the beast and he gets the girl. Gets her right here, in fact. That should prove interesting.

JUMP TO:

BILL

My looks are holding me back as an actor, I think. I mean, all I'm offered are the leading-man roles and, just once, I'd kill for one of those juicy, character parts. Oh, well.

INT. COLIN'S OFFICE - DAY (VIDEO)

Colin holds up a large poster for "Killer Kite". Near the bottom of the poster, we see a child sitting on the sand, a small shovel in hand and a pail at her feet. Near the top of the poster is a large, menacing bat-shaped kite.

COLIN

This was the original poster idea but I felt it was too derivative of Jaws, so...

He holds up a second poster. Instead of the child at the bottom, we now see a couple, running in terror from the kite.

COLIN

We came up with this which I thought was better but still didn't grab me so...

He holds up the final poster. It is a close shot of Ashley and Jonathan, partially undressed and in passionate embrace. On the wall, in the background, is a small shadow of a kite.

COLIN

I designed this one myself. I just felt the story was not about some kite, really. It's about people.

INT. BARREN ROOM - DAY (VIDEO)

CARL is once again in the stark concrete room where we first saw him.

CARL
 My advice to young filmmakers?
 (beat)
 Hire Lizzy Bowden as your A.D.

EXT. IRICK PARK - DAY (VIDEO)

Film equipment and CREW are everywhere.

Colin sits behind the camera atop the dolly crane while Carl paces nervously, checking his watch.

Liz holds a red wig and addresses the Young Girl in a whisper as her Mother looks on from the background.

LIZ
 Yes, your mother did a wonderful
 job but the kite only attacks red-
 headed children. So, you can either
 put on the wig or I'll shave your
 head with a rusty razor. Got it?

EXT. IRICK PARK - SHORTLY LATER (VIDEO)

The child is now wearing the red wig. Just behind her the kite is being suspended in the air by ASPEN GREENWALD, the stunt coordinator.

LIZ
 Ready on set?

Aspen looks high in the tree to his assistant SHORTY LOGAN, who holds the other kite line.

ASPEN
 Ready, Shorty?

SHORTY
 Ready.

LIZ
 Okay, quiet everybody. This is a
 take. Roll sound.

SOUND MAN
 Speed.

LIZ
 Roll camera.

COLIN
 Speed.

LIZ
 (slating)
 Killer Kite. Scene 43, take 1.

COLIN
 And... action.

The Girl runs from the kite which is closing in on her. She looks back, SCREAMS and falls.

LIZ
 Cut. Good for everybody?

SOUND MAN
 Sound good.

COLIN
 Sorry, I lost her when she fell.
 Let's just do one more.

EXT. IRICK PARK - LATER (VIDEO)

Liz, agitated, holds the slate in front of the camera.

LIZ
 Scene 43, take 15.

She marks and drops the slate to reveal the Young Girl spattered with dirt and wig askew.

COLIN
 Action.

The Young Girl starts running and turn to scream. This time, it is a raspy and pale imitation of its former self.

LIZ
 Cut.

EXT. IRICK PARK - LATER (VIDEO)

Carl paces as he talks to Colin.

CARL
 You just don't get it, do you?
 We've got the dolly for two more
 hours. That's it. Then, no more
 dolly.

COLIN
 We only need it for three more
 shots.

CARL
 You've already spent four hours on
 this one.

COLIN
 We're fine.

Carl's cell phone RINGS. He turns it on and puts it to his ear.

CARL
 Your brains are in your ass.
 (becoming nervous)
 Oh, no. Not you, Mr. Van Arsdale.
 Ha, ha. No, it was just... one of
 the actors.
 (to no one in particular)
 You'll never work in this town
 again.

EXT. IRICK PARK - LATER (VIDEO)

The Stage Mother sits comfortably as the Young Girl limps over, tired, defeated and on the verge of tears.

YOUNG GIRL
 (hoarsely)
 I can't do't again.

The Mother sprays antiseptic in the Young Girl's throat.

STAGE MOTHER
 Like hell. You'll do it all day if
 they tell you to.
 (softly)
 Okay, honey?

The Young Girl turns and lets out a piercing SCREAM, right into the microphone.

The Sound Man rips off his headphones and begins chasing the Young Girl, murder in his eyes.

Liz jumps up and brings him down with a flying tackle. She looks up with a face full of dirt.

LIZ
 Okay people, that's lunch.

EXT. IRICK PARK - LATER (VIDEO)

Everyone is again in position to re-take scene 43.

LIZ
Scene 43, take 22.

COLIN
Action.

The Young Girl takes off running and screaming. She falls, looks up and, instead of screaming, begins choking.

LIZ
Cut. What the hell's the matter now? Aspen?

ASPEN
The line's wrapped around her throat. Give me some slack.

CARL
Careful. Easy, you're tearing the kite.

The Stage Mother runs over to assist the Young Girl.

STAGE MOTHER
My baby.
(to Carl)
You'll be hearing from my lawyer.

Liz yanks the line and, unnoticed by anyone, Shorty is pulled from the tree, landing with a THUD.

The Young Girl and Stage Mother head for their car.

LIZ
Where are you going?

STAGE MOTHER
I'm taking my daughter to the hospital, if that's all right with you, bitch.

Liz yanks the wig off the Young Girl's head.

LIZ
Christ, never work with kids.
(to Colin)
Okay, we've wasted five hours, we still don't have this shot and we've lost our actress. So, who are we supposed to get to finish this scene?

Colin turns slowly to look at Liz, the only woman on the set. The implication of his look sinks in.

LIZ
Oh, no. No, no. No way.

EXT. IRICK PARK - LATER (VIDEO)

Liz is now in the red wig as an ASSISTANT is strapping her breasts with an Ace bandage.

COLIN
Believe me, it will cut. No one will ever notice.

He gives her a quick kiss on the cheek and leaves.

LIZ
(to the assistant)
I can't believe this. I've worked with Bob Altman, Mike Nichols...

The Assistant is unimpressed.

LIZ
Anson Williams.

The Assistant looks up, awestruck.

ASSISTANT
Really?

INT. BARREN ROOM - DAY (VIDEO)

Carl continues his interview.

CARL
Of course, the ironic thing is that the special effects are what made the film, in some ways, but also what... broke it, actually, with the lawsuit and all but, God, don't remind me of that.

He takes a long drag off his cigarette and blows smoke into the air, staring blankly as his eye twitches quickly.

EXT. LABORATORY ROOF - DAY (VIDEO)

Aspen stands next to Shorty, who's dressed in a full-body, bat-kite costume. A patch covers one eye; a scar on the cheek below.

ASPEN

(to camera)

This next stunt is really revolutionary. It's never been tried before. This kite costume, that my test pilot Shorty here is wearing, is like a small hang glider so, when he jumps off here, they'll be able to get these great shots of the kite circling and circling. Really menacing looking stuff, man. But the really wild thing is, there's a camera stuck inside Shorty's costume here so, at the same time, he'll be getting these great aerial shots. I told him, "Hey, make 'em pay you D.P. rates".

He slaps Shorty on the back, playfully.

Shorty looks over the rail, panic stricken. It is a long way down.

ASPEN

(to camera)

No, we haven't had time to test it yet but, if anybody can do it, Shorty can.

(to Shorty)

Right, buddy?

(to camera)

There's nothin' he won't do.

INT. COLIN'S OFFICE - DAY (VIDEO)

Colin's interview continues.

COLIN

Probably the most rewarding thing about "Kite" was the relationships that developed on the set, especially between the actors and myself. There was a real simpatico there.

INT. LABORATORY - DAY (VIDEO)

The set is lit, the equipment in place and the actors in costume.

Colin, fatigued and nervous, addresses Bill and Ashley.

COLIN

(to Ashley)

No, I don't think they would go to his room. This is something they do in the heat of passion. Okay? This isn't a romantic weekend in the Keys. This is raw animal lust. Get it... got it... good.

ASHLEY

But, I don't understand Tammy's motivation here. It seems so submissive. What is she trying to achieve with this?

Carl, with a three-day growth of beard and clothes straight from the floor, passes through.

CARL

An orgasm.

LAUGHTER is heard around the set.

COLIN

All right, people. Let's have quiet. This is a very difficult scene for everybody so, let's just cooperate.

(to Ashley)

Tammy realizes she is becoming the same isolated, lonely, embittered person that her uncle Harlan had become and the only way she can avoid that is to dare to love another and her disrobing is merely symbolic of her losing the veils of secrecy that have enshrouded her soul.

Ashley is moved by his words.

COLIN

Okay, let's try one.

JUMP TO:

ASHLEY

Jonathan, we may not live to see another day and I don't want to die a woman who never knew love. Make love to me, Jonathan.

They embrace and kiss passionately. Ashley begins snickering.

LIZ

Cut.

JUMP TO:

ASHLEY

Make love to me, Jonathan.

They kiss, her face to the camera side of his.

BILL

Sorry, but shouldn't my face be on the other side?

LIZ

Cut.

COLIN

No, Bill, we'll want to see Tammy's face here.

JUMP TO:

ASHLEY

Make love to me, Jonathan.

They embrace and kiss. She rips the buttons from his shirt. He unbuttons her blouse and, as he finishes, she selfconsciously begins to re-button it.

LIZ

Cut. Damn it, what are you doing?

ASHLEY

Sorry, I'm... I just... Can we do it again? Sorry.

LIZ

Okay, let's get Jonathan another shirt.

JUMP TO:

They are set to retake the scene. Bill's shirt is a different color, now.

ASHLEY

Make love to me, Jonathan.

Again, they embrace, kiss and begin to disrobe each other. This time, as he finishes unbuttoning her shirt, she manages to turn her back to the camera. He wrestles to turn her back around, kissing all the while.

LIZ

Cut. Where does it say, "Tammy and Jonathan wrestle"?

ASHLEY

I'm sorry. This isn't easy, you know?

LIZ

I don't care. Act if you must.

ASHLEY

Fine. You think it's so easy, then you get naked in front of them.

She points to the crew, who look around embarrassed and guilty.

Ashley leaves the set in tears.

INT. SOUNDSTAGE - SHORTLY LATER

Carl and Liz are off to one side of the set, talking quietly.

CARL

We've got to have this scene. I mean, we've got to have it. No "R" rating, no sale. It's that simple. We've got to have it.

Colin joins them.

COLIN

It's no use. She says it's purely exploitative and she won't do gratuitous nudity.

CARL

We'll pay her.

COLIN

I offered. She said, "I'm an actress, not a stripper".

CARL

That's it. We're screwed.

LIZ

That's your answer.

The brothers only look confused.

LIZ
 Pay someone to body double the rest
 of the scene.

Colin and Carl come alive at the simplistic genius of her suggestion. Together, they turn to look at Liz.

LIZ
 Oh, no. Absolutely not. NO, no.
 Forget it. Hire a body double.

INT. COLIN'S OFFICE - DAY (VIDEO)

Colin's interview continues.

COLIN
 The love scene, as it stands now,
 is different than we had originally
 planned but, I think it works very
 nicely. I still get a lot of
 comments on it.

INT. LABORATORY - DAY (FILM)

Tammy and Jonathan enter.

TAMMY
 Oh, Jonathan, I can't stop seeing
 that poor child's face and that...
 that thing.

JONATHAN
 Shh. Try not to think about it.

TAMMY
 Jonathan, we may not live to see
 another day and I don't want to die
 a woman who never knew love. Make
 love to me, Jonathan.

When we cut back to Jonathan he is wearing the different colored shirt.

The scene plays through until her shirt is unbuttoned and her back is to the camera and then there is an awkward cutaway to a flashing light.

The scene plays through to the end in close up, a body-double now standing in for Tammy. He removes her shirt and the body-double has tassels glued to her nipples.

The two crawl upon the giant battery to consummate the relationship and the camera dollies to a bubbling beaker.

INT. BARREN ROOM - DAY (VIDEO)

Carl's interview continues.

CARL

I've gotta be honest with you, I don't remember the last five or six days of the production. I've heard some pretty weird stuff, though. As long as they can't prove it, 'eh?

INT./EXT. TAMMY'S CAR - DAY (FILM)

Tammy sits in the driver's seat with Jonathan next to her. In the middle of the back seat is a mannequin wearing a red wig.

TAMMY

Okay, we know all the children were attacked in Irick Park, right?

JONATHAN

Right.

TAMMY

And, they all had red hair, right?

JONATHAN

Right.

TAMMY

And, since the curfew prohibits children from being outside alone, little Rusty here will be the perfect decoy.

JONATHAN

Let's hope the kite has the Professor's same bad eyesight.

EXT. IRICK PARK - DAY (VIDEO)

Tammy and Jonathan enter the park carrying little Rusty and two machetes. CHILDREN and PARENTS scatter at the sight.

The camera dollies beside them, only now, instead of a dolly and track, Colin and the camera ride atop a children's red wagon.

Tammy and Jonathan prop Rusty in the middle of the playground.

TAMMY
Okay, you take cover in those
bushes and I'll wait in the car.

In the background, a CHILD continues to play on the
playground, her MOM beside her.

LIZ
Cut.
(to Mom)
You're supposed to be gone by now.
You see these two people with
machetes and you grab your child
and leave. Got it?

Carl comes over.

CARL
(to Mom)
That's it. You're off the film.
Goodbye. Leave.

MOM
We were never in your stupid film,
remember? You told us you'd already
cast everyone.

LIZ
Well, you'll have to leave. We
can't get this shot with you in the
way here.

MOM
You Hollywood people are all the
same.

LIZ
Lady, please, just leave before we
call the cops.

Carl takes the machete from Jonathan's hands.

MOM
Why don't you go make your smutty
movie somewhere else.

CARL
Look, bitch, this smutty movie has
already put me fifty-thousand in
debt. I've mortgaged my house, my
boat and my Beemer. I haven't slept
or bathed in three days.

(MORE)

CARL(cont'd)

My wife has moved out and I think my dog may have starved to death. Trust me, I'm losing my sense of humor. So, you can either take that ugly child and get out of here or I swear I'll cut your stinkin' heart out.

The Mom grabs the child and runs off.

CARL

P.R., that's all I do.

INT. T.V. STUDIO - DAY (VIDEO)

FILM REVIEWER

It was twenty-five months ago tonight that I had the unimaginable burden of watching "Killer Kite" for the first time and, as I said at the time, "the film is not worthy of a serious review." So, of course, every child between nine and twenty has been to see it at least six times. It's now made the greatest profit of any independent film in history and, tonight, it begins a record 105th consecutive week at Los Angeles' famous Polk Theatre. Yes, I've been to see "Killer Kite" again and, no, I haven't changed my review. What everyone takes to be that camp, Kishman style of comedy is nothing more than inept filmmaking. The fact that these guys got a three-picture deal with Paramount is an inauspicious statement on the health of the American film system. Just take a look at this awful segment from an even worse film.

EXT. IRICK PARK - DAY (FILM)

We see the segment where the kite is chasing the Young Girl. She falls and looks back at the kite.

KITE'S POV

Of the Young Girl lying on the ground, screaming.

RETURN TO SCENE

Only, now, it is Liz in a red wig, wrestling with the kite. She screams and acts as badly as anyone has ever screamed and acted.

INT. COLIN'S OFFICE - DAY (VIDEO)

COLIN

Of course the critics didn't like it. None of them understood it. Not one realized that the kite is an analogy for prejudice. It only attacks red-haired children. Get it?

(disgusted)

Critics.

INT. /EXT. TAMMY'S CAR, IRICK PARK - DAY (FILM)

Tammy sits behind the wheel, looking up at the sky. Slowly, the kite rises beside the car until it is looking through the window.

TAMMY

(startled)

Uncle Harlan, no. It's me, Tammy.

The kite backs away.

Tammy grabs a machete and lunges at the kite, missing. The kite takes off.

Tammy jumps out of the car and calls Jonathan.

TAMMY

Jonathan, be careful. He knows we mean to destroy him.

ANGLE ON JONATHAN

As the kite swoops down and attacks him. He falls to the ground, bleeding.

The kite then attacks the mannequin. A loud CRUNCH is heard and the kite falls to the ground, injured.

Tammy and Jonathan quickly descend on the kite and stab it with their machetes. Trickle of blood come from the kite's wounds.

TAMMY
 (sobbing)
 Oh, no. Uncle Harlan, no.

Jonathan helps her up.

JONATHAN
 Come on. It's over. The Professor
 is in a better place, now.

They walk off, arm-in-arm, toward the car.

EXT. POLK THEATRE - NIGHT (VIDEO)

A long line of YOUNG PEOPLE extends from the front door. OTHERS wait behind barricades. Many are in costume, wearing kite suits and waving kite puppets.

TWO BOYS are dressed as the Professor, ANOTHER as Jonathan and ONE as Ashley.

Shrieks are heard as a stretch limo pulls up. Ashley gets out.

ADOLESCENT BOY
 I love you, Tammy.

Ashley enters, the epitome of the Hollywood starlet. She is dressed in a low-cut gown and poses for the myriad flashbulbs.

Bill Prinz gets out next, looking tan and manicured. There are more SHRIEKS from the crowd.

TEENAGE GIRL 1
 Make love to me, Jonathan.

TEENAGE GIRL 2
 Make love to me, Jonathan.

Another limo pulls up and Colin gets out, dressed in a tuxedo and escorting Liz who looks elegant in an evening gown. She swats away a child who asks for an autograph and hurriedly pulls Colin inside the theatre.

A black motorcycle pulls up on the sidewalk and PEOPLE scatter. The rider gets off and we see it is Aspen.

Next, the Young Girl arrives in a wheelchair and wearing a neck brace. She is being pushed by her Mother. They are swarmed by a pack of pre-pubescent girls and the last we see of them is the wheelchair tipping over.

INT. POLK THEATRE - NIGHT (VIDEO)

We see several of the AUDIENCE MEMBERS, the light from the screen shimmering on their faces. They deliver the final lines of the film with the actors on the screen.

FEMALE CROWD

Oh, no. Uncle Harlan. No.

MALE CROWD

Come on. It's over. The Professor is in a much better place, now.

EXT. IRICK PARK - DAY (FILM)

After Tammy and Jonathan walk off, the camera remains on the kite. A breeze lifts it and turns it over, revealing a dozen baby killer kites below.

The Crowd OOOH'S and AAAH'S.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

GRAPHIC:

"This Film Is Dedicated To Shorty Logan. 'There's nothing he wouldn't do'."

INT. COLIN'S OFFICE - DAY (VIDEO)

COLIN

I am very busy, right now. We begin principle photography on "Prom Bomb" next week and I'm just finishing the script for "The Town That Couldn't Spell", which we hope to have in production by the time Carl gets out... if we can straighten out this I.R.S. thing.

INT. BARREN ROOM - DAY (VIDEO)

Carl finishes the last of a cigarette butt and looks nervously over his shoulder. He checks his watch.

CARL

Do I have any advice for young filmmakers?

On the SOUND of a jail cell opening, the camera pans over to reveal the jail bars beside Carl as the GUARD enters.

CARL
Yeah, take care of the legal work
first. Trust me.

The Guard leads Carl out of the cell.

FADE TO BLACK.

ROLL CREDITS.

PROSTITUTES
Screenplay
by
Stacy Cochran

FADE IN:

EXT. LONG ISLAND CITY, NEW YORK - 5 A.M.

It's a dirty early morning. The sun isn't up. There's nobody out on 44th Drive near the entrance to the E train.

A MAN'S VOICE comes up over the wide flat road, breathing and panting, panting and pleading, barely getting the words out.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Please -- oh, please. Oh --

He yells out a quick and panicky orgasm and then it is quiet.

A PROSTITUTE in a rabbit-fur jacket comes up and out of the subway. She unwraps a stick of gum casually, folds it into her mouth. She's headed west, down toward the river.

There are only the sounds of the morning and of her heels on the sidewalk.

EXT. LONG ISLAND CITY

Another angle on the neighborhood, this time south down Vernon Boulevard.

LISA, the prostitute, has made a left. She's a block from home.

INT. KITCHEN IN LISA'S ROWHOUSE APARTMENT - SOON AFTER

She opens up the refrigerator. She's still in her coat. She pinches the gum out of her mouth and flicks it into the garbage.

She bends and pulls open the stiff squeaky fruit bin down by the floor and takes out an apple.

She walks into the room with it.

INT. RAY'S BEDROOM - LISA'S APARTMENT - SOON AFTER

Lisa sits at the foot of a narrow bed. There are curtains on the window in here. It's dim, but not entirely dark.

RAY, a kid about 12, is in the bed under the blankets.

Lisa is eating the apple. She's sitting on the bed near his feet.

RAY
Why don't you brush your teeth?

LISA
I brushed my teeth.

RAY
You did not.

He's lying there, facing the wall, doesn't move.

LISA
For your information, apples are
known as nature's toothbrush.

RAY
You need more than a fuckin' apple
to clean that mouth out.

LISA
Shut up.

RAY
I can smell it.

LISA
I said shut up.

RAY
It must be in your hair or
something. 'Cause I can really
smell it.

Lisa gets up and walks out of the room.

INT. KITCHEN AGAIN - AN HOUR LATER - 6:00 A.M.

The rabbit-fur jacket is hung on the back of a kitchen chair.
The place is quiet. The sun is finally up in the sky.

Ray walks into the empty kitchen in a V-neck sweater, pajama
bottoms. He pulls the refrigerator open, just the way Lisa
did, and stands there.

He shuts it without taking anything and walks back out of the
room.

INT. LISA'S BEDROOM - 6:25 A.M.

Ray stands next to Lisa's bed. She's sleeping.

RAY
Hey.

Lisa opens an eye, enough to see up at him.

RAY
You sleeping?

LISA
(a murmur)
What do you want?

RAY
Did I wake you up?

LISA
What time is it?

She twists a little and looks at the clock on the night table. It's 6:25 in the morning. She has only been asleep for an hour.

LISA
It's 6:25, Ray. What the fuck!

Ray doesn't move.

LISA
What is it, Ray?
(she freezes a little)
Is somebody dead?

RAY
What do you mean?

LISA
I don't know. I'm asking you.
You're making me nervous standing there.

RAY
Sorry.

LISA
You look like a vampire.

Ray shifts his weight.

RAY
I want to do something for you.
Come on. Get up. I got a surprise for you.

LISA
What is it?

RAY
It's a surprise.

LISA
It's not my birthday, Ray.

RAY
Would you get outta bed, for
chrissake?

INT. KITCHEN - SOON AFTER

Ray picks up his keys. LISA picks up her bag and her
sunglasses.

The sun is a little bit higher outside, but it's still pretty
early. Not 7 A.M. Yet.

LISA
I look all right?

RAY
I think so. Yeah.

LISA
You know I gotta be uptown by 4.

RAY
No, you don't.

LISA
Yes, I do.

RAY
Let's not worry about that right
now.

LISA
I got to worry about it.

RAY
Dammit, Ma. Dammit, Ma. I'm trying
to do something, Ma. I'm trying to
do something.

LISA
(backing off)
All right. All right. I know.

RAY
(not backing off)
It's my surprise for you.

LISA
Great. It's great, Ray. It's very
exciting.

She looks at him and waits for him to cool it. They look at each other. She smiles. He smiles back. He heads out the door first.

INT. SUBWAY

Lisa and Ray sit on a barrelling I train, their backs against a window. It's black and moving fast out there.

Lisa has her eyes shut. She opens them up a little, to have a quick look.

RAY
I said keep your eyes shut.

LISA
Why? Where are you taking me?

RAY
Ma.

LISA
What? I can't keep them shut on the train.

RAY
Shut your eyes.

She shuts them.

The train pulls into the station at 34th Street. The doors open.

RAY
Come on.

Ray gets up and leads her out to the platform as if she were a blind woman. She keeps them shut. She almost trips.

INT. PENN STATION - SOON AFTER

Lisa and Ray are in Penn Station by the AMTRAK ticket windows. Lisa still has her eyes shut.

RAY
Open up.

She opens her eyes. People are moving past and around them.

LISA
What did you do? What are we doing here?

Ray holds up two AMTRAK tickets.

LISA
What is that?

RAY
What is it? It's two tickets down
to Orlando, Florida. 9:15.

She looks at him.

LISA
I know you're kidding me.

RAY
No. I'm not.

LISA
Ray, you're a moron.

RAY
Don't say that to me.

LISA
What the hell are you thinking?

RAY
Don't call me that, Ma. Don't call
me that.

LISA
All right, fine. Mister Brilliant
Scientist. Why don't you tell me
how I get on a train to Orlando at
9:15 and be back uptown at 4.

RAY
Ma.

LISA
What?

RAY
Don't you get it?

LISA
What?

RAY
You can fuck being back uptown at
4.

She looks away. She fiddles with an eyelash, briefly, then stops.

LISA

You know I can't do that.

RAY

Why not? By 4 we'll be in some bar
car lookin' out at horses and shit.

She looks at him. She starts to consider the sight of horses.

She looks around Penn Station. She feels invisible, standing here.

RAY

Come on. We got some time to kill.
(he's walking away)
Let's get something to eat.

EXT. CORNER OF 31ST AND EIGHTH AVENUE - SOON AFTER

Lisa and Ray rise out of the stairway, out of Penn Station. They step up and onto the corner of 31st and Eighth.

INT. NEARBY COFFEE SHOP - EIGHTH AVENUE - SOON AFTER

Lisa and Ray are in a booth by a window with vertical blinds half-open. The seats are cracked. The menus are huge and laminated.

There are donuts under a couple of foggy plastic lids on the counter and there is a full bar behind the register.

The WAITER is at the side of their table. His pants have a spot on the thigh. Ray looks up at his face.

RAY

You got any breakfast specials?

WAITER

Like what?

LISA

I'll have a toasted muffin and a
diet Coke.

Ray examines the menu.

The waiter waits in a deep daze for Ray to come up with an idea.

RAY
All right. Fuck it. I'll just have
French toast.

Ray slaps the Menu shut like a man and the waiter walks away.

LISA
We're going home after breakfast,
you know.

RAY
I'm starving.

LISA
You hear me? I got to get sleep.

RAY
Ma.

LISA
What?

RAY
It's a whole new goddamn world for
us. It's what we're gonna do. I've
planned it.

He puts the menu back in its upright position behind the
sugar and ketchup.

LISA
Listen to you. What new world?

The waiter returns and puts a crème de menthe cocktail in
front of Lisa.

RAY
What's this?

WAITER
It's creme de mint. For the lady.

LISA
I didn't order this.

WAITER
It's a gift.

LISA
From who?

WAITER
From nobody.

Lisa laughs.

LISA
Nobody?

Ray looks over Lisa's shoulder and sees a gay at another table. The guy's about 35. He's wearing a hat that says "Tom."

RAY
Get it out of here.

WAITER
Can't do that.

The waiter walks away.

RAY
(after the waiter)
Hey, Rex, I said get it out of here.

LISA
Ray. It's a fuckin' present. Shut up.

RAY
I don't like this place. Let's get out of here.

LISA
The place is fine.

Then TOM, the guy, is standing at the side of their table, still wearing the "Tom" hat. He talks to Lisa.

TOM
You don't want my drink?

RAY
Get the fuck out of here.

Tom doesn't even look at Ray. He's still just looking at Lisa.

TOM
Can I sit down?

LISA
Well. We were just - having breakfast. I don't --

TOM
Scoot over, babe.

Lisa obeys. She slides over, close to the window. Tom sits down beside her in the booth. He looks right at her.

TOM
I think I know you.

LISA
Oh, yeah?

TOM
Yeah.

LISA
Well, I don't know. I don't live around here.

TOM
I've seen you around here.

RAY
We live in Orlando, Florida, asshole. Get the fuck out of here.

TOM
(to Ray)
Shut up.

Then Tom turns to Lisa again.

TOM
I've seen you, in the doorway of Duane Reade on 49th Street.

She looks at him differently now. She says nothing.

TOM
Am I wrong?

She still says nothing.

RAY
Ma, don't talk to this guy. He's a loser.

TOM
You come a long way since then, I see.
(a grin; that was a joke)
What's your name again?

RAY

What is this? "This is your fuckin' life"? She happens to be a receptionist at fuckin' Disney World and we happen to live in Orlando, Florida.

Tom is still looking at Lisa.

TOM

I don't forget a face like yours.

LISA

You must be mixing me up with somebody.

TOM

You never had somebody recognize you before? A face like that? You never had somebody see you and know you fucked him?

She doesn't answer.

TOM

I remember you perfectly.

LISA

I don't know what you're talking about.

Tom looks at the crème de menthe for a moment. He's getting ready to say something. He looks up at Lisa again.

TOM

I started going back to that block a little while ago. But I never see you there anymore. I've been there a lot. The past few months.

She looks at him now.

TOM

You remember me now. How come you never come back there? Afraid I might still be laying there? Nope. Here I am.

LISA

I don't remember you.

Tom grabs a handful of her long hair and pulls it sharply toward him. It hurts her.

TOM
Yes, you do.

LISA
Ow.

He holds her hair in his fist.

TOM
Try to remember me.

LISA
Please --

TOM
What was I wearing?

LISA
I don't know.

Tom pulls it harder. Ray is still as a stone.

TOM
What was I wearing?

Tom pulls a bit harder.

LISA
A red sweater and orange jeans and
loafers.

He lets go and smiles.

TOM
That's right. You do remember.

He drops back a little. She looks kind of sick.

TOM
What did I do?

She doesn't answer. He waits for her to answer him.

TOM
I'm waiting for you to answer me.

LISA
You killed yourself.

TOM
Be specific.

LISA
You shot yourself.

TOM
You took my wallet.

LISA
You shot yourself in the heart. You
were dead.

TOM
In the stomach. But let's not
fight.

LISA
I'm gonna throw up.

TOM
You took my wallet and left me.

LISA
I thought you were dead.

Tom looks her over.

TOM
Well. I'm better now.

The waiter comes back. He puts Lisa's muffin and diet Coke
and Ray's French toast on the table. Nobody touches anything.

TOM
Food's here.

Ray can't contain himself any longer.

RAY
Hey, man, you are confusing us with
somebody else! We don't live here.
We don't know you. All right? Ma,
come on. We're late for the train.

Ray gets up. He stands up, but Lisa can't move with Tom
sitting there. Tom isn't moving.

RAY
Come on. We've got to get seats.

Lisa says nothing. Tom doesn't even look at Ray when he
speaks to him.

TOM
Sit down.

RAY

Mom.

TOM

I said sit down.

Tom waits for Ray to obey. And after a moment, Ray throws himself back down on the seat. Tom looks at Lisa, a new tone.

TOM

You want to buy some steaks?

LISA

What?

TOM

I've got some steaks outside in the truck.

Lisa just looks at Tom.

TOM

Out in the truck.

Almost involuntarily, she turns to look outside. There's no sign of a truck. She looks back at Tom.

LISA

What truck?

TOM

It's parked around the corner.

RAY

What the fuck are you talking about, "Do we want to buy some steaks?"

Tom stays locked onto Lisa. He doesn't look at the kid.

TOM

It's a big truck full of steak.
That's what I do. I deliver steak.
Beef. To restaurants.
(right into Lisa's eyes)
I've got a truck full of frozen
shell steak and I'm offering you a
bargain.

She doesn't say anything.

TOM

You eat beef?

LISA

Yes.

TOM

Yes?

LISA

What the hell would I want with --

RAY

She's not buying your hamburger,
Mister.

TOM

(right at Lisa)

Dollar a pound.

She looks at him.

TOM

Dollar a pound. It's an
unbelievable price. You can't argue
with that. USDA super-premium, no
shit, restaurant quality. Some of
those babies are heading straight
for the Rainbow Room.

Lisa says nothing.

TOM

Dollar a pound.

She says nothing.

TOM

Dollar a pound.

The waiter returns.

As soon as the waiter lays the check on the table, Tom has his hand on it. He picks it up and snaps a twenty out of his wallet, and hands the check and the twenty right back to the waiter, hardly looking up, barely interrupting his fix on Lisa.

LISA

You don't have to buy us breakfast.

TOM

I'm offering you a very good deal
here.

Tom smiles.

RAY

Ma.

LISA

Look, Mister. I'm sorry, but Ray is right. We got a train to catch and we've got a long trip ahead of us.

No one moves.

LISA

Could I get out for a sec? If it's okay with you, I just want to run to the bathroom.

Tom looks at Lisa and looks at Ray. Tom gets up and Lisa is suddenly free to get out of the booth.

LISA

Thank you.

INT. LADIES ROOM - JUST AFTER

Lisa slips inside the ladies' room, shuts the plank door and bolts it.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - SAME TIME

At the table, Ray is still sitting, and Tom is still standing next to the booth. They're left alone together.

Tom points a finger at his own heart, and shoots an imaginary gun at himself.

TOM

Powww.

Ray jumps up, and bolts out of the restaurant.

INT. LADIES ROOM - JUST AFTER

Tom breaks into the bathroom with his shoulder, easily snapping the little bolt off the wooden door. He startles Lisa half to death. She was standing in here, alone at the sink.

He shuts the door behind him. It's a very small room with one little sink and one stall.

Lisa backs up against the door to the stall.

LISA

This is a ladies' room.

TOM
Well, the men's room is flooded.
The waiter said it was all right to
use this one.

LISA
But I'm in here.

TOM
Why are you so afraid of me? I
never tried to hurt you. It was me
I was aiming at, as I remember. You
remember, don't you?

LISA
I said I did.

TOM
It wasn't our first date. Was it?

LISA
No.

TOM
We had a lot of nice dates. You
remember?

LISA
I'm not sure.

TOM
I bet you even remember my name.

LISA
I don't think so.

TOM
It's Tom.

LISA
Oh.

TOM
Sound familiar?

LISA
I don't know.

TOM
It's on my hat.

LISA
Yeah.

TOM
Sometimes, it's best to be
straightforward, I think. What do
you think? I think if you want
somebody to know something,
sometimes it's best just to say it.
Do you think that?

LISA
I guess so.

TOM
I guess so, Tom.

LISA
I guess so, Tom.

TOM
I want to have another date with
you.

LISA
You do.

TOM
Yes, I do. I still like you. I'll
give you sixty bucks.

LISA
You don't mean right now.

TOM
I do.

LISA
I can't do that.

TOM
I think you can. I'll give you
eighty bucks.

LISA
I can't.

TOM
Could you use eighty bucks?

She doesn't answer him.

TOM
I can't hear you.

LISA
It's not that simple.

Tom waits a moment.

TOM
I thought you girls weren't afraid
of anything.

LISA
Let me out of here.

TOM
You don't like being in here with
me?

LISA
That's right.

TOM
Why not? I'm not feeling suicidal,
if that's what you're thinking
about. In fact, I'm feeling
optimistic.

LISA
Good.

TOM
I have to admit, I was on some
medication that night, which
depressed me. I was depressed, I
admit it.

LISA
Listen, Mister.

TOM
But now I'm in the mood to live. In
fact, I'm starting to think that I
may have been chosen to live. I
mean, given the very close range of
my gun, I think it's pretty clear.
I was chosen. I missed my heart,
hit my stomach, and was found, in
the nick of time, by someone more
neighborly than you. I was chosen.

LISA
Mister --

TOM
My name is Tom.

She says nothing.

TOM
It was a rebirth.
(he's very close to her)
I have to thank Fate and thank you.

He runs his thumb along her wrist. She watches. Then she looks up at him.

LISA
I don't think you need to thank me.

TOM
Well, I do. For giving me my last beautiful sight before the lights went out.

They are eye to eye.

TOM
It was a perfect ending for me.

LISA
It wasn't the ending.

TOM
It could have been.

She says nothing.

TOM
You would have been etched into my eternity.

He smiles. She looks away.

TOM
I feel pretty bonded with you, honey.

EXT. TEXACO STATION - A BLOCK AWAY FROM THE COFFEE SHOP

Ray is talking excitedly at KEN, a gas station employee.

RAY
My mom's with this guy! You got to help her!

KEN
What are you talking about, kid?

RAY
They're in that coffee shop, down
by that blue thing. You got to come
with me.

KEN
Look, I'm not a cop. Hey, Vince.
Call the cops for this kid.

Ray is so frustrated, he is just about hopping out of his sneakers.

KEN
We're not cops.

RAY
(to himself)
Oh, fuck me.

KEN
All right kid, cool it. Vince is
calling the cops.
(then, after a moment, to
Vince)
I'm just gonna walk down with him.
Poor kid's about to wet his pants.

Ken gets up.

RAY
You're coming with me?

KEN
Yeah, I'm coming with you. It's
just the next block, right?

RAY
Yeah, yeah. Come on.

Ray is half running, trying to get this Texaco guy to move faster. The guy can't really be rushed.

KEN
I'm coming, all right?

INT. LADIES' ROOM

Tom has backed off some. His back is back against the door.

TOM
Don't think I'm not expecting to
pay you. I am expecting to pay you.

LISA
 (after a moment)
 What do you want?

TOM
 I want you to take off that little
 dress of yours.

She doesn't move.

TOM
 What's wrong?

Lisa pulls off her dress, and she stands with him in the very close space of this bathroom without it on.

INT. BEDROOM OF A MIDDLE-CLASS HOUSE - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

Tom bolts upright out of a dream, in his double bed. He's alarmed.

TOM
 Whoa.

LISA
 (his wife, from her side
 of the bed, half-asleep)
 What is it, sweetie?

TOM
 I don't know -- I -- thought I
 heard Ray.

Lisa listens a moment, to hear the sound of Ray's voice, from his room, down the hall. It's quiet.

LISA
 I didn't hear him.

TOM
 I thought I heard him --

Quiet a minute. Tom's heart is still pounding.

LISA
 I don't hear him now.

TOM
 I'll go check.

Tom tries to shake himself more awake as he climbs out of bed in the dark.

INT. RAY'S BEDROOM

Tom is sitting at the foot of Ray's bed. Ray is in the bed, watching his dad, concerned about him.

RAY
Whatsamatter, Dad?

TOM
I don't know. I had a bad dream again.

RAY
You want to tell me about it?

TOM
No.

RAY
Why not?

Tom looks pretty distracted. Ray looks pretty concerned.

RAY
What's with you, Dad?

TOM
I don't know.

RAY
Are things okay at work?

TOM
Yeah.

RAY
Good.

They look at each other.

RAY
Dad.

TOM
I'm sorry about this, Ray. It was nothing. I shouldn't have even mentioned it.

INT. TOM AND LISA'S BEDROOM - SOON AFTER

Tom climbs back into bed. Lisa has been waiting for him.

LISA
What's up?

TOM
Nothing.

LISA
Was he awake?

TOM
He had a nightmare.

LISA
Oh, yeah? I thought he was getting
too big for the boogeyman.

She looks at Tom.

TOM
Apparently not.

LISA
Come'ere.

TOM
What?

LISA
Come'ere.

Lisa crawls over Tom and starts to go for him.

TOM
Lisa.

Tom looks down at Lisa's face, near his waist.

GO TO BLACK

THE END

JOHN

By

Jerome A. Nachman

Story by

J. B. Sugar

EXT. MATTEO'S - EVENING

It is just a few minutes before the restaurant opens. MATTEO'S is the type of place where every night dinner is a major event. It feels like backstage at a Broadway play.

The HEAD PARKING ATTENDANT adjusts a tie here, a collar there, making sure his charges look sharp. WE FOLLOW the Head Parking Attendant through the gleaming doors, into the restaurant.

INT. MATTEO'S - EVENING

The walls are covered with signed headshots of Hollywood legends, the waiters are all liveried and carefully coiffed. The restaurant exudes an aura of money and affluence not often seen in the 90's.

The Parking Attendant passes the front desk, where JOHN (50's) is looking over the reservation book. He looks older than his years. He's dressed in a simple grey smock and dark slacks. He is carefully groomed and exudes a feeling of importance yet there is an inherent sadness about him.

John notes certain names in the book with a discrete nod and smile, as if looking forward to seeing old friends. He turns and heads through the bar where ERNIE, late 40's, is just finishing concocting a martini. He arranges lemon peels, lime wedges, olives, onions and maraschino cherries in their respective dishes. He glances up at John and fingers his jacket.

ERNIE

Hey John? Hey... whadayya think of the new threads? Matteo's kid thinks our image needs updating.

John smiles, shakes his head and continues on his way. Ernie leaves the bar and moves towards the main dining room, martini in hand.

INT. DINING ROOM - EVENING

WAITERS and CAPTAINS are making final adjustments to tables covered in heavy linen and set with an abundance forks and spoons. The finishing touches are placed on intricate flower arrangements.

VITO (50's) the seasoned Maitre d', walks backwards as he surveys his stage. Ernie approaches Vito and cautiously hands him the martini. Vito takes a sip, rolls it around in his mouth and swallows it.

VITO

Damn near perfect, Ernie. A little lighter on the vermouth though.

ERNIE

Lighter on the vermouth? After 15 years don't you think I know how to make a martini, Vito?

Vito smiles and smacks Ernie heartily on the back. Ernie exits.

Vito's eyes scour the room. Satisfied all is in place, he bellows:

VITO

OK... We ready? Let's get this show on the road!

INT. MEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

A Porter, ENRIQUE, Latin (20's), sticks out like a sore thumb compared to the other employees at Matteo's. His bad attitude and greasy hair give away post-teen angst.

Enrique throws buckets of ice cubes into the drain portions of the urinals. The urinals are of an earlier age, full length, starting at the floor and rising four full feet up the walls.

The Men's room is ornate and anachronistic; a throwback to the time when public spaces were elegant and fanciful. Enrique gathers his buckets and makes his way to the door.

The door opens and John enters.

JOHN

Good crowd coming tonight, Ricky. The place is booked.

ENRIQUE

Lotsa guys'll be pissing on your ice.

JOHN

It's the little things that count Ricky. The personal touches keep customers coming back.

ENRIQUE

Yeah, well some day it's gonna be me pissing on those cubes, mi hijo.

JOHN

It's good to have goals. Stick close by, I'm gonna need a refill tonight. Second load of cubes.

ENRIQUE

Yeah, right.

Enrique exits, mumbling.

ENRIQUE

Goals? Shit... what does that puto know 'bout goals...

John lovingly prepares his workplace. Atop linen napkins sit rows of hair brushes and combs. Some combs float in vertical containers of blue disinfectant. Bottles of various types of mouthwash sit next to stacks of tiny paper cups. On the shelf near the sink lies the centerpiece of this theatre of toiletries: a row of colognes ranging from Old Spice to Drakkar to Grey Flannel.

Located prominently at the center of the sink area is a wicker basket about the size of a large ashtray. John lines it with a linen napkin and primes it with fresh bills: four singles, a five and a ten.

John adjusts his smock, straightens his tie and assumes his post, standing alongside the sinks, his hands clasped together in front.

As JERRY enters (40's), WE HEAR the murmur of the restaurant filling. He heads towards the urinal. After completing his mission he walks to the sink, zipping his pants. John adjusts the taps on the sink and pulls one terry-cloth towel from a stack on the counter, then waits until the Customer finishes washing his hands.

The Customer scans the array of products before him. He brushes his hair, pops a mint into his mouth and reaches for a cologne.

JOHN

Please help yourself, Sir.

JERRY

Thanks. I like that thing with the ice cubes.

JOHN

Helps pass the time.

JERRY

Yeah right, helps the hand-eye coordination too.

Jerry uncaps a bottle of cologne, drops too much into the palm of one hand, rubs his hands together, and rubs his hands over his face and neck. He turns to leave and John stares at him blankly.

JERRY

Oops, almost forgot. Sorry.

Jerry drops a dollar into the basket.

JOHN

Thank you, Sir. Enjoy your evening.

Jerry leaves. Vito enters.

VITO

John, you locked and loaded? It's gonna be a madhouse tonight.

JOHN

Three chairs, no waiting. Sold my first handful of Brut already.

Vito checks himself out in the mirror, starts to exit, then pauses, seemingly uncomfortable.

VITO

Your kid still headed to that fancy college up North?

John nods.

VITO

Incredible. I remember when he was born. They grow up so fast.

JOHN

Yes. They do.

VITO

You know Carlo is coming in tonight? I remember when he was born too. Hard to believe Matteo has retired.

JOHN

It's nice to see the business stay in the family though.

VITO

Yeah but the damn kid has let go half my staff; all he talks about is cutting overhead. Poor Ernie is working every night since he canned Frank. He said he wants to talk to you tonight about something.

John raises his eyebrows questioningly.

VITO

He wants to explain to you his "vision for the future of Matteo's". Listen... I gotta get back out front. Look John, it's not the end of the world. Hang in there, nothing's set in stone.

Vito exits. John's face is a mask, of shock. He reaches for the wall as if to steady himself.

INT. HALLWAY TO THE BATHROOM / DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Vito bumps into Enrique on his way out of the men's room. Enrique immediately tends to an imaginary detail and smiles condescendingly.

Vito notices a young man near the front desk. He hurries over to greet him.

CARLO

Vito! The place looks great. Nice and crowded with a wait. That's the way I like it.

VITO

Thank you, Mr. Carlo. Just doing my job.

Carlo heads towards his booth, passing an adjoining booth and its four occupants. WAITERS sporting bow-ties and formal shirts move around the room purposefully. They shoot looks towards Carlo. The tension in the room is thick.

The MEN and WOMEN (30's), obviously nouveau riche, are finishing their meals. Visible are the remnants of a lavish repast, dishes pushed away, napkins on the table.

FRANK

It's amazing really...

ROSIE

What?

FRANK

Guys used to do this everyday. Take a client to lunch. Eat steak, a baked potato, copla scotches. Then back to the Office.

ELLA

You want to end up dead at 35, Honey?

INT. MEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

John is sitting on one of the chairs, alone. He's pale. He stares straight ahead, sightlessly.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

LOUIS

Never mind dying. I'd need a nap. How'd they get any work done after lunch?

ROSIE

They did their work over meals and golf. My father didn't eat at home till he retired.

A waiter comes to clear the table, the yuppies continue their conversation.

ELLA

Speaking of business, we're not hearing much shop talk tonight. No deals on the burner?

Frank makes a silencing gesture.

FRANK

Hey let's not talk business, we're here to enjoy ourselves.

LOUIS

I gotta hit the head.

FRANK

Yeah, me too.

Frank and Louis exit.

INT. MEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

John nods at Frank and Louis politely as they enter. He still looks a bit shaky, but he has regained most of his former poise.

JOHN
Gentlemen.

The men walk to the urinal, ignoring John's greetings.

LOUIS
Done deal?

Frank glances furtively over his shoulder in John's direction.

FRANK
Filed today. Aumar goes public
Friday.

LOUIS
Holy shit.

FRANK
Go easy. Pigs get fat, hogs get
eaten. The SEO assholes'll be
watching this one.

The two men go to the sinks and wash their hands. One combs his moussed hair while the other drinks a cup of mouthwash, rinses and spits.

They take the towels offered by John. Louis pulls a large wad of bills from a silver money clip, finds a five, and, catching John's eye, waves the bill in his and his friend's direction.

JOHN
Thank you, Sir. Very much
appreciated.

FRANK
Hey! You bought my towel. What a
guy!

LOUIS
I consider it a good investment.

Louis laughs. They exit. John looks towards the tip basket and the new 5 dollar bill. He smiles sadly. The door swings open and Carlo walks in. John tenses immediately.

CARLO

Hi John.

JOHN

Hello Carlo.

Carlo walks around the bathroom, eyeing the colognes and mouthwash, fingering the towels. He frowns. He turns to leave, then turns back.

CARLO

Come talk to me later, John.

INT. MEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

The tip basket is filling nicely. John turns on a portable radio and tunes in some Sinatra. He paces back and forth across the bathroom, deep in thought. He heads towards the door, and peeks out. He sees Carlo sitting at his booth, smoking a cigar. He turns back and picks up the pay phone in the corner and dials.

JOHN

Hi Mar...

MARY (V.O.)

I'm glad you called. Can you pick up a box of cereal, something with raisins in it and a quart of milk. Low-fat, not skim. Ummm, I think that's it.

JOHN

Sure, honey.

MARY (V.O.)

You sound funny, are you ok?

JOHN

Yeah. I'm fine. I just called to touch base.

MARY

You sure?

JOHN

Yes... I'm fine... talk to you later, bye honey.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

People file into the dining room in small groups. All are expensively dressed and most are talking animatedly.

Vito moves from table to table, greeting regulars and introducing himself to newcomers.

INT. MEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

DAVID (mid to late 30's) steps out of a stall and approaches the sink area.

DAVID
Ate too much...

JOHN
Some Pepto, Sir?

DAVID
Naw, maybe later...

The men's room door opens and BILL, also mid to late 30's, enters. The two customers recognize each other.

DAVID
Bill!

BILL
David! How's the new practice?

DAVID
I wish they'd told me about HMO's
in med school. You?

BILL
You know trauma surgeons. Until
they outlaw guns and cars, I'll be
busy.

David leans against the wall as Bill scrubs his hands for a long time - an occupational habit. David looks on in amusement.

Bill rinses a final time, flicks the water from his hands and shakes his head as John offers him towels. Instead, David reaches around John to pull his own towels from the dispenser.

BILL
Heard a horrible story at the
hospital today.

DAVID
From whom?

BILL
Sugar. Orthopod.

DAVID

About?

BILL

Sammy Daniels.

DAVID

LA?... Point guard?

Another diner enters the men's room. John acknowledges the diner.

JOHN

Hello Mr. Sherman.

SHERMAN

Hey Johnnie, everything good with you?

JOHN

Yes Sir, Mr. Sherman. I hope you're well.

SHERMAN

That kid of yours still headed for Stanford?

JOHN

God willing.

John sighs.

SHERMAN

Stanford. Maybe your boy'll get to pork Clinton's daughter.

Sherman heads into a stall.

SHERMAN

(to himself)

Be a pisser. Old man works in a john and he's diddling the President's kid.

The doctors continue their conversation while combing their hair and dousing themselves with cologne.

BILL

Anyway... the kid took a spill at practice. Sugar did the arthroscopy. Meniscal tear. Some patella involvement.

(MORE)

BILL(cont'd)

(leans in)
Possible chondromalacia.

DAVID

Ouch! Hope the kid likes golf. Too bad. I'd better get back. Regards to Libby.

BILL

Will do. Tell Bonnie hello.

Bill heads for the urinal. David reaches into his pocket, locates two quarters, and drops them in John's basket.

JOHN

Thank you, Sir.

DAVID

And thank you.

David exits the men's room, humming the music from the radio.

INT. KITCHEN/DINING ROOM - NIGHT

A scene of orchestrated bedlam; Vito carefully inspects plates, wipes errant spots and rearranges garnishes. He cocks his head toward the swinging doors linking the kitchen to the dining room, giving permission for a waiter to proceed. He moves gracefully through the throngs in the restaurant to Carlo's table. Carlo carefully inspects every dish placed before him. WE SEE Carlo through John's POV.

INT. HALLWAY/BATHROOM DOOR - NIGHT

John tries to get Enrique's attention.

Enrique shakes him off choosing to ignore him.

JOHN

Ricky! I gotta have some more ice.

ENRIQUE

En-ri-que, En-ri-que. Ricky was Lucy's husband. You think all I've got to do is shag your ice?

John moves close to quiet Enrique.

JOHN

Shhh! Keep your voice down.

ENRIQUE

They tell me you've been workin'
here for over twenty years and you
managed to get along without me.
Why don't you get it yourself?

JOHN

I can't leave right now or I would.

ENRIQUE

Why? What the hell do you do in
there anyway?

INT. MEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

IRVING, (50's) an elderly retired banker, exits a stall and
moves toward the sinks. He begins to wash his hands. John
enters, flustered.

IRVING

Hello John. It's good to see you
again.

JOHN

My pleasure, Sir.

John uses a small whisk brook to remove dust and lint from
Irving's shoulders.

IRVING

You're a wonderful relic, my
friend, of a dying era.

JOHN

Sir?

IRVING

The shine stands. Barber shops with
hot towels... telegrams, trolley
cars. Marvelous things. All going.
Or gone, like that music you listen
to.

JOHN

Yes, Sir. I'm afraid that's true.

Irving drops a large handful of coins into the box and
leaves, shaking his head.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - MATTEO'S - NIGHT

THREE YOUNG VALETS in white shirts and black ties are receiving and delivering patron's cars. A COUPLE boards a Cadillac and drives off as a BMW glides into its place.

One Valet opens the passenger door and two long, silken legs emerge. DEBBIE, a curvy, young woman in a clingy sheath, emerges. She's attractive but overdone enough to suggest would-be actress -- or maybe hooker.

Her escort is GUISEPPE CALANDRA, dressed entirely in black. Dark silk suit, dark silk shirt. No tie. A Valet hands Mr. Calandra his parking stub; Calandra peels off a bill and places it in the Valet's hand.

VALET

You don't pay now, Sir.

CALANDRA

You take care of my Beemer, park it nice. Keep it up front. Capiche?

VALET

Yes, Sir!

The Couple enters Matteo's.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The Couple approaches Vito's desk. Mr. Calandra ruffles through his cash, searching for a bill of sufficiently large denomination. Finding one, he holds it in half three times, and places it in his palm.

A DOZEN PEOPLE are lined up at the reservation desk. Vito handles the crush with great grace. He notices Mr. Calandra and beckons him to the front of the line.

VITO

(whispering)

Mr. Calandra. How wonderful to see you again... I wished you'd called. I might have to ask you to wait at the bar.

CALANDRA

Do your best, Vito. Not too long, eh?

Calandra shakes hands with Vito and the bill shifts from palm to palm.

VITO
Just a moment...

The Couple moves to the bar. Ernie flashes a wide grin at Calandra.

ERNIE
Mr. Calandra. Always a pleasure!

CALANDRA
Ernie! Che diche?

ERNIE
Molto bene. What'll you and the charming young lady have?

CALANDRA
Usual for me, Cape Cod for Debbie.

Calandra slaps a bill on the bar. His beeper goes off. He looks at it, puts his arm around Debbie's waist, and whispers in her ear.

CALANDRA
Back in a minute, baby. Gotta go see a man about a mule...

Calandra leaves the bar.

INT. MEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Calandra enters and gives John a big hello.

CALANDRA
Hey, Chooch? How's life in the locker room?

JOHN
Good to see you Mr. Calandra. Busy night.

CALANDRA
Yeah, everyone's makin' some money.

Calandra makes the universal sign for phone... He goes to the phone, deposits a quarter and punches in a number. He hunches over and begins talking.

CALANDRA
I seen Vince. Niete. Nothing.
(pause)
Yeah, I know his vig is 3 gs. He's broke.

(MORE)

CALANDRA(cont'd)

I tell ya Al, if he's blowing smoke
up our ass we gotta do what we
gotta do.

(pause)

Hey... whatdya got?

Customers pass in and out behind Calandra's back. John is
busy.

CALANDRA

She'll be at Hollywood tomorrow.
Loong legs... a fast woman, eh?

Calandra snaps his fingers in John's direction and makes a
scribbling motion with his hand. John quickly hands him a pad
and pencil. Calandra waves John away and makes a brief note
on the pad.

CALANDRA

Uh huh... number four... only girl
hanging with the boys, on the nose,
right. She's a sure thing?

(pause)

And if Vince don't come up with the
vig, I'll take care of it.

(pause)

Alright... bye.

Calandra hangs up and washes his hands. John hands him two
towels.

CALANDRA

You're okay, Chooch. You remembered
I'm a two towel guy. Now I'm gonna
go eat then fuck that hot broad
sitting out there. Life is good.

Calandra throws a ten dollar bill into John's basket and
pinches John's cheek with his thumb and finger.

JOHN

That's very generous, Mr. Calandra.
Thank you. It's good to see you
again.

Calandra leaves.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Carlo's POV. Calandra and Carlo's eyes meet. They both nod in
acknowledgement. Carlo scans the restaurant with a critical
eye. He sees a waiter tossing a Caesar salad, Vito laughing
with an elderly couple. Ernie shaking a martini, smiling at
one of the regulars.

Slowly a look of recognition passes over his face. What the Hell is he thinking? These are the things that make Matteo's what it is... Suddenly, John appears at his side.

CARLO

John! Have a seat, won't you? Can I have Ernie get you a drink?

JOHN

No thanks, Carlo. I'm on duty.

CARLO

Oh right. You know... things are different since my father opened this place.

JOHN

Your father is a great man, Carlo. He hired me when I had nothing. I owe everything I have to him.

CARLO

I know that John. You've been with us longer than anyone. I've always thought of you as family.

JOHN

Thank you.

CARLO

Well... I've got to bring things up to speed.

John sinks back into the booth, preparing for the inevitable. A waiter shoots John a look of sympathy as he deposits a drink in front of Carlo.

CARLO

I think we're gonna have to change some things in the bathroom. I've got to cut some overhead or we won't survive. There are a lot more restaurants today than there were in my father's day.

JOHN

But Carlo --

CARLO

Hear me out, John. I've decided that we're going to switch to paper towels.

(MORE)

CARLO(cont'd)

The laundering alone is costing us an arm and a leg -- next week I'll have another dispenser put in if you think we need it. Just say the word.

JOHN

Sure, I'll let you know.

CARLO

Good.

A look of relaxation and contentment spreads over John's face. He slowly smiles as he exits.

INT. MEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Enrique mops the floor. John closes up, putting his combs, brushes and colognes into the suitcase. He counts his tips. It's a big roll, and, while mostly singles, there are easily several hundred dollars there.

John folds up twenty-five singles, and quietly hands the money to Enrique. Enrique is happily surprised.

ENRIQUE

Thanks, man.

JOHN

It was a good night.

Enrique stuffs his money in his pocket and exits. John follows Enrique out.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

John walks through the dining room. His tie is off and his starched smock has been replaced by a windbreaker. Waiters sit at a corner booth, smoking, drinking coffee and counting their loot. Ernie wipes down his bar. The Cashier closes her register; it clatters out final totals.

O.S. There's a chorus of "good night, John" from many of his coworkers. John nods and waves softly to each.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

Vito appears and smiles at John.

VITO

Johnnie! How ya doing? Can I give you a ride home?

JOHN

Naw, Vito. I'm OK. I wanna get some fresh air.

VITO

I know what you mean. I can't get the garlic smell outta my clothes. Bet that air smells good to you too. Take it easy, Giovanni.

John exits.

EXT. MATTEO'S - NIGHT

The valet stand is empty. John, shoulders hunched, feet scuffling, walks slowly through the parking area alongside the restaurant. He looks behind him, making sure he's alone. He pulls a cell phone from the pocket of his windbreaker and punches a number as he walks down the street.

MARY (V.O.)

(sleepily)

Hello?

JOHN

Hi honey.

MARY (V.O.)

(yawning)

Hi baby. I'm glad you called. I forgot to go to the pet store. Can you pick up a can of dog food for Gracie's breakfast? Whatever they have that's good. I'll get more tomorrow.

JOHN

What kind of Italian wife are you, no food in the house, not even dog food?

MARY (V.O.)

What kind of a wife am I? A wife who married a guy who thinks he's a comedian. Got anything you wanna share with me?

JOHN

Well... Remind me to lay two-hundred on the filly in the fourth at Hollywood Park.

MARY (V.O.)
Filly in the 4th... OK.

JOHN
LA's point guard blow out his knee.
So I gotta take New York and give
points against LA.

MARY (V.O.)
Is that bet with Ray?

John approaches a brand new Mercedes and clicks an alarm.

JOHN
No, it's not with Ray. One more
thing. We need to call Bobby in New
York before the market opens and
buy a thousand shares of Aumar
Interactive. Buy it in your name,
in your account. Dump whatever
isn't moving. And whatever you do,
don't tell him why you like Aumar
Interactive.

MARY (V.O.)
Why do I like Aumar Interactive?

JOHN
How do I know? I'm a men's room
attendant.

John opens the door and gets in.

EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT

And, to the sound of Sinatra singing "Luck, be a Lady
Tonight," we... tilt to the California licence plate: JOHN,
and the vehicle speeds away.

FADE OUT.

THE END

THE HOMEFRONT

by

Michael Zaidan

BLACK

we hear the sound of furious rain, followed by a THUNDERCLAP.

FADE IN:

EXT. RAINY EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE - NIGHT

Four raggedy soldiers emerge from the trees. They are soaked from the heavy rainfall. The ground is mudsoaked. Lightning strikes illuminate the area with BRIGHT BURSTS. The leader, SGT. JENKINS stops and gestures to the men on both sides to spread out. As the men begin to move, there is a BRIGHT FLASH as a flare is launched over them, illuminating the men in BRIGHT WHITE LIGHT. Gunfire erupts from in front of them. It is an ambush.

Jenkins dives behind a CRUMBLING ROCK WALL as BULLETS strike its surface. He fires back. BIBLE JOE leaps into a hole and returns fire. COPY CAT jumps over a tangle of BARBED WIRE and behind a BERM. He shouts into his RADIO for help.

COPY CAT

Romea Papa 3, this is Woodsman...
taking fire, we are taking fire...

A German HAND GRENADE plops into the hole next to Bible Joe. He SEES it just as it lands and jumps off to the side. There is an EXPLOSION of DIRT and a BLINDING FLASH.

BILLY

Bible Joe, you okay? Bible Joe?
Shit.

Billy crawls over the rim of his hole and exits frame as the firing around him continues. Jenkins calls out to Bible Joe from his position as well. With the same results.

The camera begins a slow pan across Bible Joe's body beginning at his feet. We pass a GAPING WOUND in his thigh. A piece of BONE protrudes through the skin. It is BLEEDING and STEAMING in the chill of the night air. Just as the camera reaches his face, he stirs. Slowly rising up on his arms he looks down his body. He screams in pain and horror.

BIBLE JOE

My leg!!! Jesus, NO... (ad ad-libbed)

We SEE the German GUNS firing from behind a stack of SANDBAGS. Billy crawls into frame, the guns firing just feet from his head. He pulls a GRENADE from his pocket, pulls the pin and lobs it over the sandbags.

There is a LOUD BANG and dirt flies back over the sandbags, hitting Billy. The gunfire has stopped. All is silent except for Bible Joe's cries. Billy jumps up and heads back.

Jenkins arrives at the hole where Bible Joe lies, writhing. He struggles with him, trying to apply a PRESSURE BANDAGE to the wound. Cat stands nearby, unmoving. Jenkins shouts at him.

JENKINS

Cat! Get a fuckin' medic! NOW!!!

Copy Cat takes off. Billy arrives and looks at the scene. He says nothing, just takes up a covering position in case there are more Germans around.

Our last view of the scene is of Jenkins trying to hold and comfort Bible Joe in the muddy hole. The camera slowly pulls up and away. The men get smaller. Jenkins looks up to the heavens, and the rain continues to fall.

DISSOLVE TO:

The sound of Bible Joe's cries blends into the sound of a train whistle. We HEAR the sound of a train running down tracks.

The camera moves down TRAIN TRACKS as though part of a train.

We begin to HEAR a VOICE that is reading something fade in.

JENKINS (V.O.)

... so this is it, baby. This is your green light to come and join me. I wish the invite coulda been fancier, but I guess I have all my life to make it up to you. I can't wait to see you again. All my love, Robert.

As the camera slows, steam billows forth. The camera pans to find Jenkins now in his class A uniform, squatting by the tracks holding a LETTER. The camera stops just above him. He looks off to his right. He stands and exits.

FADE TO BLACK/TITLE: THE HOMEFRONT

EXT. CLOSE-UP - DUFFEL BAG - DAY

A duffel bag hits the ground with a loud THUD. Dust flies around it.

BIBLE JOE (V.O.)
 -- THEN WHEN LUST IS CONCEIVED IT
 BRINGITH FORTH SIN. WHEN IT IS
 FINISHED, IT BRINGITH FORTH DEATH!

The camera pedestals up over the bag. We SEE a leg encased in a heavy metal brace. The camera continues up until we see Bible Joe's face in close up.

BIBLE JOE
 (same voice as the Bible
 Quote, addressing
 Jenkins)
 In case you weren't listening, what
 I said was DEATH.

BILLY, stands and scans the area nervously. COPY CAT sits on the platform, shining his shoe.

BIBLE JOE, is looming over Jenkins while leaning on a crutch which is supporting his dead leg. They are standing on the PLATFORM of an old TRAIN STATION. An American flag waves lazily in the light breeze.

BILLY
 (irritated)
 Bible Joe. We whipped Hitler's ass
 half-way across Europe while
 dodging bullets from the 29th...

COPY CAT
 (bitter)
 Fuckin' cracker battalion.

BILLY
 So off hand I'd say that there
 ain't presently any danger to this
 soldier that can't be solved by a
 shot 'o penicillin.

Jenkins reaches into the bag and pulls a small picture WHICH WAS BEHIND THE LETTER HE WAS READING. He FLIPS it on top of the letter, running his thumb over the picture then quickly stuffs both in his pocket.

BIBLE JOE
 Jenkins, you gonna answer me? Or
 you gonna let this fornicator bear
 witness for you?

JENKINS
 (voice reading letter)
 Listen, ain't no one bearing
 nothin' here. We're home now.

COPY CAT
 And hungry.

JENKINS
 And hungry. It's goin' on near
 thirty hours since we ate.

COPY CAT
 Sign says there's a diner 'bout a
 mile or so away.

BIBLE JOE
 You boys just remember that there
 shit that works on your burnin'
 dong won't do shit for your burnin'
 soul.

(beat)
 And Jenkins you watch yourself,
 remember I know your Momma.

BILLY
 (smile)
 That ain't shit -- everyone knows
 Jenkin's Momma.

JENKINS
 That so?

Jenkins attacks Billy, throwing him to the ground. They go at
 it. There's an aggressive competitive edge on their play-
 fight, they're soldiers.

Jenkins has got Billy on the ropes.

JENKINS
 You gonna take that back?

Billy's wheezing.

BILLY
 I take it back, I take it back.

JENKINS
 'Cause you know it was your Momma
 you was thinkin' of.

This reinvigorates Billy and the two begin to jostle again.
 Copy Cat's loving it -- Bible Joe looks irritated.

As they MIX IT UP an ARMY CARGO truck pulls into the station. The men stop their play fight.

Two MP's emerge from the truck. The driver, MP #1 addresses MP #2.

MP #1
I'm gonna check the schedule, see
what kinda wait we got.

MP #2
What about the cargo?

MP #1
Give 'em a stretch.

Their conversation is cut short by...

JENKINS
Hey MP, how about a lift into town?

MP #2 moves to the REAR of the truck.

MP #1
(sorry you're black)
Sorry, quarantined Cargo.

JENKINS looks back as...

The TARP of the truck is removed by MP #2 and...

A HEAVY BOOT emerges from the back REVEALING...

A number of GERMAN POW's flanked by the MP...

It suddenly dawns on the men that they are facing the enemy as they...

FREEZE AND time SLOWS. The Germans LOCK stares with JENKINS, BILLY, COPY CAT and BIBLE JOE.

The mens' stares HARDEN as they reactively tense in the face of the enemy.

The POWS exit the truck in slo mo, their contempt for the men barely veiled until...

The men START forward towards the POWS. We can see on their faces that they mean business.

IN SLO MO: the sound of a BULLET BEING CHAMBERED INTO A RIFLE. HALFWAY THROUGH WE'RE **SLAMMED** INTO REAL TIME. KA-CHUNK the men all freeze.

MP #1 stands, his gun pointed at the guys.

MP #1
 (cracker)
 You boys calm down and back the
 fuck off. Get 'em back in the
 truck, Jimmy.

MP #1 continues to hold his gun on the guys as the Germans are loaded back into the truck. He saunters down the steps and stops very close to the guys. Bible Joe puts a hand of warning on Billy's arm. MP #1 looks at their ribbons and CIB's, a sneer very near the surface on his face.

MP #1
 All this for latrine duty? Didn't
 know they were lettin' you boys
 clean toilets.

BILLY
 You talking about these medals?

The MP nods, wearing a big CRACKER grin.

BILLY
 You haven't been over, have you
 son?

The MP shrugs, saying nothing -- he hasn't. MP #2 approaches and takes his place behind his comrade.

BILLY
 'Cause if you had you'd recognize
 these medals.
 (beat)
 This one, for example,

He motions to a medal on his uniform.

BILLY
 This one is for courage above and
 beyond the call of duty.
 (beat)
 I got this one for goin' down on
 your sister.

As if remembering, Billy wrinkles his nose and waves the stink from his face. MP #2 tries to stifle a laugh. MP #1's eyes go wide as this sinks in. He's about to POP Billy when...

Jenkins and the rest of the men step forward.

JENKINS

Hey Billy, I got one of those too.
How 'bout you Cat?

Copy Cat shiver's as if remembering the horror of going down on the MP's sister -- imitating BILLY he waves away the stink. They're all having a little fun with this.

COPY CAT

I got one.

Bible Joe is with the men even if he may not approve of what's going on.

There's a beat, a tense moment, then...

MP #2

Let's go, Carl.

MP #1 hesitates for a moment then turns away.

EXT. DUSTY ROAD - DAY

The men sweat profusely. They gauge their pace by Bible Joe. The mood is light. As they walk they look around breathing American air, kicking up American dust, smelling American foliage, squinting up at the American sun...

JENKINS

What the hell you know 'bout wine
Cat?

COPY CAT

I know I brought back these seeds
and I'm gonna grow them onna farm.

BILLY

You gonna make Alabama wine, Cat?

COPY CAT

Uh huh. We all could...

BILLY

Sorry, Cat. But the only "vines"
I'm interested in are the ones I'll
be pickin' up before I head uptown.

COPY CAT

I'm gonna get me some vines.

JENKINS

How 'bout you Bible Joe?

BIBLE JOE
 Goin' back to the First Baptist.
 (beat)
 I might be one leg short of a
 shepherd but the flock still needs
 tendin' to.

The line gives Jenkins a contemplative moment but is broken
 by...

COPY CAT
 (trying to take back some
 attention)
 I'm gonna go back to church too.

JENKINS
 Copy Cat ain't you never had an
 original thought?

COPY CAT
 Sure.

JENKINS
 When.

COPY CAT
 (defensive)
 Alabama Wine, ain't that original?

JENKINS
 (laughing)
 It came from that crazy Italian who
 sold you that sack a seeds.

COPY CAT
 Well, on the platform then... 'bout
 you and your white woman.

JENKINS
 (irritated)
 Don't you start.

BIBLE JOE
 Don't you start? Ain't no one on
 this side of the pond gonna abide a
 black man with a white woman -- no
 time, no place...

JENKINS
 Her name's Arlene.

BIBLE JOE

I don't give a damn if her name's
Mary Mother of God. Ain't no white
woman gonna --

BILLY

(cutting of Bible Joe, to
Cat)

So what were you thinkin'?

COPY CAT

I was thinking that when a brother
hooks up with a white woman he must
be blinded by her skin.

BILLY

(amused)

Why's that?

COPY CAT

Cause they always ugly. If they
were black they couldn't get dogged
with a tenderloin round their neck.

BILLY

Damn Cat, that is a good thought.
Not too original but a good
thought.

(beat)

You got a picture 'o your poodle
Jenkins?

JENKINS

Billy...

Billy stands back, apologetic.

BILLY

I'd be obliged to see a picture of
the lady.

Jenkins takes a beat and grudgingly withdraws the photo from
his pocket. Billy snatches it.

BILLY

Now hold on... Man is she fine...

COPY CAT

Lemmie see... Lemmie see...

BILLY

Fine, fine, fine... Man I say you
send that letter NOW.

JENKINS
Give it back Billy.

BILLY
Get her down here an I'll give her
some service when she's done rung
your sorry ass out...

Jenkins snatches the picture away from him.

COPY CAT
Hey I didn't see...

JENKINS
Fuck you Billy.

BILLY
(to Jenkins)
What the hell's the matter with
you?

Billy shakes his head, disgusted.

BILLY
Brother gets a plate of white meat
an all of a sudden he's puttin' on
the Ritz...

Jenkins walks away, leaving them standing on the road.

EXT. DINER - DAY

The men walk toward the isolated and dusty diner. There is a
MAILBOX near the door. They stop.

JENKINS
I got to tell ya'll something...

Billy scans the diner front nervously.

BILLY
You see a sign?

JENKINS
No, it's about Arlene...

BILLY
Well I'm about done with that. You
can't get soft on those white
folks. And you've gone soft.

BIBLE JOE

For a change yer talkin' sense. Now
we just gonna stand here and starve
to death talkin' 'bout her or we
gonna get some food.

The men file in leaving Jenkins on the steps.

Jenkins LOOKS TOWARDS the MAILBOX, and contemplates sending
the letter.

EXT. DINER - DAY

The diner is empty, almost desolate. They approach the front
steps. The door opens and a chunky WHITE WOMAN in her late
50's walks out.

WAITRESS

Can I help you boys?

BILLY

(uncle Tom)

You sure could ma'am if you could
oblige us with something to eat
fore our next train leaves -- we
just back from the war and ain't
seen a bite in near thirty hours.

Jenkins joins the group. The waitress looks up at him none
too impressed that another uniformed black man has entered
the scene. She returns her address to Billy.

WAITRESS

(cunt)

I'm sorry boys, but we don't serve
niggers here.

COPY CAT

(sulky)

But there weren't no sign.

BILLY

(uncle tom)

We ain't no run 'o the mill niggers
missus we decorated niggers.

Billy laughs deprecatingly. The other all join in.

COPY CAT

Hungry, decorated niggers.

JENKINS
Hungry, decorated and newly
married.

The men turn to him -- stunned. The waitress fixes on him.

WAITRESS
(to Jenkins)
Thought you boys were just in from
the war?

JENKINS
Yes Ma'am.

WAITRESS
When d'you have time to get hitched
boy?

JENKINS
Got married in Europe before we
left.

WAITRESS
I didn't think they had no niggers
over there in Europe.

JENKINS
Well that's the thing she ain't...

BILLY
Allowed to travel... Cause, 'cause
all they got is niggers over there
and they need 'em now with the war
and all... for work.

WAITRESS
(suspicious)
That so? Then how come I ain't
never seen none on the news reels?

BIBLE JOE
Well that's cause it's against the
censors. They don't want no one to
know 'bout all that over here.

She takes a beat, her little mind processing the information.

WAITRESS
(June Cleaver)
Well, I suppose all decorated and
married and all you can go round
back and I'll have Cook fix ya'll
somethin'.

BIBLE JOE
 (to waitress)
 Thank you...

The men usher Jenkins toward the diner's rear.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BACK OF DINER - CLOSE-UP COFFEE CUP - DAY

The men are sitting perched upon boxes and other junk. They are balancing PLATES with EATEN SANDWICHES on their laps. Billy, glaring at Jenkins takes a sip of his coffee which he spits out. He pours out the coffee.

BILLY
 (to cook, O.S.)
 Hey cook, I said I want my coffee
 BLACK. No cream, no sugar. BLACK.
 You get that Jenkins?

JENKINS
 (blow off)
 Fine, so don't drink outta my cup.

BILLY
 So where you gonna drink your
 coffee, smart man? You gonna carry
 it everyday on your arm, in cotton
 country, no less!

JENKINS
 Ain't no shame.

BILLY
 And your children'll carry the
 stain on their face -- a last
 reminder 'o their dead daddy
 hanging from a tree like the bad
 idea he is.

JENKINS
 Where you livin' Billy? We're all
 back home now...

BILLY
 Where am I living?
 (beat)
 Look where you sittin' you dumb
 nigger. Cat was on the money --
 you're snow blind.

JENKINS
 No you're the one who's blind
 Billy, can't see past yourself...

Copy Cat hears something and moves towards the window at the back of the cafe.

BILLY
 Fuck you, Jenkins.

JENKINS
 (beat)
 How many children you got?

Billy says nothing.

JENKINS
 You don't even know.
 (beat)
 Well, I got a reason to be sittin'
 here eatin' in the trash, Billy, I
 got a wife waitin' on me, why you
 here?

BILLY
 I'm in transit.

JENKINS
 (facetious)
 On your way to HAR-LEM. Slip into
 the vines... You sorry jive ass --

Copy Cat is still watching through the window.

COPY CAT
 Oh shit.

The men move to the window and SEE...

The GERMANS INSIDE EATING. MP# 2 stands guard. NO ONE NOTICES
 the GUYS WATCHING.

BILLY
 (I don't want you to die)
 Now, you see what I was tryin' to
 say Jenkins...

Jenkins says nothing.

BILLY
 You understand?

Jenkins watches the Germans for a beat then turns away and begins to leave.

BIBLE JOE
Where you goin'?

JENKINS
I'm gonna send for my wife.

Billy shakes his head with resignation as Jenkins wanders away.

EXT. DINER - DAY

The Dusty Old mailbox stands at the front of the diner. Jenkins approaches it.

He pulls out the letter he was reading at the station and puts it into a signed, stamped envelope when...

MP #1
What chu' got there HE-ro?

Jenkins turns, startled by the sound.

JENKINS
Nothin'.

Jenkins turns away from the MP.

MP #1
Don't you turn your back on me when
I'm talkin' to you, boy.

Jenkins does not respond. The MP reaches around, grabbing Jenkins' uniform, and spins him. As he does he inadvertently RIPS a medal off JENKINS' UNIFORM.

Jenkins looks down at his ripped uniform. Then back up at the MP. He's got the medal in his hand.

JENKINS
Look, I don't want no trouble.

MP #1
Not so smart without yer coon
buddies are you?

JENKINS
I don't want no trouble.

MP #1
Then I think you better be on your
way.

The MP rubs his fingers along the medal he ripped from Jenkins' uniform. Jenkins eyes it.

JENKINS
Could I get that back?

The MP drops the medal on the ground and grinds his heel into it.

MP #1
Go on. Get goin'.

Jenkins looks at the MP for a moment then bends over to pick up the medal. He is REWARDED for his EFFORTS by a swift KICK that the MP delivers to his face, sending him sprawling.

Jenkins is down in the dirt. Blood flows freely from his mouth.

He takes a beat and, with a PRIMAL SCREAM, attacks the MP. The two go down.

We FOLLOW Billy around the corner of the diner as he charges into the melee. As Billy jumps into the fight the camera continues past the action and up the diner's porch steps. Just as we reach the door, it bursts open, MP #2 flies out, past the camera, cocking his gun. The camera continues into the diner.

We HEAR the shouting of the men. Voices yelling "HALT" and "NO", the grunts of men fighting each other. And then there are shots. Two at first, then three and then two more, cries of pain and then silence.

While this is going on, the camera is inside the diner moving toward the seated Germans. They have stopped eating and are sitting in shocked silence. When the firing stops one rises slowly, followed by the others. We follow him to the window and look out.

EXT. DINER - DAY

Carnage. The men are all down. Bible Joe cradles Billy in his arms. Billy is dead.

Copy Cat kneels unmoving, holding his bleeding arm. His face is blank.

MP #1 is down. His pistol on the ground next to him.

MP #2 is tense, rigid, still shocked by what he has done.

Jenkins, a bloody mess, appears to be dead. He's fallen near the entrance to the diner.

After a beat he begins to stir... He's disoriented, confused. He SEES...

The letter he was going to send to Arlene -- covered with dirt and a splattering of blood.

He reaches over, grabbing it and stuffs it into his uniform as he... struggles to get to his feet.

He's on his feet, he looks around.

Jenkins STAGGERS up the stairs to the diner.

INT. DINER - DAY

The Germans and waitress, now at the door of the diner, part as Jenkins, looking like he's on his last legs, enters.

He trails blood as he makes his way to a table, slowly lowering himself into the seat.

He grabs the menu that's at the table opening it but not looking at it -- rather looking right through it, his eyes glazed over.

JENKINS

(low)

Could I get some service here?

No one moves, no one makes a sound. He musters his remaining strength.

JENKINS

COULD I PLEASE GET SOME SERVICE
HERE?

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END

MARIA & JOSE

Written by

Catherine Nilsen

FADE IN:

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Letters from a 1950's style typewriter rhythmically BANG --

"AMERICAN FILM INSTITUTE PRESENTS"

We move along a row of male workers. Papers organized and stacked symmetrically on desks. Everyone is efficiently typing in unison.

Our move ends at JOSE, 30, awkward and lost. Tons of papers lying spread out on his desk. He types to a different beat. All the time looking caressingly up front to the only woman in the office, MARIA, 30, beautiful and unreachable, with her hair in a bun.

Suddenly, she seems to have lost something. She looks around her desk and quietly mutters.

MARIA

Oh, where did my earring go?

From his position Jose looks around the floor and sees the earring, laying by the water cooler. He's on his way to pick it up, but is overwrought by the other men crawling on the floor looking for it. Maria is mildly annoyed by their aggressiveness and superficial desire to help her.

When Jose picks up the earring, a coworker snaps it from him, and all the men in unison give it to Maria.

Jose is left in the background, no one pays attention to him.

Maria thanks them. At the same time a bell rings, relieving her. She hurriedly gets her stuff together and runs out the office. The men follow after.

Defeated and crushed, Jose gets back to his desk.

After a short moment he gets an idea, a vague smile forms on his lips.

As we pull away from him, he diminishes in the frame -- until it's a big room with a tiny man.

CUT TO:

MARIA & JOSE

(Typed on parched paper and pulled away from a typewriter.)

INT. EAR - DAY

E.C.U.:

Canned food being put against an odd, shaped wall.

Anatomical maps are hung up.

The final touches on a bed being scooted into the wall.

A drawing of someone's ear is hung up on the wall.

PULL BACK from Jose, who clasps his hands, content in his new home.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - DUSK

MONTAGE:

1) PULL IN on Maria as she enters through her front door, sounds of pleading male voices are heard outside. She bolts two locks and sighs.

2) An answering machine goes off -

MAN #1

Hi, it's Dave, I wanna marry you,
now!

Beep.

MAN #2

Patrick here, listen, I'll kill
myself if I don't get to meet you.

Maria stops the machine. A bit distressed.

3) Maria turns on the radio. A soothing song can be heard.

She opens her refrigerator and smiles, a moment of relaxation.

The song fades out, and a radio DJ starts to speak.

DJ

Our next candlelit dinner melody
comes from love-struck John to sexy
Maria.

Maria walks determinedly to the radio and abruptly SNAPS the knob off.

A frantic beat, like a HEART, can be heard.

4)Bed - night:

Maria lies in bed, tosses and turns, can't seem to find peace.

Suddenly, a faint CELLO melody is audible.

Maria gradually closes her eyes as the cello becomes more distinct.

We DOLLY around the bed to Maria's ear and slowly PULL IN as the sound of the cello increases in volume.

INT. MARIA'S EAR

We move through Maria's cavernous ear, recognizing through the shadows things from a previous scene -- a bed, canned food, drawing of ear, etc.

We find Jose, playing a cello by the eardrum -- longing, sensual, satisfied.

As the bow pauses from striking the strings, Jose listens to the echo of a calmed HEART BEAT.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Maria's alarm blares.

INT. MARIA'S EAR - CONTINUOUS

A drowsy Jose, still by his cello, jolts awake at the sound of the alarm.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Maria turns off the alarm clock, stretching after a good night's sleep before she gets out of bed.

INT. MARIA'S EAR - CONTINUOUS

Having completed his nightly chore, Jose sets down his cello, kisses a picture of Maria and collapses into bed.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

We PAN the workers who efficiently type and change lines synchronically. We end up at Maria.

She is a little behind the others in the linechange, and ceases to type because of it -- why is she doing that all of a sudden? Does the sound remind her of something? Jose's, whoever he was, offbeat typewriting isn't audible anymore.

She looks over to Jose's old desk -- it is empty. She walks over to it, touches the knobs on the typewriter.

The men in the office look at each other -- what's going on with her?

A rumble of thunder can be heard outside the office window.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - DUSK

Maria closes her apartment door, locks it twice and crosses to her telescope. There is a FLASH of lightening and she sneezes.

INT. MARIA'S EAR - CONTINUOUS

Jose is in the middle of cleaning the ear wall when the lightening strikes in the ear. He looks with uneasiness towards the ear opening.

Suddenly a sneeze can be heard. Jose reacts with worry -- this is new to him. Where did the sound come from?

Unsure what to do, Jose paces.

He throws down his cleaning equipment and runs over to his bookshelf, and pulls out a book titled--"FIGHTING THE EVIL VIRUS".

He flips to one chapter, "THE COLD." He quickly studies the chapter and gets an idea.

Out from a corner a dartboard and darts stick out. Jose is revealed, a warrior with protection, shield and weapons, slowly moving forward.

He stops in front of the eardrum -- frightened. He checks his map to make sure he's on the right track.

As he parts the slippery drum doors, Maria sneezes. There's a HIGH PITCHED GROWL. Jose shivers and puts his earmuffs on before proceeding.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - DUSK

KITCHEN:

A teapot whistles.

A tea bag dunks in a cup.

LIVING ROOM/BEDROOM:

Maria passes her telescope on the way into the living room, tries to look in it, but of course, nothing is visible due to the rain.

She sits down in her armchair with a blanket wrapped around her. She sips from her tea and sneezes.

INT. CANAL

From the bottom of a long, dark canal Jose is seen entering at the top.

He looks down with fear.

A sneeze. Big shadows. Loud noise. The virus is close.

Cowering in fear, Jose frantically throws darts towards the sounds. With each hit, horrific SCREECHES.

He stretches down far, so far, to throw a last dart that he falls in and slides down the tube.

Jose screams. It is a wild ride that goes on and on.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Maria sniffs in the air. She feels good again.

The rain stops. Maria reacts to it and moves over to her window to look out.

She enthusiastically grabs her telescope and looks out the window.

MARIA'S POV:

A cloud passes, leaving a big, beautiful full moon.

INT. TUBE

Jose is sliding down the tubes until finally --

INT. UTERUS

He lands in darkness with a THUMP.

Darkness.

Jose tries to get up on his feet. He finds one of his maps and tries to orientate himself.

A flashlight he's carrying starts to fade. It goes black.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT

Maria lies in bed. She turns out the light and closes her eyes... but not for long.

She turns around in bed, tries to close her eyes again, but they pop wide open. Something is missing... or, rather, someone is missing.

She begins to HUM Jose's cello song.

INT. UTERUS

We barely make out Jose's eyes and then hear the faint sound of the cello song as HUMMED by Maria.

The humming goes over:

INT. MARIA'S EAR

A cello lays on the floor.

A bow hangs on the wall.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Sunlight moves across several books in a bed. The movement ends at Maria, awake in the same position as we left her. Her eyes are wide open as if she has not slept all night.

Her alarm BLARES... until she finally reaches for the clock, gets the cord and pulls it out of the wall.

She thinks for a minute, then gets out of bed.

As she passes the clock we see that the numbers have fallen to zeros.

INT. MARIA'S BATHROOM - DAY

A tub fills with water.

A nightgown slips off.

Bare shoulders are visible.

A toe dives into bubbles.

Maria relaxes in the tub with a flowery bathing cap on. Slowly, as if testing, she dips her head halfway under water, a deep BASS SOUND is heard. She enjoys the feeling of it.

She moves her head quickly above the water again.

She moves her head halfway under the water again, the BASS SOUND is there again. Maria smiles. She stays under.

INT. UTERUS

Jose, alone in darkness, hears the BASS SOUND over Maria's hum. A far off glow warms and becomes almost inviting. The sound becomes louder, more sensual.

Jose stands and walks to the beckoning sound and glow. It's damp and sweaty, and things seem to be distorted, out of proportion.

Jose approaches the glow and is astounded, overwhelmed in fact. He slowly tears off his clothes and moves, like in a trance, toward a large EGG before him. He is filled with passion, lust and love. As if this was all he ever wanted in life, he runs and submerges himself in the egg.

INT. MARIA'S BATHROOM - MORNING

Maria, enjoying being under water, slowly drifts out of frame.

INT. UTERUS - LATER

The magic light has disappeared.

Jose slides down from the egg, exhausted.

Reality suddenly hits him.

INT. MARIA'S EAR - MOMENTS LATER

Jose enters the eardrum area with a pitiful expression on his face. He looks sweaty, distraught and insecure. He throws himself down by the eardrum and confesses.

JOSE

I'm so sorry, Maria. I didn't mean to... I just... I don't know, I was just overwhelmed... I guess...

INT. MARIA'S BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Maria stands before her mirror and removes her bathing cap, her hair flowing. She looks at herself -- new, different, scared?

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Maria waits patiently. Anatomical posters on the wall don't make her feel better.

A doctor enters.

MARIA
Lack of sleep right?

DOCTOR
The nurse will be right in with the results. Now relax, sweetie, you have no reason to be stressed.

MARIA
Stressed? Not so much anymore, but you don't know the men in my office!

The doctor grins --

DOCTOR
Well, I know the men in my office!

A young and handsome male nurse enters.

NURSE
Just as you suspected, Doctor.

They exchange an flirtacious glance.

DOCTOR
Thank you.

The Doctor opens the medical records and flips through the charts.

DOCTOR
Oh... Ah... Yes.

MARIA
What?

DOCTOR
You have someone inside of you.

MARIA
What!?

DOCTOR
You're pregnant. Ten weeks.

The Doctor smiles, Maria is shocked.

INT. MARIA'S EAR

Jose nervously hides his face in a pillow. He then reaches for his camera and snaps an instant photo of himself.

He whips a dart through the air. BANG! It nails his face.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE

Maria laughs.

MARIA
That's impossible!

DOCTOR
Never impossible, but always a
miracle.

MARIA
There's no way. I would never -- I
HAVE never -- there's been a
mistake -- you have to believe me.

DOCTOR
Oh, I believe you. I believe in it
all. That's why there's no mistake.

The Doctor winks.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Maria storms through her room, approaches a bookshelf, pulls out a book titled: "Unexplained pregnancies: from Jesus Christ to Anakin Skywalker."

She rips open the book and reads, desperately looking for an answer. As she turns the pages, she starts to cry.

INT. MARIA'S EAR - CONTINUOUS

A worried Jose runs to his cello and frantically tries to play his night-time lullaby.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Maria sobs like she's never sobbed before, tears roll down her cheeks in big stream.

She pays no attention to the music.

INT. MARIA'S EAR - CONTINUOUS

Jose puts his cello down, and starts pacing about, obviously unsure how to deal with the situation.

The crying makes BIG NOISES in her ear. Jose puts on his earmuffs, but pulls them off quickly realizing he can't escape the situation.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Maria's sobbing becomes a whimper. There are no more tears left.

She looks down to her stomach with wonder and anxiety.

INT. UTERUS

A rope falls down. Feet are coming into frame, a lantern is visible. It is Jose -- on his way down again -- this time more controlled.

Jose sticks his head nervously out from a corner, then back.

He walks forward with all the nervous anticipation and proud anxiety of a father seeing his child, the FETUS, for the first time.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

A rotund Maria lies on the doctor's examining table. A metal cup attached to a wire is placed on her naked belly. A small TV monitor BUZZES on, as Maria's face turns to its image.

DOCTOR
There she is.

A four-month-old fetus is visible on the screen.

MARIA
She?

DOCTOR
Yeah, and there are her feet and there, her head.

Awed, Maria smiles.

DOCTOR
Here, listen.

The doctor places headphones over Maria's ear. The DULL THUMP of a small heart.

And another heartbeat?

INT. UTERUS

Jose goes closer to the fetus.

JOSE

Oh, Maria... I'll always be here
for you, I promise. I'll take care
of her and you, don't you worry...

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - SIMULTANEOUSLY

Maria listens contentedly, calmly. She pulls the headphones
aside as if to check where the sound comes from, but puts
them quickly on again.

The doctor notices something on the screen. She points to it,
wondering, but shakes it off.

Simultaneously:

MARIA

Did you hear...?

DOCTOR

Did you see...?

MARIA

Nothing.

DOCTOR

Nothing.

They smile to each other. Maria strokes her stomach
caressingly.

INT. UTERUS

Sitting before the fetus, Jose reads world literature to his
daughter.

JOSE

It was the best of times, it was
the worst of times... you know, my
dear, the world is a big place.
Don't believe everything you read.

A Polaroid snaps off. We see Jose in front of his daughter -
now 7-8 months old.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

The familiar typing. But... this time the men are jealously looking at each other at the same time - who's the father?

A bright Maria, in her 9th month, gleefully types. Her hair is loose. Her rhythm is reminiscent of Jose's from his typing days.

We see her keys pond out: "Maria &..(pause)" Barbara". "Maria & ... Patricia." "Maria & Madeline".

MAN

Say congrats to the father.

Maria doesn't quite know how to respond.

INT. MARIA'S FAR - CONTINUOUS

Jose mimics the guy.

JOSE

"Say congrats to the father"...
Anyway, back to the names. How about, Rebecca. It was my mother's name.... you like that?...

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Maria's POV panning over the stars horizon.

Maria stands by the window with a telescope in her hand.

MARIA

Lea, maybe.

Maria gets into bed still reciting names, writing them down. She looks nervous.

MARIA

Nora.

Suddenly something happens in her stomach, Maria gets a little nervous.

MARIA

Laura.

INT. MARIA'S EAR - NIGHT

Jose reacts to it, too. He gets out his tuxedo and starts dressing.

JOSE
 Laura's lovely. But Rebecca's the
 way to go. I'm telling you.

He sits down by his cello and whispers the name Rebecca as he
 plays his melody.

INT. UTERUS

A 9-month Rebecca is turning around, getting ready for birth.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Softly and smoothly, in time with the sounds of the cello,
 Maria is wheeled in on a delivery gurney. She is in pain but
 seems to control the situation decently.

DOCTOR
 How are things?
 (off Maria's calm)
 The epidural's already working?

NURSE
 I actually haven't put it in yet.

DOCTOR
 You're taking this pretty well,
 what's your secret?

Maria breathes deep and shrugs.

INT. MARIA'S EAR - CONTINUOUS

Jose continues to play the cello.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE

In SLOW MOTION: nurses turning around, grabbing instruments,
 Maria's face that changes, hands on stomach, etc.

INT. MARIA'S EAR

The bow strikes the strings with wild passion.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

The nurse hands the bundled baby to the Doctor, who in turn
 gives it to Maria.

DOCTOR
 What will you name her?

MARIA
Do you like the name Rebecca?

DOCTOR
Beautiful. She's blessed.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - DAY

MONTAGE:

- 1) A door is pushed open, a stroller rolls in.
- 2) A hand takes away the answering machine, throws it in a trash can.
- 3) A radio knob is turned on -- Jose's cello music fills the room.
- 4) A planetary system hangs above Rebecca's crib. It CHIMES as a now one-year old Rebecca is being put to bed.

She looks up at the chime -- fascinated. She touches Maria's nose.

MARIA
... Mommy's nose, this is Rebecca's nose. Nose, nose.

INT. MARIA'S EAR

Jose riffles through a Polaroid album of Rebecca's first year. He is a proud father.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Mother and daughter continue to play.

MARIA
... Rebecca's ear, Mommy's ear.

REBECCA
Da - de.

Maria looks at Rebecca astounded at first, then speaks with compassion and love.

MARIA
Yes... daddy, that's right.

EXT. HILL - NIGHT

The WISP and turning of pedals and spokes.

A hand wipes sweat from a brow.

A bike rounds a knoll as we pull away on a silhouetted Jose biking against a starry sky. Jose parks his bike against a rock. He turns around in awe -- he's happier than ever.

The CAMERA PULLS OUT to show Jose standing on Maria's breast, his bike leaning against her nipple.

Maria and Rebecca's breath SOUND reminiscent of waves hitting the shore.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END

EL SANTO

Written by

Ryan Viguerie

Story by

Fernando Lebrija & Ryan Viguerie

FADE IN:

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

ANGLE ON TELEVISION

Dark images of the city: crowds, traffic, hoodlums, slums, smog, etc.

REPORTER (V.O.)
(subtitled)
Mexico: land of poverty. The
solution? Kidnapping.

Images of crime.

REPORTER (V.O.)
(subtitled)
Everyone from entrepreneurs to
petty thugs, from housewives, to
the criminally insane, is turning
to kidnapping as a means of earning
a quick Peso.

Slowly pull back to reveal that we are watching a television.

REPORTER (V.O.)
(subtitled)
Having reached almost epidemic
proportions, an estimated 500
kidnappings occur each day within
the city. At present, a full 33% of
the Mexican population is being
held against his or her will.
Experts predict, by the year 2150,
the entire population... gone...
kidnapped.

Pulling back further, we see the TV sits in a small, dirty, sparsely furnished apartment.

Standing in front of it are CLARENCE (an angry looking Caucasian holding a fly swatter) and MIGUEL (a pudgy, slovenly Mexican with a couple of flies buzzing around him).

REPORTER (V.O.)
(subtitled)
Reports of the latest kidnapping
tell a story that's unfortunately
become all too familiar:
unidentified men, and an
unidentified victim.

(MORE)

REPORTER(cont'd)

Eye witness accounts say that the two perpetrators, both disguised as wrestlers El Santo and Blue Demon...

Upon hearing this, Miguel gestures excitedly toward the TV.

MIGUEL

(Spanish)

They're talking about us!

He becomes more and more animated. Clarence mirrors his enthusiasm.

REPORTER

(subtitled)

... grabbed a woman off the street, put her in the back of a van, and drove off.

MIGUEL

(Spanish)

That's us! That's us! They're talking about us!

Miguel is practically jumping up and down. Clarence too is getting more and more excited.

MIGUEL

(Spanish)

Did you hear? The man, he was talking about us!

Then, in an instant, Clarence's expression drops and he whacks Miguel across the back of his head with the fly swatter.

CLARENCE

Speak-English!

TITLE: "El Santo"

INT. APARTMENT -- MOMENTS LATER

ANGLE ON TELEVISION

Sitting at his news desk.

REPORTER (V.O.)

(subtitled)

Here today, kidnapped tomorrow.

(MORE)

REPORTER(cont'd)

From Mexico City, this is Juan Carlos Garcia standing in for Manuel Rodriguez... who has been kidnapped.

ANGLE ON ROOM

Clarence stands at the window looking out over the slums of the city. He peels a fly off his swatter, breathes in a lung-full of smog, SIGHS, and flicks the fly out the window.

CLARENCE

Ahhhh, Mexico: land of opportunity.

In the corner, the woman sits tied to a chair. Her face is wrapped entirely in duct tape.

Miguel sits at the table - one of the few pieces of furniture in the room - and rubs his head. While pretending to look at a wrestling magazine, he stares at the woman.

Clarence looks over at the girl and makes the gesture of cutting off one of his fingers. He blows her a kiss, then walks over to join Miguel at the table.

CLARENCE

Okay. Let's do this.

Clarence prepares himself: he becomes still, he closes his eyes, he takes in a deep breath.

CLARENCE

Okay. Give me the number.

He looks at the scrap of paper Miguel hands him.

CLARENCE

Ready?

Miguel nods.

He takes in a breath, then dials.

MIGUEL

Hey, make sure he knows we mean business. Yeah?

Clarence nods. The phone RINGS a few times, then:

CLARENCE

(yelling)

All right, listen up you bloated, ugly, stinking piece of pig shit!

(MORE)

CLARENCE(cont'd)

We're gonna fuck her up and we're gonna fuck her up good! We're gonna cut off her fingers! And slit her wrists! And blow her brains out! And eat her eyeballs! And step on her liver! And stick a really hot poker up her ass!

MIGUEL

And slap her!

CLARENCE

And slap her!

Clarence registers that last remark a second too late.

CLARENCE

And break every last, single, fucking bone in her...

Clarence stops. He listens for a second, then hands the phone over to Miguel.

CLARENCE

He doesn't speak English.

MIGUEL

Oh.

Miguel takes the phone from Clarence.

MIGUEL

(subtitled, yelling)

All right, listen up you bloated, ugly, stinking piece of pig shit! We're gonna fuck her up and we're gonna fuck her up good! We're gonna cut off her fingers! And slit her wrists! And blow her brains out! And eat her eyeballs! And step on her liver! And stick a really hot poker up her ass! And slap her! And break every last single fucking bone in her...

Miguel stops. He listens for a second.

MIGUEL

Que?

He listens.

MIGUEL

Tu hija.

He listens.

MIGUEL

Oh.

He hangs up.

CLARENCE

What did he say?

MIGUEL

El Guopo says he does not have a daughter.

CLARENCE

What do you mean he doesn't have a daughter?

MIGUEL

I mean, he says he does not have a daughter.

CLARENCE

Oh.

Clarence pauses for a second, then slowly rises from the table. He pulls out a baseball bat, holds it over his head, then begins to SCREAM as he slams it down onto the phone again, and again, and again.

INT. APARTMENT - LATER

Miguel watches TV.

Now and then he peeks a look at the woman. Her eyes move about nervously as if she knows she's being watched.

Accidentally, she makes eye contact with Miguel. Quickly, she looks away. A moment passes. She looks back and sees Miguel staring back at her. He smiles. She responds politely with her eyebrows. After a few more moments, Miguel clears his throat, summons up his courage, and:

MIGUEL

Hola.

She looks around then shrugs a greeting with her eyebrows.

Miguel gets up, walks over, and shyly sits down opposite her. After a few moments of consideration, he opens his mouth, begins to say something, but stops. The woman waits expectantly. Miguel struggles to find the words.

MIGUEL

Em... em... uh... em...

Finally:

MIGUEL

I like your feet.

Just then, Clarence busts in through the front door. Miguel immediately stands.

CLARENCE

Today...

He throws a box of razor blades onto the table.

CLARENCE

... is the day.

MIGUEL

Em, what day is that?

CLARENCE

The day the princess loses her
fucking finger.

MIGUEL

Oh.

Clarence stares at her hard, ill-intent written all over his face.

Then, without even looking at him, he shoves a razor blade at Miguel.

CLARENCE

Here.

Miguel considers for a second, then passes the blade back to Clarence.

MIGUEL

I do not think so.

Clarence takes it, considers, then passes it back to Miguel.

CLARENCE

I want you to fuck'n do it!

MIGUEL

I do not think so.

CLARENCE
Fuck'n do it!

MIGUEL
I do not think so.

CLARENCE
Fuck'n do it!

MIGUEL
I do not think so.

CLARENCE
Fuck'n do it!

MIGUEL
I do not think so.

CLARENCE
Okay! I'll do it! Jeez! Big fuck'n deal, right?

Clarence takes the blade. He approaches her slowly, reluctantly. Her eyes bug out in panic. He awkwardly brings the blade closer and closer. She begins to make MUFFLED SOUNDS. Miguel looks uncomfortable. The blade gets closer and closer.

MIGUEL
Wait!

Clarence gratefully stops.

MIGUEL
Why does it have to be a finger?

CLARENCE
What do you mean?

MIGUEL
We need to send him a part of her body to show him we mean business, yes?

CLARENCE
Yeah.

MIGUEL
Well, there are many parts of the body. No?

Clarence looks interested.

EXT. MANSION - DAY

A middle aged, Mexican business man opens his front door and walks out to his mail box. On it is written "EL GUOPO."

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

WOMAN

The camera pans along her toes.

CLARENCE AND MIGUEL

sit at the table. Miguel holds a small box as if trying to determine its weight.

MIGUEL

What do you think? The 20 Peso stamp with the donkey, or the 30 Peso stamp with El Presidente?

Clarence takes the box and weighs it in his hand.

CLARENCE

El Presidente. Definitely.

MANSION

El Guopo opens his mail box and pulls out the small box.

WOMAN

The camera pans across her face - her ears, her nose, her eyes.

CLARENCE AND MIGUEL

Miguel now holds the box.

MIGUEL

I do not know. I say it is no more than 1 kilogram. I think we should use the donkey.

Clarence grabs the box and weighs it again.

CLARENCE

How many kilos in a pound?

Miguel doesn't know.

He hands the box back.

CLARENCE
Fuck it. We use El Presidente.

MIGUEL
Em, I think we will use the donkey.

Clarence is starting to look pissed off.

MIGUEL
He is kind of cute, no?

MANSION

El Guapo sits down at a table and begins to open the box.

WOMAN

The camera pans over her torso.

CLARENCE AND MIGUEL

CLARENCE
El Presidente!

MIGUEL
Donkey!

CLARENCE
El Presidente!

MIGUEL
Donkey!

CLARENCE
El Presidente!

MIGUEL
Donkey!

MANSION

El Guapo opens the box. He peers in. Instantly, he is shocked and disgusted.

CLARENCE AND MIGUEL

Their argument reaches its zenith.

MIGUEL
El Burro!

CLARENCE
El Presidente!

MIGUEL

El Burro!

CLARENCE

All right! That's it!

Clarence reaches into the box.

Miguel's eyes widen in panic.

Clarence winds up and...

SMACK! A disgusting, bloody, gory organ hits Miguel square in the face.

MANSION

El Guopo pulls out the same disgusting, bloody organ.

CLARENCE AND MIGUEL

Miguel wipes off his face.

We get a look at the woman - she is exactly as before.

Miguel picks up the organ...

MIGUEL

El Burro!

... and hurls it at Clarence.

Clarence ducks. The organ flies over him, through the air, and right into the woman's face.

MANSION

He looks again into the box, sees something, and pulls out a receipt. On it is an itemized grocery list, including one "Pancreas."

CLARENCE AND MIGUEL

Clarence, holding the organ, chases Miguel around the apartment.

CLARENCE

El Presidente, motherfucker!

MIGUEL

El Burro, you piece of shit!

MANSION

The organ is thrown onto the ground. A Chihuahua runs over, picks it up in its teeth, and runs off.

EXT. APARTMENT - ESTABLISHING SHOT - DAY

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Alone again, Miguel, as before, eyes the woman from across the room while pretending to watch an El Santo wrestling movie on TV.

The woman's eyes tell us she knows she's being watched.

MIGUEL

Hola.

He waits for an answer. She shrugs "hello" with her eyebrows.

Miguel stands up, walks over, and sits down opposite her.

MIGUEL

Em, I was wondering, em, if... do you... if you had... have someone who is special to you...?

He waits for a response. None comes.

MIGUEL

No? Me neither. I had a dog... but he died. You see, there was a bus... but that was a long time ago and very sad, too sad. And then I was sad...

Miguel trails off for a second, looks down at the floor, then snaps out of it, and looks back toward the woman.

MIGUEL

Em...
(thinking)
I like your ankles.

From the other room we hear a toilet FLUSH. Miguel instantly jumps up and runs back to sit in front of the television. A moment later Clarence walks in.

CLARENCE

(fanning the air)
Uuughhh. Guaca-fuck'n-mole.

INT. APARTMENT -- DAY

Clarence and Miguel sit at the table. In the center sits a novelty phone shaped like a cartoon character; this one is Garfield.

Clarence looks at Miguel for some sort of explanation.

Miguel shrugs as if to say "what's the big deal?" then dials the number.

MIGUEL

(Spanish)

Buenos dias. Senor Guapo, por favor.

(pause))

El Santo y Bluedaemon.

(pause, to Clarence)

Okay. He's on.

CLARENCE

Okay. You tell him that we're going to give him until...

MIGUEL

(interrupting)

He says he does not have a daughter.

CLARENCE

Fuck!

Clarence whacks Miguel on the back of the head with his flyswatter.

CLARENCE

He's fucking lying! Look! Tell him...

MIGUEL

He says to stop sending him horse kidneys in the mail or he'll call the police.

CLARENCE

Fuck!

Clarence whacks Miguel again with his fly swatter.

He grabs the phone.

CLARENCE
 (consumed with rage)
 Look! We cut off her fucking
 pancreas!... You don't give us the
 money... we cut off her other
 fucking pancreas!

Miguel takes back the phone and listens.

MIGUEL
 He says 'fine,' but no more mail,
 okay?

CLARENCE
 Fuck!

He whacks Miguel.

CLARENCE
 Okay... okay... you tell that
 little, fat, piece of...

MIGUEL
 He says that normally, in a similar
 situation, he would be trembling
 inside of his sombrero and would
 not hesitate for a moment to give
 us what we demand, but, under these
 circumstances, since he has no
 daughter, he says that you should
 go and do something unspeakable to
 a donkey.

CLARENCE
 Fuck! Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!

Clarence whacks Miguel again, and again, and again.

CLARENCE
 Okay listen...

(THE FOLLOWING TIRADE WILL RUN SIMULTANEOUS TO MIGUEL'S
 SUBTITLED "TRANSLATION")

CLARENCE
 You tell that fat piece of monkey
 shit that no one... NO ONE messes
 with me! No one! And tell him that
 we know he's lying, that we've been
 watching his house and we know all
 about his ugly-assed family! And no
 way am I going back to stealing
 cars!

(MORE)

CLARENCE(cont'd)

And if he doesn't stop with this bullshit, we're going to fucking kill her! We're going to poke her eyes out, and cut off her legs, and step on her brain... and run her over in a car... and throw her out a train, and... and... slap her around... and...

MIGUEL

(subtitle)

I am sorry. My partner, you see, he is very angry. Maybe he is drunk, that would not surprise me; he is often drunk. Often drunk and often angry.

A beat.

MIGUEL

I think maybe he has a small penis. I do not know. I have never seen it, but, well, I do not know. I think also there was a person who beat him when he was a small child. Maybe several persons. Maybe on more than one occasion. I imagine his mother, and his aunts... and his grandmother... and possibly any of the neighbor women would have liked to have beat him.

Miguel SIGHS and looks over at Clarence. Clarence is completely absorbed with yelling and smashing up the room.

MIGUEL

Sometimes I wish they would come back and continue to beat him... Oh, well... Yes, okay... Okay... Good bye.

Miguel hangs up.

Clarence abruptly stops.

A beat.

CLARENCE

Well?

MIGUEL

Huh? Oh, um, he says thank you, but, um, no...he would not like to pay the ransom, very much, thank you, good bye... that is what he said.

Clarence thinks about this for a second.

Nods, then stands from the table, eyes the phone, pulls out the bat, raises it high over his head, SCREAMS, and:

INT. VAN - MOMENTS LATER

Clarence drives like mad through the city. Miguel and the woman sit in the back. Miguel rubs her leg reassuringly.

MIGUEL

Do not worry my little mountain llama, I will see that no harm comes to thee.

(to Clarence)

Em, Clarence, do you think this is such a very good idea? Maybe indeed this is not the daughter of El Guapo.

CLARENCE

Shut up! I'm gonna show that little prick! I'm gonna show him he has a daughter! Shove her right in his fucking face!

Miguel shrugs.

MIGUEL

(casually)

Okay.

(turning his attention and love back to the woman)

Well, did I ever tell you about the time... the time I... no, no I did not. Well, one time, you see, I knew a woman... I met a woman... And she was very beautiful. Very, very, very, very, very...

EXT. STREET - MOMENTS LATER

The van screeches to a halt in front of El Guapo's house. Clarence jumps out and runs around to the side door.

INT. VAN - CONTINUOUS

MIGUEL

(sobbing)

But she said it would cost money!
And if I wanted... if I wanted
to... that would cost even more
money! A lot of money! - Too much
money! And I did not have the
money! And... and I never saw her
again!

The door slides open. Miguel quickly wipes his tears and
hides his face.

EXT. MANSION - MOMENTS LATER

The three of them stand at the front door. Clarence, with a
large knife, RINGS the bell.

MIGUEL

Em, Clarence, maybe he indeed tells
the truth. Maybe...

CLARENCE

Shut up!

The door opens, and the three push their way inside.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

El Guopo stands with his hands in the air. Clarence waves the
knife between him and the woman.

CLARENCE

All right, motherfucker! Who is
this?! Who is this?! You tell me!
Say it! Say it or she's fucking
dead!

MIGUEL

Clarence, I do not think he knows
this woman. I say we go.

CLARENCE

Shut up and translate!

MIGUEL

Clarence, I...

CLARENCE

Translate!

Miguel translates. Guopo responds.

MIGUEL

He says, he says... "not on the carpet."

Clarence glances down at the rug, then back up at Guopo. Another second passes before he lets out a long, anguished SCREAMS.

CLARENCE

All right, motherfucker!

He glances down at the knife, considers it for a second, tosses it aside, then grabs the woman and holds her close to him.

CLARENCE

Okay, how do you like this? Your daughter's a slut! Huh? How about that?

Starts to grope her.

CLARENCE

Huh? How 'bout this? Huh? Your daughter's a fuck'n whore! Yeah!

Now starts to kiss her through the tape.

CLARENCE

Yeah? Yeah? You like that?

As Clarence carries on, El Guopo watches with only the slightest interest. In response, all he can manage is a shrug.

Miguel, though, is getting agitated. Finally, he can take it no more.

MIGUEL

Enough!

He steps in and pulls Clarence off of her.

CLARENCE

What the fuck are you doing?

MIGUEL

Clarence, you can not!

CLARENCE

What?

MIGUEL
There is something... there is...

CLARENCE
What!

MIGUEL
I... I...

CLARENCE
What!!!

MIGUEL
I...

Pause.

MIGUEL
I love her!

A beat.

CLARENCE
Get the fuck out of my way!

As Clarence tries to step around Miguel, Miguel strikes a wrestling pose. Clarence tries to maneuver for an opening, but Miguel holds him off.

MIGUEL
No! Clarence! Please!

CLARENCE
Get out of my fuck'n way!

EL GUOPO
(in Spanish)
The statue! Watch the statue!

CLARENCE
Outta my fuck'n way! Move it!

MIGUEL
You can not! No! I am going to
marry this girl!

EL GUOPO
(in Spanish)
Watch out for the table! Please,
seniors, be careful! Be careful!

CLARENCE

You don't fuck'n move outta my way
I'm gonna...

MIGUEL

I love her! I love her! I love her!

Just then, a MAN wearing a ski mask enters the room brandishing a pistol.

MAN IN SKI MASK

(subtitled)

Freeze! Nobody move!
(motioning to El Guopo)
You! Come on! Let's go!

They pause to give him a second's consideration, then resume exactly as they were.

CLARENCE

Get out of my fuck'n way!

MIGUEL

No! Clarence! Please!

EL GUOPO

(in Spanish)

The painting! Watch the painting!

The man in the ski mask joins in.

MAN IN SKI MASK

(subtitled)

This is a kidnapping! I'm not
joking here! I'm serious! I'm
serious! I said move!
(a little desperate)
Come on!

Clarence grabs Miguel's legs, flips him onto the ground, and reaches the girl.

CLARENCE

(to Miguel)

So you don't fuck'n like when I
touch your girl? How 'bout when I
give her a big, fat kiss?

Rips off the tape.

Abrupt silence.

Complete and utter shock and disgust on everyone's face.

We now see what it is they see:

The "woman" - duct tape in hand, and only inches away from Clarence - has grown about a week's worth of stubble on "her" face.

"She" lets out a deep, baritone YELL:

WOMAN
(in Spanish)
Auuuuurrrghhhh-ly shit!

Again, silence.

Then:

EL GUOPO
Son...

SON
Papa...

El Guopo is speechless.

SON
Papa, I meant to tell you... I'm
gay.

Clarence drops to his knees - out of frame - and BARFS.

EL GUOPO
No, you're not.

SON
Yes, I am.

And Clarence BARFS.

EL GUOPO
No, you're not.

SON
Yes, Papa, I am.

And Clarence BARFS.

EL GUOPO
No, no you're not.

SON
Papa, I wear women's clothing. Yes,
I am.

And Clarence BARFS.

EL GUOPO

You are just confused. I went through a similar stage when I was your age.

MAN IN SKI MASK

(subtitled)

All right! That's enough! You! Come on!

The man leads El Guopo outside. Clarence jumps up, wipes off his chin, and runs after them.

CLARENCE

Wait! What about my ransom!

Miguel and El Guopo's son look at each other.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

ANGLE ON TV

A picture of El Guopo and Clarence tied back to back with duct tape on their faces.

REPORTER

(subtitled)

Still no information on the location of businessman Juan El Guapo and the unknown person seen in this photograph. Senior El Guapo was kidnapped two months ago from his mansion in Mexico City...

BATHROOM

The son of El Guopo - wearing the same wig, dressed in a nightgown - stands over the sink shaving.

SON OF EL GUOPO

What are they saying now my little burrito?

BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Miguel lies in bed watching TV.

MIGUEL

Nothing new my little cup of salsa.

END

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED DURING THE
CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

by

Charlie McNamara

TITLE:

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 27TH, 1962

FADE IN:

A BLACK AND WHITE VIDEO IMAGE of a vast dark grey ocean, seen from high in the air.

Gradually, a tiny spot on the water appears and grows, until we recognize it as a SHIP. Closer still and we can tell it's a 50's era TANKER, with Cyrillic writing on its side. It churns steadily across the water...

TV ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

... As we watch the Soviet tanker, "GROZNY" making it's way towards the American Embargo Point just a few miles from the island of Cuba, we have just learned that a US reconnaissance plane has been downed and an American pilot killed...

INT. ONE BEDROOM APT. - MIAMI - DUSK

The VOICE-OVER continues and melds with the sounds of Spanish voices shouting in a Cuban dialect. Heavy FOOTSTEPS clomp up and down the stairs.

We glimpse what lies beyond the brand new TV set -- a tiny ONE BEDROOM apartment -- sparse, modest, restrained. The TV is by far the most expensive thing in there. In the distance, the doorway to a bathroom.

Inside it,

INT. BATHROOM - DUSK

CYNTHIA HYDE, (20, serious, traces of fear behind a facade of control) faces off in a toilet-training stalemate with her 2-year-old son, Billy. She's agitated but hiding it from her son with firm resolve.

CYNTHIA

Come on now, I know you can do it.
Just --

A POUNDING on the door scares her. She catches her breath.

CYNTHIA

-- just let it go!

IN THE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

She opens up the door to reveal a haunted-looking man wearing a grey uniform and a HARDHAT.

He white-knuckles his clipboard and pen. His voice cracks when he utters...

UNIFORMED GUY

Ma'am?

CYNTHIA

Yes?

UNIFORMED GUY

Ma'am, have you filled up your bathtub?

CYNTHIA

What?

UNIFORMED GUY

The municipality of Miami is asking everyone to fill up their bathtubs. In case of a nuc -- So you will have enough to drink, wash with -- stuff like that.

CYNTHIA

Oh. I should do that?

UNIFORMED GUY

You should do that.

CYNTHIA

... OK.

He looks down and checks off her name. He looks at her and sighs heavily. His eyes move past her shoulder inside the apartment, then back at her again.

UNIFORMED GUY

Ah, you have a television! Mind if I... take a look?

He steps inside and within three rapid strides he's staring down at the screen. It's the GROZNY again, plowing grey waves across the Atlantic. His eyes bulge with TERROR.

UNIFORMED GUY

God help us.

He turns and is gone. Cynthia snaps off the TV.

IN THE BATHROOM -

A JET of water spatters violently out of the faucet into the tub. Cynthia wipes her hands on a towel. She glances out of her window.

In the apartment across the way, a PEEPING TOM watches her-intently. She flings the curtain closed.

CUT TO:

The tub is full. She leafs through a copy of Dr. Spock's, "BABY AND CHILD CARE". She pores diligently over the pages.

CYNTHIA

"... Sometimes resistance can be eased if the mother stays with him while he is on the seat, agreeably keeping him company and perhaps giving him occasional encouragement..." That's good Billy, stay on the seat now...

The kid stares innocently back at her.

CYNTHIA

C'mon kid! Poop for Mommy!

He smiles defiantly. Cynthia takes it in, then mumbles something to herself.

CYNTHIA

... Don't be like your father.

The PHONE RINGS.

CYNTHIA

Stay right there!

IN THE LIVING ROOM - SAME

She snatches up the phone, keeping one eye trained on her son.

CYNTHIA

Yes? ...Hello mother... Oh mother, yes I know, but I'm fine here in Miami right now... No, I'd love to see you too but this is my home now.

Billy wriggles impatiently on the seat.

CYNTHIA

No, stay there!... Not you mother, I'm talking to Billy. He's fine. Toilet training. TOILET TRAINING -- T... O... I... Yes at a time like this. Well I think it's as good a time as any... Mother... Mother he's my son, OK and I'll do just what I...

She takes a breath, and composes herself.

CYNTHIA

I know exactly what's going on mother! I happen to be watching it on the television you bought me. Yes, it's lovely. No, we're just as safe here as up where you are up there... Well if they drop the bomb they're just as likely to hit Cleveland as they are Miami... No, I'm not saying they'd specifically target Cleveland... I didn't say they're going to bomb you! Look, forget I mentioned it!... Mother... CALM DOWN mother!

An urgent POUNDING on the door startles her.

CYNTHIA

I've got to go, OK? I'll call you. Yes I promise. In an hour. Yup. Yup... Bye.

She slams the phone down and shudders. She gathers her wits. The POUNDING grows louder and more insistent.

AT THE DOOR

She flings the door open, revealing GABRIEL, (30's) skinny and trembling, clutching a brown bag full of ORANGES. He proffers the bag. Cynthia frowns, nonplussed.

GABRIEL

They're very juicy. Maybe we trade... You have toilet paper?

CYNTHIA

I think I'm going to need mine.

He looks crestfallen.

CYNTHIA

Look I'm sorry but I'm a little
busy right now --

A WOMAN'S FORCEFUL VOICE shouts in Cuban Spanish at him from
an upstairs apartment. He forces a wan smile.

GABRIEL

My wife, heh-heh... Um, can we
watch your TV?

CYNTHIA

I'm kind of busy right now.

She starts to close the door.

GABRIEL

But we want to look at the boat! We
won't bother you.

Cynthia looks up the stairs at Socorro, a large Cuban woman
peering down from the darkness over the railing at her. She
sighs.

CYNTHIA

C'mon in. But remember -- I'm busy!

IN THE BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Cynthia walks into the bathroom to find Billy, squatting in
the corner.

CYNTHIA

No!!

She scoops him up and puts him on the toilet.

CYNTHIA

There, isn't that better?

Billy sits.

CYNTHIA

Go on then... Bombs away.

Nothing. Billy smiles.

-- JET PLANES roar DEAFENINGLY overhead. Pictures shake on
the walls. The water in the tub vibrates.

Billy bursts into tears. Cynthia slams the window and is
freaked but she holds it together. She turns to her son,
holds him, comforts him.

CYNTHIA
You want some chocolate?

He snuffles and nods.

CYNTHIA
I'll be right back, OK?

She runs out of the bathroom, past Gabriel and his WIFE, Socorro (30's, big and motherly) who stare ashen-faced at the TV screen. The ANNOUNCER'S VOICE drones on in a deadly serious tone.

Socorro glances up at Cynthia as she blows past.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

She opens an almost empty cabinet and grabs a half-eaten Hershey bar off the shelf. A KNOCK comes on the door. She fumbles the bar and it falls to the floor.

CYNTHIA
Christ!

She picks it up, strips the wrapper and jams a large piece in her mouth. She chews and swallows, collecting her wits. She takes a long, deep breath and lets it out.

AT THE DOOR -

She opens the door on a startled YOUNG COUPLE -- JANET AND DAVE. They're skinny -- vegan poets maybe... Dave wears a goatee.

JANET
Hi.

DAVE
Hey.

CYNTHIA
Hello.

JANET
I'm Janet.

DAVE
I'm Dave.

CYNTHIA
I'm busy.

JANET

Yes, but are you OK? We thought we might as well introduce ourselves. We thought, now's as good a time as any didn't we Dave?

DAVE

Yeah man, yeah...

JANET

I mean how long have you been living here? And we haven't met yet? I mean it's just crazy, isn't it Dave?

DAVE

Yeah man, crazy.

JANET

Especially now. It's a good time to be together...

Janet glances in at the TV; Socorro and Gabriel on the couch watch in terror.

CYNTHIA

So...

JANET

What's um, what's happening with the blockade? Have you heard anything?

She glances in again.

JANET

I mean it's been twelve days now!

CYNTHIA

Oh, uh, yeah I don't know, see we're kinda busy toilet training right now and...

They're not even listening to her.

CYNTHIA

Well, I guess you'd better come in then!

They rush past without saying a word. Cynthia calls after them.

CYNTHIA
There's nothing to look at!

IN THE LIVING ROOM - SAME

Socorro, Gabriel, Janet and Dave sit petrified, watching TV.

GABRIEL
How fast is that thing going?

DAVE
It looks really slow but it's
fuckin' moving!

A pause. Gabriel swallows.

They watch some more. Socorro's eyes wander over to the bathroom door.

SOCORRO
What she's doing in there?

JANET
I think she said she was toilet
training.

SOCORRO
Now?!

JANET
Exactly!

IN THE BATHROOM -

Cynthia leafs through a copy of Dr. Spock's "BABY AND CHILD CARE". Billy smears a piece of chocolate on his face. She reads, mumbles to herself...

CYNTHIA
"... A good way is to tell him that
if he goes on the potty then he
will be more like a grown-up. He'll
be able to wear grown-up underwear,
like Daddy..."
(to Billy)
Honey if you learn this you can
wear grown-up underwear. You'd like
that wouldn't you? Just like...
Mommy?!

The slightest hint of a smile crosses her lips at the absurd visual. She checks herself and peeks around the door at the strange neighbors in her living room.

She quietly pulls it closed, so they can't see inside.

IN THE LIVING ROOM -

Socorro can barely stand to look at the Russian ship.

DAVE

I wonder if they put that camera in
a helicopter...

SOCORRO

What does it matter where it is?

Gabriel gives her a look.

SOCORRO

What's your problem!

He shrugs. Socorro springs off the couch.

IN THE BATHROOM -

Cynthia buries her head in the Dr. Spock book. When she looks up, she's startled to find Socorro standing at the threshold, arms folded across her formidable chest.

SOCORRO

What's that book?

CYNTHIA

Excuse me?

SOCORRO

That book you got? What is that?

CYNTHIA

Oh uh, this? This is a book written
by, um, Dr. Benjamin Spock...

She holds up the book.

CYNTHIA

... Offering the latest techniques
in child-rearing.

Socorro looks away, feigning boredom.

CYNTHIA

Written by one of the finest
pediatricians in the country...

Socorro nods, purses her lips. Her presence clearly makes Cynthia uncomfortable, but she decides to try and ignore her.

CYNTHIA

C'mon Billy, now concentrate. Be a big boy.

SOCORRO

This your first?

Cynthia looks up, irritated. Billy squirms and tries to climb down off the toilet seat again.

SOCORRO

He wants to get down.

CYNTHIA

No he doesn't! Do you Billy? He has a stomach ache, don't you Billy.

Socorro approaches the toilet, smiling. Billy looks up at her, fascinated.

CYNTHIA

Excuse me, we're in the middle of something here!

SOCORRO

If I'm bothering you just let me know.

CYNTHIA

As a matter of fact --

SOCORRO

He's a cute kid. He has a stomach ache?

CYNTHIA

He's gonna be fine. Look I appreciate your concern but we're trying to solve a problem, nothing we can't handle mind you, we just need time to --

SOCORRO

Looks like it's been a few days... I'm right?

CYNTHIA

What?

SOCORRO

Since he went?

CYNTHIA
 Absolutely not...

She glances at Billy.

CYNTHIA
 Well... maybe... How'd you guess?

SOCORRO
 I got eight kids. Some people can
 tell when it's gonna rain.

Cynthia eyes her suspiciously.

CYNTHIA
 Two days, three nights.

SOCORRO
 You tried prunes?

CYNTHIA
 Oh please, that's for constipation.
 He just doesn't want to go.

SOCORRO
 He's holding out. Same thing at
 that age.

Socorro turns to Billy.

SOCORRO
 Is your tummy hurting you? We gonna
 make you go.

Gabriel hollers from the other room.

GABRIEL (O.S.)
 What the hell are you doing in
 there?

SOCORRO
 None of your business! Just watch
 TV!... Men!

GABRIEL (O.S.)
 You should worry about Fidel
 coming!

SOCORRO
 Even under Fidel people still have
 to shit OK?!... Now, how are we
 going to do this.

CYNTHIA

You're very nice but I think I can handle this by myself thank you very much!

Socorro ignores her and storms out of the bathroom.

CYNTHIA

But I'm his mother!

IN THE LIVING ROOM -

Socorro heads straight for her shrinking husband on the couch.

SOCORRO

Get off your lazy ass and get some prunes!

GABRIEL

Now? Where am I goin' to find prunes?

SOCORRO

I don't fucking care! Just go get us some!

She jabs him in the ribs. He leaps off the couch.

SOCORRO

And prune juice too!

Gabriel skulks out towards the door.

AT THE FRONT DOOR -

He opens it on a FAT, sweaty SALESMAN with a large suitcase, catching his breath on the landing.

SALESMAN

Ah! Hello good sir! Are you by any chance the man of the house?

GABRIEL

No. Man no here.

SALESMAN

Well then perhaps I could interest you in some of highest quality goods.

GABRIEL

You got prunes?

SALESMAN

Proos?

GABRIEL

Uh huh, proos.

Salesman tries to ascertain what he just said, guesses he might have it -- whatever it is.

SALESMAN

For the right price I may. Allow me good sir.

He barges past Gabriel and is inside.

AT THE BATHROOM DOOR -

Salesman stops in the doorway, takes off his hat, and pats his sweating scalp.

SALESMAN

Good evening ladies.

CYNTHIA

What tha -- ?!

SALESMAN

In light of the current predicament we're in at this time, I come bearing gifts of the timeliest import. Satisfying all of your survival needs - and more. Much more.

He opens his suitcase.

CYNTHIA

Look, I really don't need any --

SALESMAN

-- I've got flashlights, helmets, goggles, toilet paper, cigarettes, and for those who want to live a little before --

He grabs a bottle of champagne and holds it up.

SALESMAN

... Well, I have some champagne as well.

A pause. The irony hits them hard. He reaches into his pants pocket and pulls out a crumpled brown paper bag.

SALESMAN

Oh and dried fruit. Keeps forever
you know.

SOCORRO

We'll take that.

SALESMAN

A wise choice madam. That'll be
fifty cents.

He hands it over. Socorro digs out a couple quarters. She frowns and hands them to the Salesman. As he pockets the coins...

SALESMAN

And what a regal young man I see
sitting there on his magnificent
throne!

Cynthia and Socorro stare at him. He nods uncomfortably and backs out.

IN THE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Salesman sits next to the others on the couch and counts a wad of sweaty bills.

SALESMAN

God bless America.

He puts away his cash, then looks up self-satisfied at the TV. His expression sobers up as he watches the ship.

OFF-SCREEN: Another VOLLEY OF JETS shatters the air overhead.

Salesman gulps in terror. He mops his brow and reaches into his suitcase. He pulls out a bag of potato chips. He shovels them into his mouth by the handful.

IN THE BATHROOM -

CYNTHIA

Look, you're very kind but he just
needs peace and quiet right now.

SOCORRO

Just feed him those prunes, he'll
feel better soon.

Cynthia reluctantly feeds Billy some dried fruit. Socorro takes comfort in watching Billy. Neither speaks.

IN THE LIVING ROOM -

Salesman stops chewing and looks up, noticing the others, who stare at him. He hesitantly offers them around. Gabriel, Janet, Dave and Salesman eat chips and watch TV.

IN THE BATHROOM -

Billy squirms. OFF-SCREEN -- A KNOCK ON DOOR

CYNTHIA

Oh my God, who the hell is that.

SOCORRO

GABI!

GABRIEL (O.S.)

Si... Si... I get the door.

She flips through the book with a vengeance.

AT THE DOOR -

Gabriel opens the door on a HARRIED, THIN BUSINESS MAN.

BUSINESS MAN

Can I use your phone!

Gabriel shrugs and lets him in.

IN THE BATHROOM -

Cynthia's eyes aren't even scanning the pages. She looks up at Billy, then at Socorro, who sits in proud silence.

SOCORRO

He wants to get down again.

CYNTHIA

Well he can't!

SOCORRO

That book tell you that?

CYNTHIA

What do you have against this book anyway!?!... Have you even read it?

Socorro turns and smiles. She replies quietly.

SOCORRO

You can't learn this from a book.

Gabriel appears in the doorway.

SOCORRO
HEY! This is WOMEN'S WORK!

GABRIEL
But the man, he say he want to use
the teleph--

SOCORRO
-- GET OUT!!

He backs out. Cynthia jams a prune into Billy's hand. Socorro sucks her teeth.

SOCORRO
Looks like he's pretty much in
control right now...

Cynthia glares at her.

IN THE LIVING ROOM -

Dave, Janet, and Salesman stare at the TV.

ON TV -- An American Helicopter hovers and swoops over the Grozny. Gabriel glances at the TV in terror. The others stare, transfixed.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Just four miles away from the
Embargo Point -- ninety six miles
from Miami the Grozny makes it's
relentless journey toward Cuba...

DAVE
Cool.

BUSINESS MAN (O.S.)
Yeah hi -- You'll never guess. I'm
in Miami. My flight was cancelled!
Yeah, just my luck.

Gabriel walks away. The Salesman panics. He opens the latch on his suitcase.

JANET
What's that?

BUSINESS MAN
Going out of business sale? Anybody
interested?

He shows the suitcase around. They peer in, frown and shake their heads.

SALESMAN

Going cheap?

No response. He sighs, closes it, and looks up at the screen again, forlorn.

IN THE BATHROOM -

Gabriel appears again. He glances at his wife, smiles sheepishly, then looks at Billy. When he sees the kid, his face softens. Billy stares back.

GABRIEL

Cute kid.

Socorro ignores him. He manages a FUNNY FACE. He tries another face. Billy ekes out a little smile.

GABRIEL

Reminds me of Ignacio. A little -- in the ears. Remember he couldn't go to the bathroom unless he saw Rolando go first? Remember that?

Socorro stares at him.

GABRIEL

Please don't make me leave again!

SOCORRO

You know, for a man you're not so stupid sometimes. I'll be right back.

She pinches his cheek, then rushes out of the room. Gabriel smiles and nods at Cynthia.

IN THE LIVING ROOM -

Socorro comes back with her MOTHER, who carries FELIX, (2), followed by LORENZO (4), INNOCENTE (6), and MARIA (13). In their haste they leave the door slightly ajar.

SOCORRO

We're in luck. He's gotta go! Come on Mama.

JANET

Hey what's going on?

She gets up off the couch.

SOCORRO
We're potty training this kid.

She blows past. Janet gets up and follows them.

JANET
Are those your kids? Hey once my
aunt was potty training my cousin
and you know what he did? It was
the darnest thing...

IN THE BATHROOM -

Socorro holds Felix suspended above the pot. Cynthia grabs Billy out of the way just in time as Felix is lowered onto it.

SOCORRO
He'll go if he sees another kid do
it. This is guaranteed to work.

Felix looks up at his dad.

GABRIEL
Come on Felix...

-- Felix looks at his Grandma, then his SIBLINGS, Billy and Cynthia, Janet, and the Salesman. Business Man squeezes his head in through the crowd.

GABRIEL
... For Papa.

ARSENIO (50's, WALL-EYED with a BIG SCAR) appears. He holds a battery-powered, artificial VOICE BOX to his throat and presses the button.

ARSENIO
-- I HEARD YOU HAVE A TV --

Felix bursts into tears. Gabriel picks him up. Cynthia clutches her head.

Gabriel carries Felix into the living room. He gives Arsenio a nasty look when he walks by. Socorro follows them out.

Cynthia puts Billy back on the toilet. She mumbles under her breath...

CYNTHIA

Why didn't I just invite the whole
fucking neighborhood over!

As the words leave her lips, she looks up and sees three new
strangers -- ILIAN (20's, musician), his friend TONY (20's),
and Tony's girlfriend TINA (20's) -- all staring at the TV.
Plus, the BUSINESS MAN using her phone.

Enough. She reaches over and SLAMS the door HARD!

IN THE LIVING ROOM -

Everyone turns and stops talking.

BUSINESS MAN

(on phone)

Hi honey.

IN THE BATHROOM -

Cynthia steels herself.

CYNTHIA

OK now we're going to do this. You
and me. Even if it kills us.

IN THE LIVING ROOM -

The crowd of people stare in shock at the bathroom door.
Except for Dave who stares at the TV.

GABRIEL

I think we should go.

BUSINESS MAN

(on phone)

I'm gonna have to stay here in
Miami.

The others nod. They gradually begin to disperse and head for
the door. Socorro puts hands on hips.

SOCORRO

Where the hell you going? The
Russians are attacking, and you're
going home? To do what? Sit all
alone and wait for the end?! Is
that how you want to go out?!

They look to one another and one by one, congregate together
on the sofa next to Dave, who hasn't taken his eyes off the
TV screen.

BUSINESS MAN

(on phone)

Well, I guess I'll just stick it out here. Honey, I want you to know, whatever happens -- I'll always be with you... Me too...

Business Man puts the receiver down, sighs heavily. Janet walks over to him, puts her hand on his shoulder and looks him in the eye.

JANET

Was that your wife?

He nods. Janet nods too, as if she's been there. She leads him to the couch, and the others there.

JANET

Everybody, this is...

BUSINESS MAN

Joe Zizzo.

JANET

This is Joe everyone.

EVERYONE

Hi Joe.

They settle in and watch. Gabriel tentatively puts his arm around Socorro, a mosquito hugging an egg. Janet slips her hand in Dave's and holds it. She looks around at all the new people she's met. They watch in silence.

ON TV --

- The Grozny steals across the water, as before.

- A MAP shows the Grozny has almost reached the American Embargo point near Cuba.

US WARSHIPS float in formation, waiting for the Grozny.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

No word as of yet from Soviet Premier Krushchev in reply to President Kennedy's plea to turn the ships around before reaching the American Embargo Point. And so the Nation, and indeed the World, waits...

IN THE BATHROOM -

Cynthia looks at the door, and listens. All she can hear is the TV set.

-- ANOTHER VOLLEY OF JETS EXPLODES THE AIR...

She leafs through the Spock book, then hurls it against the wall in frustration. She stares at Billy. She looks up again at the door to the living room.

IN THE LIVING ROOM -

They gaze at the screen as the JETS subside.

TONY
(softly)
Bookstores...

TINA
What?

TONY
I don't even know why...

Pause. They're all transfixed by the boat on TV.

TONY
Every time I go into a bookstore I have to go to the bathroom. No sooner do I get in there, but then I have to turn around and leave! And especially used bookstores, they're the worst...

He shakes his head in frustration.

TONY
It makes browsing virtually impossible.

ELIO
Splashing noises do it for me.

Others nod.

SALESMAN
For me, it's food.

SOCORRO
No kidding!

They laugh...

TONY

My mother's pork. She bastes it in its own juices, uses rosemary and garlic... Man I could kill for some of that pork right now.

ELIO

You should taste my rice and beans sometime. I do the beans with spinach and peppers, man you could die from them!

SALESMAN

I make really great devilled eggs.

SOCORRO

What's that?

SALESMAN

C'mon, you never had devilled eggs?

SOCORRO

If the devil stepped one foot in my kitchen, I'd cut off his tongue and fry it in oil. Right, Mama?

Her mother nods quietly -- she knows. A few people laugh.

IN THE BATHROOM -

Cynthia hears the laughter. She frowns.

IN THE LIVING ROOM -

Someone's stomach growls. People look at one another. Another rumbling noise, this time from someone else.

SOCORRO

Alright, that's it. Mama, go up and get the rice, the beans, and that piece of baccalla would you?

GRANDMA

OK.

SOCORRO

And bring some garlic. And the lemons, bring them too.

GRANDMA

OK!

Grandma dashes out.

SOCORRO
 Gabi, go to Roberto and Maria's.
 Tell them to bring some platanos.

She opens the window and yells out.

SOCORRO
 Eh Manuel!

MANUEL (O.S.)
 Eh!

SOCORRO
 Bring us some peppers from the
 garden.

MANUEL (O.S.)
 Eh?

SOCORRO
 Come on up! We're having dinner up
 here!

MANUEL (O.S.)
 What about the apocalypse?!

SOCORRO
 You can watch it on TV! Come on
 over!

MANUEL (O.S.)
 OK!

She dashes into the kitchen.

IN THE KITCHEN -

Socorro starts pulling out pots and pans. Others follow her
 in.

IN THE BATHROOM -

Cynthia stares into Billy's eyes.

CYNTHIA
 Please, I just really need you to
 do this for me honey... I won't
 have you turn out to be one of
 those kids, nine years old and
 still wearing diapers!

Billy just sits and looks at his mother.

CYNTHIA

I won't have it... I just won't
have the shame of it. I won't fail,
I won't!

AT THE FRONT DOOR -

People come in with provisions, and NEW FACES wander in. The PEEPING TOM from across the way comes in.

IN THE KITCHEN -

They pile into the kitchen and become lost in washing, slicing, and frying. A bottle of wine is opened. Wine splashes into glasses.

Animated discussions about the food turn heated. Everyone puts all they've got -- all their fear, vigor, enthusiasm, life -- into preparing the food.

IN THE BATHROOM -

Cynthia glances at the door. Sounds of arguing and laughter drift in from the kitchen.

CYNTHIA

What the hell's going on out there?

Cynthia absently splashes the water in the tub.

CYNTHIA

... We're not leaving here until
you do this y'know.

IN THE KITCHEN -

The feast is going full throttle. Pots boil with beans and rice. Pork, fish and plantains fry in pans. One pan catches fire, causing a loud ruckus and gales of laughter.

The PHONE RINGS and Socorro picks it up.

SOCORRO

Hello? Hello? I'm sorry I can't
hear you very well... hello?

GABRIEL

Who was it?

SOCORRO

They said something about coming
from Cleveland and hung up.

IN THE BATHROOM -

Cynthia stares at Billy.

CYNTHIA

I'm the adult here, not you! One day you're gonna have to let go and I'm gonna sit right here until you do... even if you hold it in for a week... or a month! However long it takes. And if the world comes to a fucking end then they'll walk in here and they'll find us -- you there on the John and me right here on the floor and they'll say look at that -- she loved her kid, they left her alone to figure out how to do it all by herself and you know what? She never even figured it out but she died trying, dammit, she never gave up! That's what they're gonna say!

Cynthia nods emphatically then looks to Billy for a response. He just blinks at her. She frowns. Sounds and smells waft in from the other room.

CYNTHIA

That smells good... You hungry?

Billy nods. She reaches over and lifts him off the pot.

CYNTHIA

C'mon then.

IN THE KITCHEN -

Cynthia is greeted with smiles. Socorro spoons some beans into her mouth which she chews and swallows. Socorro leads her to a pan of plantains, picks one up and puts it in her mouth. Cynthia is overwhelmed by the taste.

She hands Billy a piece of plantain, which he takes in his hand.

SALESMAN

Hey, the champagne's on me folks!

A cork POPS! He pours out glasses and hands one to her.

SALESMAN

To CUBA!

They all drink and laugh.

IN THE LIVING ROOM -

Dave watches TV.

IN THE KITCHEN -

Tony and Ilian play a Merengue on guitar and violin. Arsenio sits next to Tony and puts his voice box to his throat...

ARSENIO

- YOU KNOW I USED TO BE A SINGER -

Gabriel grabs Socorro and they dance. Others join in as Billy walks through the crowd.

IN THE BATHROOM -

Billy tosses his plantain in the toilet. He flushes and watches it disappear.

He then climbs up onto the toilet, and poops. He gets off, grabs the handle, and flushes the toilet again. He gazes in, fascinated!

IN THE LIVING ROOM -

He's greeted by a STANDING OVATION from the living room. Ilian and Tony play a mambo version of "I've Gotta Be Me." Arsenio sings along...

ARSENIO

- I WANNA LIVE, NOT MERELY SURVIVE,
AND I WON'T GIVE UP THIS DREAM OF
LIFE THAT KEEPS ME ALIVE -- I GOTTA
BE ME! I GOTTA BE ME!... -

People dance, eat and laugh. Cynthia picks up her son and dances around the room with him.

ON TV -

The Soviet ships slowly turn away front the Embargo Point and head back across the Atlantic.

No one even notices -- except for Dave. He seems slightly disappointed, but then he reaches out and changes the channel.

FIN

INSERTS

by

j. d. hoyt

FADE IN:

EXT. APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

ANGELA, 30+, attractive but with noticeable acne scars, short, struggles to balance two boxes and watch her step down the stairs. Her look suggests a sad frustration.

Looking out his apartment window through the broken mini-blinds is JOHN DIMATTO, 30, baby-faced yet handsome. John stares as she drops a box. When she turns to retrieve it, he looks upon her face for the last time. Their eyes meet as she raises the box off the ground. John's faint smile annoys her.

Angela's eyes well-up involuntarily.

JOHN (V.O.)

This is my first time doing this,
so...

She gives him a small, voluntary snarl before turning away.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

JOHN (V.O.)

You'll have to stop me if I'm
babbling about her.

(beat)

So I guess I just keep talking and
you'll stop me at some point?

John's hand writes furiously. He is filling out a roommate ad form for the paper. It reads: "Wanted to share cool apt. with busy male professional - female preferred- n/s, no cats, \$400 plus uts."

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

It is well-appointed, neat but not obsessively so. The furniture is uniformly low and small so that it appears normal but has an odd feeling nonetheless. All of the artwork is in black and white, photos, a few Ansel Adams prints.

John, perpendicular to the sofa, dressed in warm-weather clothes, possibly from Banana Republic. He sits erect, back arrow straight, almost painfully so. Chunky, thick-soled Doc Marten sandals engulf his feet. John is deeply engrossed in thought. He looks up, gives a slight grin and looks back down again. John peaks at a crib note in the palm of his hand. Closing his hand quickly, he looks up.

JOHN
 ... would you prefer chicken
 McNuggets or those big, greasy
 chicken strips?

A WOMAN, beautiful, average height, leans awkwardly against
 the adjacent wall.

WOMAN
 Well, I'd have to say that I'm not
 a fan of the McNugget, so I'd...

JOHN
 Um-hmm. That's nice.

John bites his lip, anxiously awaiting her departure. An
 awkward silence ensues.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

A YOUNG WOMAN towers over him in the door way. A garment bag
 hangs from her fingers. John stares at an application and
 reference sheet.

The Young Woman nods and smiles.

YOUNG WOMAN
 (maniacally)
 I know it sounds like a tall tale
 but honestly, she hated orange and
 I spent good money reupholstering
 that sofa. It was a six footer,
 overstuffed. Like a big sun.

JOHN
 I would have moved out, too.

YOUNG WOMAN
 (even faster speech))
 Yeah, I got short-changed though.
 She got the sofa after all. Changed
 the locks on me. Some strange legal
 thing, I think it's called a
 (beat)
 restraining order, so do you think
 you could waive the little
 reference check?

The Young Woman drops the garment bag onto the floor.

YOUNG WOMAN
 I sort of need a place, like now.

John flattens his lips across his face, in an attempt to smile and frown at the same time. With mounting fear, he slowly shakes his head.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

DRAKE, 25, tall, golden waves of hair, artistic, muscular, caresses the cabinet with his strong, masculine hand.

John walks past him, each muscle in his body tense. Drake's 6'3" frame dwarfs John. He moves away from Drake as quickly as possible.

DRAKE

You know, man, I could do so much with this place.

(beat)

You see, the musician thing is just how I earn my living. I'm also a journeyman carpenter, that's where my hands really make music, in the wood.

Drake continues to grace the kitchen with his beauty and brilliance. He follows the curve of the counter's top as if it were his lover's body.

DRAKE

Oh yeah, my cousins have a place at Big Bear, for weekends.

(beat)

This'll be a great set-up.

John mumbles through the thick clouds of jealousy that choke his reason. Drake looks up at him, cocking his head quizzically.

JOHN

I'd prefer a female. Ad says female preferred.

INT. APARTMENT HOUSE HALLWAY - LATER

Standing outside the door is JOANNE, an irresistibly cute woman in her twenties, wearing a thick cotton cable-knit sweater. Joanne's cheeks are flushed.

JOANNE

I'm early. I'll come back.

John motions with his hands for her to enter and offers a shy smile.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

John and Joanne stand next to each other. She with her arms clasping her necklace; he looking intensely at the stove. John's shoes give him almost two inches on her.

John sits down at the kitchen table. Joanne follows suit. John coughs into his hand in order to sneak a look at his crib sheet.

JOHN

Excuse me.

Joanne leans forward on the table, obscuring her chest. She EXHALES a breath upward, over her red face.

JOHN

Do you like small, colorful plants
or the larger trees better?

Joanne's eyes dart around the room. Her forehead beads with sweat.

JOANNE

I think bigger plants are really
just a waste of space. Small ones
aren't appreciated enough.

John smiles but does not look at her. Joanne continues to look around the room.

JOHN

And, what about big parties? You
into big and loud or small and
personal?

JOANNE

Oh God, no! I hate big ones.
Honestly, I prefer small and
intimate.

John is bursting with enthusiasm. He keeps it in check except for slight knee tapping and a perma-smile. Joanne bites her lip, in anticipation.

JOHN

When would you want to move in?

EXT. APT. HALLWAY - MORNING

Small and medium sized moving boxes pepper the hallway outside the apartment. Joanne and John simultaneously bend down and pick up a heavy box marked, "BOOKS".

JOHN
 One, two,
 (they brace)
 THREE.

They stand and shuffle as DREW, early 20's, tan, tall, surfer-type walks down the hallway. He checks Joanne out briefly. She wears a puffy vest over a tee-shirt and shorts.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Joanne walks into the room backwards, holding half the box. John follows, guiding her. He smiles sweetly. She returns the sentiment.

INT. APT. HALLWAY - LATER

Many boxes are stacked. They are all marked except for one. John grabs the unmarked box. The tape weakens and a flap pops open.

JOHN (V.O.)
 I felt comfortable with Joanne from
 the start.

Joanne rushes over to him and snatches the box from his arms with defensive protectiveness. She holds the flap down with such pressure that it caves in a bit.

JOHN (V.O.)
 She was thoughtful, smart and so
 open.

JOANNE
 (almost scared)
 I've got it.

INT. JOANNE'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Her hand digs into the partially opened box. She pulls out several heavily padded bras. Her hand stuffs them into an open dresser drawer while,

C.U. John fixes his hair and smiles broadly.

JOHN
 Hey, Jo. All moved in or what?

John shakes off his dumb remark.

INT. JOANNE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Joanne's hand completes a final check on her foundational drawer. Wonderbras, padded bras, inflatable bra, water bra all stacked neatly. She closes the drawer quickly as,

C.U. John's looking straight ahead, attempting a come-hither look with smile and without.

INT. JOHN'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

A full-length mirror. He repositions himself in front of the mirror again; practicing a head tilt and cool look as he waits for the response from his imagined reflection of Joanne.

JOHN

Hey, you. How about a welcome dinner, on me?

(tilts his head)

Chinese cool?

A door CLOSES. John jumps back. The room is also in black and white. Hospital corners on his bed, a prominent photo of John, his tall brothers and small but fierce Mother on his desk.

He peaks through the keyhole to make sure no one is standing outside of his door.

He sees her enter the bathroom, oblivious to his rehearsals.

John sits down on his bed with a SIGH of relief.

JOHN (V.O.)

My Mom used to say that I needed to be more social but, you know how most girls are, just into the jocks, those big hulky types.

He spies two shoe lifts lying on his comforter. John picks up his thick black oxfords.

JOHN

Joanne seemed different.

He places the lifts inside each one before putting them on his feet.

INT. JOANNE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Wearing a tee-shirt and boxer shorts, Her natural figure is entirely proportional, tiny on top, tiny on the bottom.

The room is filled with colorful and unusual prints, vegetarian and anti-cruelty rally fliers and scented candles. A blouse and the inflatable bra lie on the bed. Next to them is a box of gel falsies. Joanne checks out her bra and adjusts her inflatable cup size.

Her cell phone RINGS. She grabs it off of the desk, checking out the caller id first.

JOANNE

Hello Mom!

(beat)

I told you, caller id, that's how I know.

Facing the wall, Joanne maneuvers her tee-shirt off and fastens the bra armor onto her chest.

JOANNE

I'll explain it another time.

Listen, I just finished moving into the place. It's great.

Carding the phone between her shoulder and ear she feels around for the blouse on her bed, never looking at it.

JOANNE

Yes, he's very sweet, normal. You were right. I feel much safer knowing there's a guy around.

Joanne finishes buttoning the blouse.

JOANNE

I'll call you tomorrow with the new number.

(beat)

Of course its my own line, he's the one with the home office, remember?

Joanne turns to face the mirror and door, respectively. She tousles her hair so as not to look to "done".

JOANNE

I will. Love you, too, Mom. Tell Dad I'll talk to him tomorrow.

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

White cardboard Chinese food boxes cover the table. A bottle of wine stands tall in the center of the table.

JOHN (V.O.)

We had this immediate connection. A comfort level most people only attain after years of friendship. She was amazing. Principled vegetarian, social worker type but not a whiner either.

John shyly places a fortune cookie on her plate. Joanne is still in the throes of eating.

JOANNE

I never knew that about bananas.

John studies her, a glass of wine in his hand.

JOHN

Yeah, my brothers are all over six feet. It's amazing.

He smiles shyly, enjoying the newly acquired domestic bliss. He pours the rest of the wine into her glass.

JOANNE

Thanks.

(beat)

So why didn't they feed you bananas too?

John stops mid-drink. He looks away self-consciously.

JOANNE

Not that it matters.

JOHN

They were allergic to wheat, I wasn't. My Mom had no idea that the banana and protein diet would make my brother's grow like that.

A prolonged SILENCE.

JOANNE

My sisters are all much bigger. Sometimes I feel like maybe I'm adopted.

Joanne laughs nervously. John cracks open his cookie to find no fortune in it. They both stare at the bad omen cookie.

INT. HALLWAY - LATER

John walks out of his bedroom in his sweats with bare feet. He takes about six steps and stops abruptly. John runs back into his room.

JOHN (V.O.)
Here was a person, not unlike
myself, who...

INT. JOANNE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Joanne walks to her dresser, wearing pink cotton pajamas. She opens a drawer and takes out a basket filled with breast enlarging lotions and potions. Joanne opens a bottle of "All natural Vitamins and Herbs For Breast Enhancement". She pops several, swallowing them dry.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

John walks out of his bedroom in his sweats with thick soled sandals on his feet. He checks the locks on the door and turns out the living room lights.

JOHN (V.O.)
Knew exactly who she was and didn't
need stacks of friends or social
affirmations to know she was okay.

INT. JOANNE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Joanne rubs cream on her breasts, looking at her breasts underneath her pajamas. Her face betrays her distaste, as if she'd just smelled bad cheese.

EXT. APARTMENT - MORNING

John walks up the street, laden with Payless Shoe Source bags and an uncharacteristic gusto. He stops mid-step when he notices Joanne in the window, hanging cool curtains over the ugly blinds. He beams.

INT. JOHN'S BEDROOM - LATER

A BRYAN ADAMS SONG BLARES out of the stereo. Five shoe boxes sit on his bed, one box is opened.

John stands confidently in front of his mirror. He looks hot. High-heeled, masculine black boots, hip shirt, black pants.

JOHN (V.O.)
So I like the idea of a
partnership.
(MORE)

JOHN(cont'd)

It's not like I was obsessed with it. Or her for that matter. My Mom always says that hell is other people. I think that's Sarte, right?

Strutting around the room, checking his look repeatedly in the mirror.

JOHN (V.O.)

Really, I can't recall an awkward moment between us. We flowed, ebbed and flowed, like a sonata. And it had only been a week or so.

EXT. APARTMENT - LATER

John walks down the long, tall hallway. Out comes his neighbor, Drew. As they pass each other, Drew gives John the usual "guy half-smile and nod." John tries to mimic him but ends up puckering his lips too much and bobbing his head instead of nodding it.

DREW

Yo, little buddy.

JOHN

(mumbling)

Hey, Drew.

DREW

Saw you move the new one into your crib. She looked pretty hot.

John flares his nostrils.

JOHN

I, I don't know.

John continues to walk, passing Drew.

DREW

Maybe not so high maintenance as the last one?

John turns around, opens his mouth to speak but re-thinks the proposition. Drew holds up his hand as a goodbye wave. John furrows his brow, almost planning this man's eventual death.

At his own door...

A brown bag sits at John's platforms. He stands outside the door, balancing two salads in plastic containers, lids open.

JOHN (V.O.)
 Maybe it's risky to get too close,
 too fast but it felt so natural.

He carefully takes red pepper strips out of one salad and places them into the other container.

JOHN (V.O.)
 My Mom says that the best romances
 are built from friendships.

C.U. SALAD - CONTINUOUS

John's hand shapes the red pepper strips into the shape of a heart.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

Joanne opens her salad box. John watches her in anticipation. She wears a top accentuating her chest, which is three times it's actual size.

JOHN
 Great salad, huh?

Joanne nods but fails to notice the red-pepper heart and instead devours forkfuls of his heart, lettuce, and carrots. John looks sadly at his own food.

Joanne notices his distance and sad face. She tilts her head.

JOANNE
 This was really thoughtful, thanks.

JOHN
 It's all organic, too. No
 chemicals.

JOANNE
 (stunned)
 You're the first person whose EVER
 remembered that without me saying
 it a million times.

She stares at him a little longer than friends do. He blushes. She bites the corner of her bottom lip.

JOANNE
 Wanna watch a movie later?

John nods his head.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

John and Joanne each on the sofa, a linebacker could sit comfortably in the space between them. She's stares at the tv screen. His eyes dart back and forth between the movie and her. Joanne absentmindedly eats popcorn.

John rocks back and forth, attempting to scoot closer to her under the guise of getting comfortable. Joanne notices his movement, trying to squelch her smile. She leans forward, ostensibly to put the popcorn bowl on the table, but also scoots closer to him.

John panics long enough to ruin the moment by lunging for the popcorn bowl, startling her and spilling some of the popcorn on the sofa and himself. He moves away from her in order to reach the fallen corns and kernels. She tries to help, brushing his hand briefly.

John looks at her, convinced she thinks he's a doofus, then back at the tv screen. She slides away a little, convinced she's misinterpreted his earlier signals.

They both CHUCKLE nervously at a movie line.

INT. KITCHEN - NEXT MORNING

Sporting serious bed-head, John munches on spoonfuls of cereal, groggy from a late night but not so tired as to forget his shoes. He gets up to hunt for more cereal.

JOHN (V.O.)

What I don't understand is why it
always has to get complicated.

Joanne walks in wearing the pink pajamas and inflatable bra. She has also just arisen, hair uncombed, no makeup. Her bra, slightly lop-sided, looks as if perhaps she slept in it.

JOANNE

Morning.

JOHN

Hey.

JOANNE

You sleep okay?

JOHN

Yeah, but we've got to stop staying
up so late. That software program I
told you about, well, I have to
demo it for those guys next week.

JOANNE

You're so right. I totally blew off my quarterly case reports on Friday.

(beat)

But it was worth it.

John smiles. Joanne pours herself a cup of coffee from the machine. A carton of cream is already out.

JOHN (V.O.)

You probably think I'm silly to wait for someone who knows how to accept me unconditionally?

She reaches for some organic sugar crystals.

JOHN

It must be your vegetarian diet because you look good even in the morning.

Joanne blushes as she unconsciously runs her fingers through her hair.

JOANNE

You, too.

John subtly and slowly puffs out his chest. They stare at one another, eyes locked. She lifts the steaming mug of coffee to her mouth.

JOHN

I find it tough to talk with most people.

JOANNE

Me, too.

JOHN

My last roommate, I told you how she hated to talk in the mornings.

(beat)

And I usually program at night, so.

JOANNE

She was the, the aspiring foot model? I bet she was really beautiful?

JOHN

No.
 (beat)
 She was a law student.

He moves closer to her. She inches closer to him also.

JOANNE

Right. Some people just never get
 it. I'm just glad she had to move
 or we may have never met.

Swallowing his fear, John takes a breath, leans forward, puts his hand on her cheek and kisses her.

They share an awkward... slow... sweet, then... intimate kiss. His hands wander near her chest. Joanne feels the heat of his hands and pulls away from him. She panics.

JOANNE

You want some more coffee?

John stares at the table, rejected. Joanne gets up and runs out of the room.

JOHN (V.O.)

I knew it was too good to be true.
 Maybe she was playing with me all
 along, like Angela,
 (beat)
 And Sara, and Marlene.

John stands up from the table and stares at the kitchen door. John TAPS the table nervously. He stands up, walks to the door, losing his balance and teetering on the boots.

INT. JOANNE'S BEDROOM - LATER

Pajama top on the bed next to her, red eyes from bitter tears, Joanne stares at herself in the mirror. She looks at her chest, cringes, bites her lip hard with regret.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

John turns on the cold water shower head, full blast. He checks it. He gives the hot water nozzle a half-spin, just enough so he can stand the cold.

INT. JOANNE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Her regret turns to resolve. She turns her back to the mirror. Facing the bed now, she puts on the pajamas sans bra and walks out of the room.

INT. BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A SOFT KNOCK and turn of the door knob. John leans his head out of the shower.

JOHN

Jo?

JOANNE

Can I come in?

John turns the SHOWER off. Eyes wide with anticipation, he snatches a towel and wraps it around himself.

JOHN

Hold on.

John walks to the mirror to check himself out. His reflection reminds him of his low vertical rise and he panics.

JOHN (V.O.)

I'm condensing a bit here but I'm sure you get the idea?

Still stunned at the mirror, he gets an idea. He steps into the shower stall, he peers down only to realize that it makes him no taller.

Crunching up the bathroom rug, he stands on it, to no avail.

Finally, he settles on the scale, which gives him about the same lift as his lowest shoes.

JOHN

It's unlocked, come on in.

Joanne enters. He stares at her powerlessly as if at an oncoming truck.

JOANNE

I'm sorry, John. I thought you knew and then I freaked when you touched me...

Joanne sighs deeply, drawing in courage.

JOHN

But you acted like I...

JOANNE

Like you were hurting me. And you were only... I was being silly.

Joanne pauses and unbuttons her blouse, exhilarated with accepting her truth. John stares at her with the look of an adolescent boy gazing at his first issue of Playboy.

JOANNE

I know size shouldn't matter to me,
but with guys, well, I thought
maybe you'd be disappointed.

John is paralyzed with the knowledge of his shoeless dilemma. Joanne walks toward him, stopping just short of him.

John leans toward her, his hands stretch out in order to touch her but he cannot reach without stepping off the scale.

JOANNE

(vulnerable; longing)
Come down here, John.

John pulls his hands back to his body. The moment lingers. And then...

JOHN

You know, I think you've got a
great personality.

Joanne instinctively covers her breasts with her arms. John simply stands staring at her. He loses the moment and Joanne.

JOANNE

Great personality?
(beat)
Oh my God, it's
(tears; shaken)
their size, I knew it.

Joanne runs out of the bathroom.

JOHN (V.O.)

And she said something about my
size and ran out. Left without a
word the next day, curtains and
all.

John stands perfectly still. He steps off the scale, only his sad, confused eyes are visible.

C.U. JOHN'S EYES.

INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE - DAY

John open his eyes. Diploma's stare at him. He is sitting in a chair. The back of the THERAPIST'S shoulder leans in slightly, possibly writing on a tablet.

JOHN (V.O.)

Why does this keep happening? What did I do to deserve that? My Mom thinks maybe she should be in here instead of me?

(beat)

I go over it and over it but I come up short every time.

FADE OUT.

DOGTOWN

Screenplay by
Gerardo Naranjo
&
Howard Rabinowitz

Story
by
Gerardo Naranjo

FADE IN:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Green trees, birds chirping, sunny. The middle of nowhere. We HEAR a Southern radio preacher railing about the coming Resurrection. A dented 75 Impala drives toward us.

INT. IMPALA - DAY

MOSES (late 30s), unshaven, disheveled hair, cheap polyester suit, flips the radio dial past static. He finds Rick James' "Super Freak" and bobs his head to the music.

On the passenger seat is a stack of U.S. Census forms. The backseat is crammed with clothes, maps, empty cans. As he drives, Moses reaches back and finds an electric razor.

Moses sings along with "Super Freak" and drums the steering wheel happily as he dry-shaves his face.

He passes a sign: "Dogtown 3 miles". Shaving, bobbing to the music and driving all at once, Moses takes his hand off the wheel and pulls a clip-on tie out of his pocket.

As he's putting on the tie, a dog runs across the road. He grabs the wheel and swerves -- almost running into a ditch.

He screeches to a stop, shaken. The tie hangs askew on his shirt. He turns off the humming razor and straightens the Census forms carefully.

Moses looks around outside: The dog is gone.

EXT. DOGTOWN - DAY

Moses drives up to the Southern town that time forgot: a church, a police station, a few shops, a bank, a bar. The streets are empty. Wind whips through.

The car door slams.

A "Hello My Name Is" sticker slapped onto a polyester lapel. "Moses" is handwritten on it neatly in black marker.

Moses stretches and looks around. He reaches in the car window, grabs the Census forms, and walks to a nearby house.

EXT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The front door is wide open. Moses stands on the porch and peers inside. He rings the doorbell. No answer.

MOSES

Hello? Census Bureau? I've got a form... Only take a minute to --

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

I knew you'd come. You couldn't stay away, could you.

Moses ducks his head inside tentatively.

MOSES

Ma'am?

He steps inside gingerly, squishing a dog toy. It SQUEAKS. He kicks it aside and goes to the living room.

Empty. The TV is on -- the voices of a soap opera. Dramatic soap-opera music swells. Moses stares at the TV. LOUD GROWL. And it's not from the TV.

A large black dog growls at Moses. Terrified, he backs out of the house as it moves toward him. He slams the front door as it lunges at him, BARKING viciously.

EXT. DOGTOWN - DAY

Moses walks backward from the house as the dog's BARKS continue. He looks around anxiously. Taking a deep breath, he straightens his tie and walks to the diner.

INT. DINER - DAY

Moses sits at the counter. He picks up a menu, then looks around as he realizes: The place is empty.

A steak sizzles on the grill. Moses looks at it hungrily. He takes out his wallet and looks inside: Two dollars. He glances at the steak. The door behind him CREAKS open. He turns to see...

A coiffed pink poodle sits at his feet. Staring. It knows his thoughts.

Moses hurries out. The poodle follows him.

EXT./INT. DOGTOWN - VARIOUS LOCATIONS - CONTINUOUS

In the street, Moses looks around anxiously and shoos the poodle away. He glances in store windows...

Barber shop. Empty, but there is fresh cut hair on the floor.

Police station. The jail door is open. A basset hound sits inside. It looks up at Moses as if it was expecting him.

Grocery store. A radio plays country music. A shopping cart is at the checkout, half the food bagged. By the register, a cigarette - mostly ash - burns in an ashtray.

Moses stares at the cigarette. The ash drops - the SOUND like a ton of bricks.

He hears GROWLS and turns - in the back of the store, two dogs fight over a package of hamburger meat.

The dogs see Moses and drop the meat. They move toward him.

Moses runs out of the store, dropping some Census forms as he goes. He quickly runs into the bar across the street.

INT. BAR - DAY

Moses drops the jumble of Census forms on the bar and sits down. He's sweating. He slaps his face twice. The only picture behind the bar: Black velvet. Dogs playing poker.

A beer is on the bar in front of him. He feels it: still cold. He drinks in one gulp, like a man dying of thirst.

Calming down, he looks up the bar: several other drinks, a whiskey bottle, but no one in sight.

Moses pulls out his wallet and starts to leave two dollars, then stops: Why should he? He moves down the bar and grabs another beer.

The jukebox. Moses puts in a quarter. Patsy Cline's "Crazy" plays. He sways and takes another big swig of beer.

Moses dances happily, idiotically, around the empty bar. Swinging his arms, he accidentally knocks the whiskey bottle off the counter.

It SHATTERS. Moses stops dancing and looks at it, panicked. Then he smiles.

A bottle of vodka on the edge of the bar. Moses pokes it. It teeters, but doesn't fall. He grins childishly. Pokes it again. It CRASHES to the floor. Moses jumps up, arms in the air: Victory!

A line of liquor bottles. Moses dances, balletically knocking each bottle off: SMASH... CRASH... Moses does a pirouette, rips off his clip-on tie, and dances out of the bar.

EXT. DOGTOWN - DAY

The poodle and a few other dogs watch Moses in the street. He tosses some beer at them, and they back off.

Moses dances in the street, then sees his reflection in the store window of a TV Repair Shop. He stands there, then puts his "Hello My Name is" sticker on the reflection.

He takes a few steps back and holds the beer bottle, feeling its weight, staring at the window...

 OLDER MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
 (over a bullhorn)
 Get the hell out of there, boy!
 (unamplified)
 What the hell's he doin'?!

 YOUNG MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
 Nuthin'. Jus' standing there.

Moses winds his arm as if pitching - then hurls the beer bottle through the store window. It SHATTERS.

Moses turns all four directions, bowing.

EXT. HILLTOP - DAY

A crowd of about fifty people -- the residents of Dogtown. A few trucks, a sheriff's car. About 20 people stand at the edge of the hilltop watching the town below; the rest loll about, like it's a fire drill or a picnic.

The man with the bullhorn is SHERIFF DAN (50s, thick gut, calm or just lazy). Next to him is his deputy, WARREN (40s, spindly, anxious), holding binoculars. Both in uniforms.

 WARREN
 He threw it right through the durn
 window! Pete's TV repair shop!

 SHERIFF DAN
 He what?

PETE (40s) strains to see. To his left, GREG (20s, geeky, borderline psychotic) kneels and aims a rifle at Moses.

 PETE
 Goddamn sum-bitch! Take him out,
 Greg.

GREG
 (way too eager)
 Can I, Sheriff Dan? I got me a
 clear shot! I can take him out!

SHERIFF DAN
 Y'ain't takin' no one out.

The REVEREND (60's) steps forward and puts a hand on Pete's
 shoulder.

REVEREND
 Let God do the sharpshooting, Pete.

PETE
 God gonna fix up my store? Shit.

Sheriff Dan rubs his eyes and raises the bullhorn again.

SHERIFF DAN
 (through bullhorn)
 Get the hell outta there! Now!
 There's a BOMB goddamn it!

EXT. DOGTOWN - DAY

Moses can't hear them. He pulls TVs out of the busted store
 window and smashes them on the ground.

PULL BACK to reveal an old military BOMB half-embedded in the
 dirt next to the gazebo in the center of town. It TICKS.

Moses grabs a TV and jumps onto the hood of a parked car. He
 hurls the set to the ground and jumps up and down, excited.

He stops jumping and looks up the street: The hardware store.

He gracefully jumps from car hood to car hood to get there,
 like he's playing hopscotch.

EXT. HILLTOP - DAY

Warren peers through the binoculars. More people are watching
 beside him, concerned.

WARREN
 Gone to the hardware store! Smashed
 in the hood o' your Ford, Miss
 Vicky.

MISS VICKY (60's, a spinster) grabs the binoculars from his
 hands. The strap is still around Warren's neck.

MISS VICKY
Damn him! Damn him to Hades!

REVEREND
Better do something, Sheriff.

SHERIFF DAN
Whatcha want me to do, Reverend?
Get my hide blown off?

REVEREND
Law should know the law's business.
That's all I'm saying.

GREG
Let me blow his head off, how's
about that?

SHERIFF DAN
What's he doin' now, Miss Vicky?

WARREN (CHOKING)
I cain't breath!

MISS VICKY
He's in the store. Got a trash can.
Gonna clean everything up?

EXT. DOGTOWN - DAY

The trash can CRASHES through the hardware store window.
Moses dances out through the window holding a large, heavy
wrench.

MISS VICKY (O.S.)
Threw it out the window! Damn him!

Moses swings the wrench at the heads of parking meters,
destroying them one by one.

VOICES (O.S.)
Enough's enough! Shoot him! Do
something, Dan!

SHERIFF DAN
Y'all calm down now!

REVEREND
There is a higher authority,
friends! Trust in the Lord!

Moses tosses the wrench aside. He shifts uncomfortably and
strides to the church steps.

A basin of holy water is beside the church doors. Moses undoes his fly and pisses in the holy water. Relief washes over his face.

MISS VICKY
Gone to the church... He's relieving himself in the holy water!

REVEREND
My holy water?! He's defiling the house of the Lord!

EXT. HILLTOP - DAY

The Reverend crouches beside Greg, who's aiming.

REVEREND
(whispers)
Smite him! Do the Lord's work!

GREG
Get off me, man!

Miss Vicky lets the binoculars drop and gets in the Sheriff's face, bitterly poking his chest.

MISS VICKY
Dan Farnum, you are the sorriest excuse for a sheriff I've ever seen!
(to CROWD)
I say we lynch the fucker!

SHERIFF DAN
(feeble)
Bomb goes off the whole town'll be blown to hell anyway.

But no one's listening to Sheriff Dan.

WARREN
He's goin' to the bank!

That gets everyone's attention. They peer down...

EXT. DOGTOWN - DAY

Moses hauls the trash can into the bank. Through the door, we can see him stride into the vault and throw all the money into the can.

The bomb. The TICKING is faster.

EXT. HILLTOP - DAY

The crowd is watching in horror, except for THREE KIDS (GARY, MICKEY, LYLE) who run around playing. BILL, one of the boys' father (40s, farmer), grabs Mickey.

BILL
Y'all stop playing now. This here's serious business.

MISS VICKY
(to Sheriff)
You still ain't gonna do nothing?

SHERIFF DAN
I'm thinking!

PETE
That's my goddamn life savings!

CROWD
(various)
Goddamn thief! Let's get him! He's robbing us blind!

SHERIFF DAN
Y'all keep your heads now!

BILL
Don't care what this asshole says -- I'm not letting him take everything I worked my whole life for!

REVEREND
He's the devil's what he is! Or one his minions, I can't tell which...

MISS VICKY
We go in there NOW and kill him dead!

The crowd is really riled up. Bill hands Gary a jackknife.

BILL
Let's get him, son.

Gary runs off, excited. The crowd follows, running down hill toward town.

Except Sheriff Dan, who shouts after them through the bullhorn.

SHERIFF DAN
Idiots! That bomb could blow any
second, y'hear?

They hear, but they don't care. Mob frenzy has taken over.

EXT. DOGTOWN - DAY

Moses drags the trash can full of money to his car, whistling "Crazy." He opens the trunk, dumps a bunch of stuff out and empties the money inside.

The bomb. TICKING really fast now. Like a heart attack.

The crowd is running toward town. They're getting closer. Some people pick up rocks, tree branches, whatever is at hand. They're ready to pummel Moses...

Moses slams shut the trunk and goes to get inside, but he stops. He looks around...

Dogs run into the diner...

He strides to the diner and walks inside.

INT. DINER - DAY

Dogs sit on the floor and counter, staring at the steak. One reaches his paw onto the grill and pulls it off.

Moses pushes the dog aside and picks up the sizzling steak. He takes a big bite out of it, relishing the taste. He takes another bite, folds the steak and shoves it into his coat pocket.

He strides out of the diner. The dogs follow him hungrily.

EXT. DOGTOWN - DAY

Moses gets into his car. He looks at the dogs. Gets out and opens the door, waving them inside...

The car screeches off.

The angry mob runs into town and searches for Moses...

EXT. HILLTOP - DAY

Sheriff Dan watches through binoculars, shaking his head.

THE BOMB

The TICKING... stops.

INT. IMPALA - DAY

Driving, Moses rips pieces of the steak and tosses them to the backseat. He flips on the radio. The same preacher is ranting about the end of days.

Behind him, the town, now a half mile away, EXPLODES in a massive fireball.

Moses flips the station. He finds... can it be... Rick James' "Super Freak." He smiles and drums the steering wheel.

EXT. DOGTOWN - DAY

Through the smoke, the pink poodle runs down the road. It's singed and smoking, but decidedly alive. It watches as the Impala drives away, then YELPS.

Through the back window, we see the car is full of dogs. A few bills stick out of the closed trunk...

The poodle runs after the car, yelping, as "Super Freak" plays louder.

FADE TO BLACK.

BENDER

by

Howard Rabinowitz

FADE IN:

EXT. STREET NEAR CHURCH - EVENING

LARRY (20s) walks, lost in space. He wears a plain brown trenchcoat. He mutters to himself as he goes.

LARRY
Motel 6... get drunk... cheap
champagne... Well guess what?

He takes a deep breath, pauses, then starts walking again. When he speaks, he seems strangely detached.

LARRY
This is not as fucked up as it
seems. Maybe it's a little fucked
up. But there are more fucked up
things in the world. I'm not
bombing abortion clinics. I'm not
making five-year-old Thai kids sew
labels on fake designer jeans. This
is just me. The real me.

A PEDESTRIAN stares at Larry as he passes: Is this guy crazy? Larry checks his watch and strides purposely to the church door, then strides away: not ready yet.

He breathes deeply and leans up against the church wall. He collects himself, then strides up the steps again and enters.

INT. CHURCH ENTRY - IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING

Larry walks inside and checks a DIRECTORY of rooms. He walks with determination down a hallway.

INT. CHURCH MEETING ROOM - NIGHT

Bright, sterile space, religious posters on the wall. Larry enters and stops dead in his tracks, suddenly panicked.

LEADER (O.S.)
Welcome!

LARRY
(as if he's unsure)
I'm Larry?

LEADER (O.S.)
You're here for the support group?

Larry nods uneasily.

LEADER (O.S.)
Take off your coat and join us.

Larry jerks his overcoat off and hangs it on a rack. Underneath he is wearing a simple, almost matronly FLORAL PATTERN DRESS. He smooths the dress.

LEADER (O.S.)
We're going to start by centering ourselves, Larry...

Larry nods again, but doesn't move.

CLOSEUP - HANDS

Larry's hand joins a young black man's on one side. On the other side, he takes a man's hand with LONG RED FINGERNAILS. After a beat, this hand gives Larry's a little SQUEEZE.

LEADER
We'll close our eyes and be here in this room with each other. Some of us have pain and all of us know that sharing can ease our own pain as well as others'...

PULL BACK to reveal that Larry sits in a circle of men, all in women's clothing. A wide range of ages and clothes: TOM (30s), in a sparkly red dress; DELBERT (20s), a black man in a cocktail dress and heels; SAL (50s), a grandfatherly type in a fluffy outfit; MARCO (40s), a brawny man in nun's habit; GREGORY (late 30s), a drag queen who looks "real"; and WILL (30s), a handsome man in a sexy black outfit. The LEADER (40s), a therapist, wears a sweater and jeans.

PAN around the group as the Leader talks, each with his eyes closed, ending on Larry, his eyes open.

LEADER (V.O.)
Some of us are here for the first time. Some of us need to talk, others to listen and understand...

INT. CHURCH MEETING ROOM - LATER

Sal tugs unconsciously at his fake pearl necklace as he speaks.

SAL
So I'm at Capezio and I find these gold pumps that actually fit. I should've worn them tonight. Meant to.

(MORE)

SAL(cont'd)

So I'm buying them and the girl asks if they're for my wife. Should she wrap 'em. And I look at her and I say, 'Hell no. They're for me!'

LEADER (O.S.)

What did she say?

SAL

(laughs)

Nothing. She just, y'know... Rang me up.

LEADER

Did you want her to say something?

SAL

Like what?

Abrupt SWISH PAN to Tom.

TOM

(exasperated)

Like eat shit and die! Like, hello!

SAL

Well, I'm proud I didn't pretend. Every time I go shopping...

TOM

What was she going to do, call the pump police? "Officer, he's buying a size ten, arrest him!"

LEADER

Tom...

TOM

Sal, I go out like this all the time. I get fucking harassed, all right?

SAL

It sounds like you want everybody to jump off a roof, Tom.

TOM

(overlapping)

No, no, no --

SAL

I dress up for myself. I'm not an exhibit, a-a public display --

TOM

But, it's... No one can get a word in edgewise, Sal. You go on and on - first I went shopping and bought some nice pumps. Gold pumps. Oh, gold pumps? How nice...

SAL

(to Leader)

Am I talking too much?

LEADER

There are no rules here.

DELBERT

(to Tom)

Man, you are out of line. Let her speak her peace is all.

MARCO

Amen to that.

GREGORY

The fur's flying tonight.

MARCO

Full moon.

SAL

Well, excuse me if I talk too much.

Sal mimes zipping his lips. A pause. Larry has been watching the encounter intently, but feels a bit removed.

LEADER

Let's take a deep breath. Does anyone have anything more to share?

WILL

(smiles)

Who's the new kid in town?

LEADER

Larry? Do you want to share anything?

Larry looks nervous.

LARRY

No. I'm here to listen.

All eyes are still on Larry. He shifts uncomfortably.

LARRY

But my name is Larry Black. I'm an architecture student. I do have one question. It's just that I'm not gay. I wear these clothes, but I'm straight. And I was wondering if anyone else was. For what it's worth.

WILL

I'm not gay. For what it's worth.

Larry and Will exchange a look. FOLLOW the Leader as he stands up and gets a glass of water.

LEADER

A lot of men who cross dress aren't gay, Larry. Many lead quote unquote normal heterosexual lives, raise children -- and wear women's clothing. I don't know the statistics offhand, but I bet they'd surprise you.

TOM

(defensive)

Are you suggesting there's something not normal or-or weird about gay men who wear women's clothing?

The Leader, his back to the group, rubs his eyes.

LEADER

(weary)

Let's get back on track.

INT. MEN'S RESTROOM - LATER

Larry stands at a urinal, peeing. He exhales.

WILL (O.S.)

You really put yourself out there.

PAN to show Will, wearing a black leather jacket, peeing two urinals away from Larry.

WILL

That was brave, to talk your first time. I didn't say anything for a month when I started coming.

LARRY
I didn't plan on it...

WILL
Didn't mean to put you on the spot,
but I was sick of hearing those two
bicker.

Both Larry and Will flush, almost simultaneously. They adjust their clothes.

WILL
I'm Will, by the way.

LARRY
Nice to meet you.

Larry extends his hand. Will just looks at it. Then Larry looks at his hand. They move to the sinks and wash up.

WILL
You just move here from somewhere?

LARRY
No. I've been in L.A. awhile.

Will moves a little closer to Larry.

WILL
(hushed)
It was good to be up front about
that, not being gay. Some guys come
to these groups just looking to get
laid. Cruising the circuit. I don't
know how many times I got hit on.
(smiles)
You like opera?

LARRY
Oh yeah. Who doesn't?

WILL
Cosi Fan Tutti's on PBS tomorrow
night. If you're not doing
anything, you could come over.

LARRY
That'd be great. Tomorrow -- wait,
tomorrow's bad. I've got this
thing.

Will pulls out a PEN.

WILL
 I'll tape it. We can watch it
 whenever. Got anything to write my
 number on?

Larry feels for pockets, then remembers he's wearing a dress.
 Will takes Larry's hand and writes his phone number on the
 back. They smile awkwardly.

WILL
 Call me.

LARRY
 I will... Will.

Will takes a long, hard look at Larry, smiles, then leaves.

LARRY
 (to himself)
 Will Will.

INT. THEATER - DAY

Bright lights. Larry, dressed in jeans and T-shirt, stands on
 the stage. Looks into the audience, blinded.

LARRY
 Are you there, God? It's me, Larry.

MAY (20s), pretty, bookish, flips through a script. Larry
 jumps off the stage and sits next to her.

MAY
 Don't call me God.

LARRY
 You're the writer. You created me.

MAY
 Larry, not you. Channeled is more
 like it.

LARRY
 Can I ask you a question, May?

MAY
 Sure.

LARRY
 It's Larry. I'm trying to pin him
 down. I'm reading the lines, but
 it's not real for me.

(MORE)

LARRY(cont'd)

His girlfriend comes home and finds him in drag...

MAY

It's a comedy. Don't overthink it.

LARRY

But the character has dignity. I want him to be a real person. So I met this guy who's straight and wears women's clothing. Thinking I'm just doing research.

MAY

Where'd you find him, Mitch?

LARRY

Not important.
(vulnerable)
The thing is, I can't stop thinking about him. I told him I'm straight. Because Larry is.

MAY

Why didn't you just say you're you - a gay actor doing a part?

LARRY

I wanted him to be real, to expose something --

May pulls out a POCKET TAPE RECORDER and-presses record.

MAY

Hold it a sec.
(into recorder)
Idea for a play: Actor researching a role on "The Sopranos" infiltrates the mafia. Hijinks ensue.

May clicks the recorder off.

LARRY

So I'm going to see this guy tomorrow night at the support group --

May holds up her hand and turns on the recorder again.

MAY

(into recorder)
Possibly gets whacked.
(MORE)

MAY(cont'd)

(presses stop, then to
Larry)

So what do you want, advice?

LARRY

I was wondering if I could borrow
something nice to wear.

INT. THEATER - LATER

Larry, dressed as before, stands on a stage set (an apartment with exposed brick walls, a white sofa and framed theater posters). He holds a SCRIPT.

MAY (O.S.)

Let's run the monologue. Act 1,
Scene 2. Mara comes home and sees
you in the dress. Ready?

LARRY

Let me get into character.
(to himself)
I'm exposed... Vulnerable...

MAY (O.S.)

Take your time. Whenever you're
ready.

Larry takes a deep breath. Then another deep breath.

MAY (O.S.)

Hey, we don't have all day!

Larry nods. He's not comfortable with the part yet. Glances at the script occasionally as he acts.

LARRY

This is not as fucked up as it
seems. Maybe it's a little fucked
up. But there are more fucked up
things in the world. I'm not
bombing abortion clinics. I'm not
making five-year-old Thai kids sew
labels on fake designer jeans. This
is just me. The real me. You want
the truth? I've been raiding my
mom's closet since I was 12. In
high school, when I went to prom,
the whole night I was dying to get
into my date's dress. After the
dance, we go to a Motel 6. I get
her drunk on cheap champagne. She
passes out. Here's my chance. I
undress her, try it on.

(MORE)

LARRY(cont'd)

Well, guess what? Looked better on me than it did on her! But... But she wakes up and sees me...

EXT. CHURCH ENTRY - EVENING

Larry strides in holding a handbag. He takes off his trenchcoat. Underneath he wears a sexy strapless blue dress.

CLOSE-UP - ADDRESS BOOK

Larry flips it open to Will's phone number. He dials the number into a pay phone.

WILL (O.S.)

They moved the support group to Thursdays. The church is doing a musical. Why don't you just come over? We can hang out.

INT. WILL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Will opens the door, dressed in a white T-shirt and jeans.

WILL

Wow! That's some outfit, Larry.

LARRY

Thanks.

WILL

Come on in. I rented a video.

Larry walks in and throws his handbag on the counter. He looks around the room in shock: It looks exactly like the stage set -- exposed brick wall, white sofa, posters.

WILL

Is everything all right?

LARRY

The place feels... familiar. You're into theater?

WILL

My girlfriend is. Ex-girlfriend. She's a playwright.

LARRY

Really?

WILL

Aspiring. They're going to put on a play of hers down at the Target Theater next month. Not that I'll go see it. Get this -- she wrote a play based on my life. That's why we broke up.

Larry nods, makes the connection: Does Will know? He edges toward the door.

LARRY

Jeez. I forgot! I have this thing tonight...

WILL

This thing?

LARRY

(think, Mitch, think)
Yeah, this thing, it's... Some friends are having a Super Bowl party.

WILL

It's Tuesday. The Super Bowl's on Sunday.

LARRY

It's not on Super Tuesday?

Will shakes his head, then puts his arm around Larry and PULLS him inside.

WILL

C'mon, sports fans. Let's watch the video.

CLOSE-UP - TELEVISION

A scene from "Tootsie" plays. Dustin Hoffman puts makeup on and dresses in drag.

INT. APARTMENT - LATER

Larry and Will sit next to each other on the couch, illuminated by the TV's glow.

Offscreen, we hear the movie soundtrack. Will is LAUGHING at the movie. Larry feels trapped. He edges away from Will, but Will edges closer to Larry and puts his arm around him. Larry looks confused, then slowly turns to look at him.

Will moves in closer and KISSES him. Larry JUMPS UP from the couch. Will jumps up after him.

LARRY
What's going on, Will...

WILL
You tell me.

LARRY
I thought you said you weren't gay.

WILL
I'm not. I'm bi. What's your real name? Cause it sure as hell isn't Larry Black.

Will SHOVES Larry.

LARRY
It's Mitch. Mitch Viharo.

Will SHOVES him again. He stumbles back and falls to the ground.

WILL
May sent you to the support group, didn't she!

LARRY
It was an accident, Will. I swear --

WILL
You think I don't recognize that dress? It's one of her favorites.

LARRY
I borrowed it. But she didn't know about the group or you or...

Will walks angrily to the kitchen and grabs a beer.

WILL
Larry Black. Architecture student. Right off the fucking character description!

LARRY
I was doing research. I couldn't get a handle on the character. I saw an ad in L.A. Weekly. She didn't send me. She doesn't have a clue... I'm really sorry, Will.

Will's reaction. He MUTES the TV and sits for a moment, fuming.

WILL
Do the monologue.

LARRY
What?

WILL
From Act 1. She walks in on me wearing her dress.
(prompts)
This isn't as fucked up as it seems...

Larry eases himself up and scoots against the wall.

LARRY
I'm still on book...

WILL
Do it!

Larry takes a deep breath. He nails the monologue.

LARRY
This is not as fucked up as it seems! Maybe it's a little fucked up. But there are more fucked up things in the world. I'm not bombing abortion clinics. I'm not making five-year-old Thai kids sew labels on fake designer jeans. This is just me. The real me.

Will listens intently. He gets up and sits on the floor facing Larry.

LARRY
You want the truth? Okay. I've been raiding my mom's closet since I was 12. In high school, when I went to the prom, the whole night I was dying to get into my date's dress. After the dance, we go to a Motel 6. I get her drunk on cheap champagne. She passes out. Here's my chance. I undress her, try it on. Well, guess what? Looked better on me than it did on her! But she wakes up and sees me. She's crying, I'm crying. Don't tell anyone!
(MORE)

LARRY(cont'd)

I'm begging her, please don't tell!
So what does she do? She kisses me.
The real me. And we had sex. My
first time.

Will takes a swig of beer and passes it to Larry.

WILL

We didn't go all the way. She was
kinda freaked out by the prom
dress.

(softening)

You do it well. The monologue.

LARRY

(excited)

That was great! I really felt it.
It was like... Did you feel that?

WILL

I lived it. It's a little fucked
up. Like an out-of-body experience,
watching myself.

LARRY

It's not as fucked up as it seems.

Larry looks at Will. PAN around them as Will gives a slight
smile, looking back at Larry. Will gently puts his hand on
Larry's shoulder.

WILL

I can't believe she let you borrow
this. She never let me wear it.

TIGHT on Larry's reaction. He has finally found the
character. Slowly PULL BACK from Larry...

INT. THEATER - CONTINUOUS

... but now we are on stage in the apartment set, where Larry
and an ACTRESS are on the floor against the wall, in the same
position that Larry and Will were in. "Tootsie" plays on the
TV without sound. We keep PULLING BACK to show the seats in
the theater are full. As the curtain falls, the AUDIENCE
applauds.

FADE TO BLACK.

NEBRASKA

by

Olga Zurawska

EXT. STREET - DAY

A poor residential area in Los Angeles, run-down Victorian houses interspersed with styleless buildings. Three Mexican boys, about 5-years-old, hide behind a fence. They play at catching sunbeams in a mirror. They direct the reflection at a person sitting on the porch of a Victorian house. It's AUNT ROSE, an old, jovial African American woman resting in a rocking chair.

BOY 1

She asleep?

BOY 2

Blind people don't have to sleep,
stupid.

Aunt Rose wakes up and reaches to catch the sunbeams. The boys laugh and run away. Aunt Rose smiles and nods her head. The door of the house opens. DREW, 23, Caucasian, in mismatched pyjamas and barely awake, comes out and sits next to Aunt Rose.

AUNT ROSE

Morning.

DREW

Morning.

They sit for a while looking at the street. A sharp sound of a plane grows above their heads. DREW looks up at the sky.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

EXT. PORCH - DAY

A hot, lazy afternoon. Aunt Rose and Drew sit on the porch looking at the street. Aunt Rose reaches down next to her rocking chair for a glass and bottle of Jack Daniels. She pours herself a drink and enjoys it.

DREW

Damn hot today.

AUNT ROSE

Not as hot as in Tennessee.

Aunt Rose chuckles, tipsy. The sound of an ice-cream truck comes and goes.

AUNT ROSE (CONT'D)

No clouds?

Drew looks up at the sky.

DREW

No.

Aunt Rose chuckles again.

AUNT ROSE

Born and raised here, you'd better
get used to the heat, girl.

She chuckles even more. Drew looks at her, entertained by
Aunt Rose's tipsy mood.

CUT TO:

View of the street from the porch. A huge old classic
American car drives past the house slowly.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

EXT. PORCH - DAY

That same old car drives up and parks in front of the house.
JOHNNY, 28, Caucasian, cross-eyed, comes up to the porch. He
is oddly dressed-up and nervous about it.

JOHNNY

Aunt Rose. Drew.

DREW

How are you Johnny?

Johnny joins them on the porch and now the three of them look
at the street and nibble on cookies. Finally Johnny says it.

JOHNNY

So, Drew, wanna go to the movies or
something?

DREW

I don't like them - movies.

Johnny's palms sweat.

JOHNNY

What do you like?

DREW
Fish. I like watching fish.

Aunt Rose smiles and sips her whisky.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

EXT. POND - DUSK

Drew and Johnny sit side by side. She stares intensely down at the fish in the pond. Reflections from the water dance on their faces. Johnny glances at Drew, content.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. DINER - DAY

A dingy diner. Drew cleans the counter. Then she comes up to the only customer, DARREN, 28, a British writer on the verge of a nervous breakdown. He is sitting at a table full of untouched food.

DREW
Anything else for you?

DARREN
No, just the bill.

DREW
You don't like the food?

DARREN
No, I just can't eat. I can't write
and I can't eat.

Drew hands him the bill.

DREW
You're a writer.

DARREN
I'm a writer.

He gets the money out of his pocket.

DARREN (CONT'D)
I've got to get away from this
city. This... this pink plastic is
not fantastic... at all.

DREW
I also got to get out of here.

Darren pretends to be interested.

DARREN
Where do you want to go?

DREW
Nebraska.

Darren stares at her, curious.

DARREN
Nebraska?

She nods.

DARREN (CONT'D)
Do you know anybody there?

She shakes her head.

DARREN (CONT'D)
What would you do in Nebraska?

DREW
I'd wait on tables.

She gives him the change and starts cleaning up the table.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. DREW'S ROOM - NIGHT

Drew on her bed, thinking. A big, old-fashioned fan is on next to the bed. There is a poster of landscape above Drew's head; it features the middle of nowhere. Drew gets a photo album from a shelf and puts on a walkman. She goes through the pictures.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

EXT. PORCH - DAY

Aunt Rose, Drew and Johnny sit on the porch. Aunt Rose in her rocking chair, smokes a pipe. Johnny glances at Drew, happy to be so close to her. Drew looks up - in the blue sky there are some cumulus clouds.

DREW
I wanna move to Nebraska.

Johnny's face freezes. Aunt Rose nods and smiles, still smoking the pipe.

AUNT ROSE
What do you know about Nebraska,
girl?

Johnny watches Drew, concerned.

DREW
Nothing.

Aunt Rose starts to laugh. Her laughter grows, changes a few times, finally dies. She gets all serious.

AUNT ROSE
Then you should go.

Aunt Rose goes on smoking her pipe. Johnny tips his hat back and sighs.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

EXT. STREET - DAY

A huge old pink car parks in front of the house. Johnny gets out of it and comes up to the gate. Drew is on the porch.

JOHNNY
Drew!

DREW
What's up, Johnny?

JOHNNY
Come see.

Drew comes up to the car.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)
I got it for you.

He waits impatiently for her reaction.

DREW
Pink.

His face lights up.

JOHNNY

Yes.

Johnny's smile fades.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

It'll make it to Nebraska all
right.

Drew looks at Johnny.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

EXT. PORCH - DAY

Aunt Rose on the porch as in Scene 1. The door of the house opens and Drew walks out, two suitcases in her hands. She places them on the porch and comes up to Aunt Rose.

DREW

Goodbye, Aunt Rose.

AUNT ROSE

Goodbye.

They hug. Aunt Rose breaks the hug and gently pushes Drew away, withholding tears.

AUNT ROSE (CONT'D)

Go, girl, go.

Drew picks up the suitcases and walks down the stairs.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY

Drew comes up to the pink car and puts the suitcases in the trunk. Johnny helps her. Drew looks back at the house.

DREW

Goodbye, Johnny.

JOHNNY

Goodbye, Drew.

Drew kisses Johnny on the cheek. He blushes. Drew gets in the car and drives away as Johnny watches. The car gets smaller and smaller in the street.

Johnny watches long after it had disappeared. He turns around, tips his hat back and walks away.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

EXT. PORCH - DAY

Aunt Rose in her rocking chair. She wipes sweat from her forehead with an old-fashioned hankie.

AUNT ROSE
It sure is hot today. As hot as in
damn Tennessee.

She chuckles.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE BET

by

Anton Chekhov

(translated from the Russian by M. S. Kidd.)

It was a dark autumn night. The old banker paced from corner to corner of his study and recalled how, fifteen years ago in the fall, he held a soiree. That evening, there had been many clever people and interesting discussions. Among other things, they touched on capital punishment. The guests, among whom there were several scholars and journalists, disapproved of the death penalty. They considered that method of punishment outmoded, unsuited to a Christian government, and immoral. In the opinion of several of them, capital punishment should in all cases be replaced by life imprisonment.

"I don't agree with you," said the banker-host. I have suffered neither the death penalty nor life imprisonment, but if one is to judge a priori, then in my opinion, capital punishment is a more moral and humane choice. It kills you at once, but life imprisonment does it slowly. Which executioner is the more humane, one who kills you in a few minutes, or the one who draws out your life for many years?"

"They are each equally immoral," observed one of the guests, "because each has the same goal -- the deprivation of life. A government is not God, it does not have the right to take away that which it cannot replace if it wishes."

There was a lawyer among the guests, a young man of twenty-five. When they asked his opinion, he replied, "The death penalty and life imprisonment are equally immoral, but if you press me to choose between the death penalty and life imprisonment, then I should, of course, choose the second. To be alive, in whatever manner, is better than nothing."

This produced an animated discussion. The banker, who was then younger and more highly strung, was suddenly beside himself. Turning to the young lawyer, he struck the table with his fist and cried, "It's not so! I will bet two million rubles that you couldn't stay shut away for even five years."

"If you are serious," replied the lawyer, "then I will bet that I can remain not five, but fifteen years."

"Fifteen? Done!" exclaimed the banker. "Gentlemen, I'll wager two million rubles."

"Agreed! You bet Millions, and I, my freedom," said the lawyer.

And that queer senseless bet was on. The spoilt and callow banker, who at that time didn't even count his millions, was delighted with the bet. During supper, he made fun of the lawyer and said, "Be reasonable, young man, while it's not too late. For myself, two million is a trifle, but you risk losing three or four of the best years of your life. I say three or four, because you won't last longer. Don't

forget, unhappy soul, that voluntary incarceration is by far more burdensome than if it were compulsory. The thought that at any minute, you have the right to regain your freedom can poison your whole existence in confinement. I feel sorry for you."

The banker, now pacing from side to side, recalled all this and asked himself, "What was the point of the bet? Who benefits from it, the lawyer losing fifteen years of his life, or I, throwing away two million? Was it to show people that the death sentence is better or worse than life imprisonment? Absolutely not. Stuff and nonsense! For me, it was the whim of a well-fed man, and for the lawyer, it was pure greed."

Then he thought of what had happened after the evening described. It was decided that the lawyer would serve out his imprisonment under strict supervision in one of the cottages in the banker's garden. They agreed that for the duration of fifteen years, he would be deprived of the right to cross the threshold of the cottage, see human beings, hear a human voice, or receive letters and newspapers. He was allowed to have a musical instrument, read books, write letters, drink wine and smoke tobacco. According to the conditions, he was not allowed to communicate with the outside world other than silently, through a little window built expressly for the purpose. All that he needed, books, paper, wine, and so on, he could receive in any amount he pleased, as agreed, but only through the window. The agreement enumerated all conditions and details, which stipulated a confinement absolutely solitary, and obliged the lawyer to endure exactly fifteen years, from twelve o'clock, November 14, 1870, to twelve o'clock, November 14, 1885. The least attempt on the part of the lawyer to infringe on the conditions, even two minutes from the end of the term, would release the banker from his obligation to pay two million rubles.

In the first year, the lawyer, as far as they could judge from his short notes, suffered greatly from solitude and boredom. Day and night, the sounds of a piano were heard constantly from his cottage. He refrained from wine and tobacco. "Wine," he wrote, "arouses longings, and longings are the first enemy of the prisoner; and besides, there is nothing more boring than to drink good wine and not see anyone." And tobacco spoiled the air of his room. During that first year, they sent the lawyer books mainly of a light character: novels with complicated love intrigues, crime stories, fantasies, and the like.

In the second year, there was no music from the cottage, and in his notes, the lawyer demanded only classics. In the fifth year, music was heard again, and the prisoner asked for wine. Those who observed him through the little window said that all that year, he only ate, drank, and lay on the bed, often yawned and talked irritably to himself. He read no books. Sometimes at night, he would sit down to write, scribble for a long time, and towards morning, would rip all he had written into shreds. At times, they heard him weep.

In the second half of the sixth year, the prisoner assiduously began the study of languages, philosophy and history. He embarked so avidly on these studies that the banker scarcely had time to order the books for him. In the following four years, almost six hundred volumes were ordered at his request. In that period of enthusiasm, the banker received from his prisoner the following note: "My dear jailor! I am writing you these lines in six languages. Show them to scholars. They will be able to read them. If they find not one mistake, then I beg you, order a gun fired in the garden. That shot will tell me that my efforts have not been for nothing. Geniuses of all ages and countries have spoken in divers tongues, but there burns in all of them the same flame, Oh, if only you knew what unearthly happiness fills my soul that I can understand them!" The wishes of the prisoner were fulfilled; the banker ordered a gun fired twice in the garden.

Thereupon, after the tenth year, the lawyer sat in his chair and read only one book, the Gospel. It seemed strange to the banker that a man who in four years had conquered six hundred abstruse tomes, should expend almost a year on the reading of one easily understood and not very thick book. To replace the Gospel came history, religion, and theology.

In the last two years of confinement, the prisoner read an extraordinary amount, without discrimination. Now he studied natural science, now he demanded Byron or Shakespeare. There were notes from him requesting chemistry, medical treatises, novels, and all kinds of philosophical or theological tracts at the same time. His reading was as though he swam among the wreckage of a ship at sea, and desirous of saving his life, eagerly snatched at first one piece of debris, then another.

II

The old banker recalled all this and thought, "At twelve o'clock tomorrow, he will gain his freedom, and I must pay him two million rubles, as we agreed. If I pay him, then everything is finished. I am absolutely ruined."

Fifteen years ago, he had not counted his millions, but now he was afraid to ask himself which he had more of—money or debts. Gambling on the stockmarket, risky speculations, and a recklessness which even in old age he could not renounce had led little by little to the decline of his business; and the intrepid, self-sufficient rich man was reduced to a mediocre banker, trembling at each rise and fall of the market.

"That damnable bet!" muttered the old man, slapping his head in despair. "Why didn't he die? He is but forty years old. He'll have my last kopeck, marry, enjoy life, play the market, while I like a beggar, will look on enviously and every day will hear the same words from him: "I am indebted to you for my life's happiness. Allow me to help you." No -- that's too much. My only salvation from bankruptcy and

disgrace is that man's death."

Three o'clock struck. The banker listened intently. Everyone in the house was asleep and the only sound to be heard was the chilly rustle of the trees through the window. Trying to make no sound, he took from his strongbox the key to the door which had not been opened for fifteen years, put on his coat, and left the house.

The garden was dark and cold. It was raining. A damp thin wind rushed howling throughout the garden and gave the trees no rest. The banker strained his eyes, but could see neither the ground, the white statues, the cottage, nor the trees. Going toward the place where the cottage stood, he twice hailed the watchman. There was no answer. Evidently the watchman was sheltering from the weather and now slept somewhere in the kitchen or in the orangerie.

"If I have the courage to do what I intend," thought the old man, "suspicion will fall on the watchman first."

He groped for the step and doorway in the darkness, and went into the entrance hall of the cottage, where he made his fumbling way to a small passage and struck a match. There was not a soul there. In a corner, a cast-iron stove was visible, and a bedstead of some sort, without covers. Seals were affixed to the door leading to the prisoner's room.

When the match went out, the old man, trembling with nervousness, peered through the little window.

A candle gleamed dimly in the prisoner's room. He himself was seated at the table. Only his back, the hair on his head, and his hand were visible. Open books lay on the table, on two armchairs, and on the carpet near the table.

Five minutes passed and the prisoner did not once stir. Fifteen years of imprisonment had taught him to sit motionless. The banker tapped his fingers on the window, but the prisoner made no move in answer. Then the banker gingerly tore the seals from the door and put the key in the keyhole. The rusty lock grated and the door creaked. The banker expected a cry of astonishment and immediate footsteps, but three minutes passed and it was as quiet as before beyond the doorway. He decided to enter the room.

The man sitting motionless on the chair was not like normal folk. He was a skeleton covered with skin, with long feminine curls and a shaggy beard. The color of his face was yellow, with a sallow hue, his cheeks were sunken, his back was long and thin, and the hand with which he held his hairy head was so drawn and thin that it was terrible to look upon. There were already silver threads in his hair, and gazing at his aging emaciated face, no one would believe that this was a man of only forty years. He was asleep... on the table near his bowed head lay a sheet of paper on which something was written in a cramped hand.

"Poor soul!" thought the banker. "He is asleep and assuredly sees millions in his dreams. I have only to take this half-dead man, throw him on the bed and gently smother him with a pillow. The most conscientious expert will find no sign of a violent death. First, however, I had better read

over what he has written."

The banker took the page from the table and read the following: "Tomorrow at twelve o'clock noon, I shall receive my freedom and the right of intercourse with people. But before I leave this room and see the sun, I consider it necessary to tell you several things. With the clearest conscience and before God who sees me, I declare to you that I despise freedom, life, health, and all things which in your books are accounted the blessings of the world.

"For fifteen years, I have carefully studied life on this earth. True, I did not see the earth or people, but through your books, I drank full-bodied wines, sang songs, hunted deer and the savage wild boar through the woods, loved women... Exquisite beauties, ephemeral as clouds, created by the brilliance of your inspired poets, came to me at night and whispered marvelous tales which rose to my head like wine. In your books, I scaled the summits of Elbrus and Mont Blanc and saw from there how the sun rose in the morning and in the evening flooded the heavens, ocean, and mountain heights with crimson gold; there I saw above me the sundered clouds, the flashing lightning; I saw green forests, fields, rivers, lakes, cities; heard the song of the Sirens and the shepherd's pipe, felt the wings of splendid demons flying to me to talk of God. In your books, I threw myself down bottomless abysses, performed wonders, destroyed and sacked cities, propounded new religions, conquered whole kingdoms.

"Your books gave me wisdom. All that which human thought has tirelessly created throughout the ages is contained in my mind in one small lump. I know that I have more wisdom than all of you.

"And I despise your books, despise wisdom and all the happiness of the world! All is nothing, perishable, illusory, deceptive as a mirage, Though you be proud, wise and beautiful, death will shake you from the face of the earth even as the mice scurrying in their burrows; but your posterity, your history, the immortality of your geniuses will freeze or flame together with the earthly sphere.

"You have gone mad, and do not walk in those paths. You accept lies as truth and ugliness as beauty. If, for some reason, apple and orange trees suddenly brought forth frogs and lizards instead of fruit, or roses began to stink like a sweating horse, you would be amazed, even as I marvel at you, who have bartered heaven for earth. I do not wish to understand you.

"In order to make my contempt for the way you live quite plain, I decline the two million rubles of which I once dreamed as of Paradise and which I now despise. To deprive myself to the right to them, I shall leave here five hours before the appointed time and by so doing shall violate the agreement..."

Upon reading this, the banker laid the paper on the table, kissed the head of this strange man, and weeping, left the cottage. Never at any other time, even after dangerous losses on the stock market had he felt so much contempt for

himself as now. Returned home, he lay on his bed; but for a long time, emotion and tears gave him no rest.

The morning of the next day, white-faced watchmen came running up to inform him that they had seen someone like the man who had been living in the cottage climb through the window into the garden, slip to the gate and then steal away. The banker immediately set off with the servants and verified the flight of his prisoner. To prevent unnecessary rumors, he took the note of renunciation from the table, and upon returning to his room, locked it in his strongbox.

THE BET

by

Ron Waller

1. FADE IN:

Black. A door opens from left to right and reveals two shadowy figures, Ron and Mike. They pause in the doorway, hesitant.

RON
What's the piano for? I haven't touched one since I was a kid.

MIKE
Yes, I know. The books you asked for are on the shelf. You recall what we discussed about the telephone? It's a direct line to the office switchboard.

RON
Yeah, I know. Everything looks fine.

MIKE
Ron --

RON
Mike! Don't start again. We've been all through...

MIKE
Call it off.

RON
No!

MIKE
You're a fool.

Ron smiles. Mike looks at him for a moment; then he exits. The door closes to black.

2. FADE IN:

Beyond Ron's shadow, there is a calendar on the wall. Over it year has been marked off. Ron's shadow remains visible in right foreground. He is smoking a cigar. He takes a drink, moves left, and marks off part of March of the second year. He recalls an earlier conversation.

VOICE-OVERS

MIKE (V.O.)

Hmm. Don't you ever feel like just being alone instead of all these other people down here?

RON (V.O.)

Well, I don't know. At different times.

MIKE (V.O.)

Like when?

RON (V.O.)

Like this morning; I think I was alone for
(pause)
an hour.

MIKE (V.O.)

Why, when you were bathing?

Ron has moved to the cupboard; he takes another drink.

RON (V.O.)

Still, I was alone.

He opens the lazy susan and takes out a bag.

RON (V.O.)

No, I'm talking about being alone. You're alone where you just kind of do things that you want to do to improve yourself.

Ron takes a fifth of whisky and a bottle of wine out of the paper bag. He works at opening the bottle of wine.

MIKE (V.O.)

You're the last one in the world that should talk about being alone.

RON (V.O.)

Why, how do you figure that?

MIKE (V.O.)

You've got broads around you all the time.

RON (V.O.)

(laughs)
Oh that.

MIKE (V.O.)

I've never seen you come down here yet that you didn't have a broad with you, or one coming.

RON (V.O.)

Yeah, well, I wonder where she is.

Ron crosses to a rumpled bed carrying a bottle and a bag. The table in front of the bed contains glasses, whisky, beer, and a coffee cup. The bed has only a sheet and pillow.

RON (V.O.)

-- and I maintain that if a person is allowed to be alone by himself without any interruptions or any social pressures, not having to worry about food or clothing or anything like that, he would manage to make himself a better human being.

Ron sits. He takes a pizza from a bag, puts out his cigar, and begins opening the wine bottle with a corkscrew.

MIKE (V.O.)

It's a very beautiful theory, Walden and Thoreau and being off in Brook Pond, but --

RON (V.O.)

The length of time.

(pause)

Oh, I think a man, if he is really going to do anything with his mind would have to be alone at least five years. That's a lot of time --

MIKE (V.O.)

Five years? You realize what you're saying? It's like saying you're going to put yourself in jail for five years.

RON (V.O.)

No --

MIKE (V.O.)

Worse than jail, you're cutting yourself off from all human contact.

Ron tries a different corkscrew to get the wine cork out of the bottle.

MIKE (V.O.)

Well, so -- that clears --

RON (V.O.)

No, no, no! I mean to be alone and allowed to study and learn.

Ron is getting increasingly frantic trying to open the bottle.

MIKE (V.O.)

Oh, that sounds great. It sounds great.

RON (V.O.)

Anyway, I still maintain and insist that it would work.

Ron tries a knife and then his finger and still can't budge the cork.

MIKE (V.O.)

I don't think it would work. In fact, I'll tell you what I'll do. I want to bet you something.

Ron tries his little finger.

RON (V.O.)

How's that?

Ron succeeds in pushing the cork into the bottle.

MIKE (V.O.)

A little wager, and you can break it any time you want. No problem. I've got a shack on some property I own, really isolated, out in the country.

RON (V.O.)

Well?

Ron fills his glass from the bottle.

MIKE (V.O.)

Now, what we'll do is we'll board up all the windows;

(MORE)

MIKE(cont'd)

there's to be no outside communication, food will be brought to you, but you won't see who brings it. Sort of a lazy susan thing, from one side, and you can leave a note for supplies, what you want. Everything will be supplied, but, as soon as you open that door or if you lift the telephone and break the seal on it --

Ron continues to drink. He sets the glass down revealing the calendar as before.

RON (V.O.)

What telephone?

Ron sits on the bed. The room is terribly cluttered and untidy.

MIKE (V.O.)

I'm going to have a telephone installed with a seal. As soon as you break that seal and make a telephone call on the outside, you lose.

Ron reclines on the bed.

MIKE (V.O.)

How's that?

RON (V.O.)

What's the stake?

Ron munches on the pizza.

MIKE (V.O.)

Oh, let's make it interesting. Fifty thousand?

RON (V.O.)

For five years? Not enough.

MIKE (V.O.)

No, that's right, too. What about this boat? Think it's worth it?

RON (V.O.)

Sure it's worth it. You know it's worth it. I know what this boat's worth.

Ron sits up and pours another drink.

MIKE (V.O.)

Well, all right.

RON (V.O.)

I've always kind of liked this boat, too, as a matter of fact. And you never use the damn thing. You don't even take it out and play with it.

MIKE (V.O.)

I'll put it in writing, have it notarized, the whole thing. You still want to go through with it?

RON (V.O.)

You're gonna bet me this boat, against five years of my life

MIKE (V.O.)

In complete isolation. No letters, no communication whatsoever, no radio. You can have anything else you ask for.

Ron turns out the bedside lamp and lies down. He covers himself with the single sheet and wads his pillow under his head.

RON (V.O.)

Hmm. You, my dear sir, have a bet.

MIKE (V.O.)

Think it over, my friend, think it over.

3. Diffused shot of ashtray. Camera moves back to reveal the ashtray filled with butts and paper. Liquor bottles jam the table. Ron, vaguely visible, thrashes about on the bed in the background. He rises, hairy, bearded, disheveled, and seizes a bottle. He pours a drink, feverishly. He shakes, pants, and continues drinking. He crosses over to a clock that says 12:08. The dim sound of a tone begins; it increases in intensity as he fumbles for a cigarette.

PHONE OPERATOR'S VOICE

The time is 12:08, exactly.

Ron crosses over to the calendar and marks off March of the third year. He circles about the room drinking, pouring more. His physical condition has deteriorated. He searches for a cigarette; they are all gone. He finds another pack and rips it open. He sees a clock. The tone sound ceases.

VOICE
The time is 12:08, exactly.

Tone resumes. He picks up the clock and shakes it vehemently.

VOICE
The time is twelve, eight, twelve,
eight, twelve, eight --

He sits down heavily and tries to take the clock apart.

VOICE
(faster)
Twelve, eight, twelve, eight
(tone)
-- thirty-two --

He shakes the clock close to his ear.

VOICE
exactly
(tone continues)
The time is one, two --
(tone)

Ron takes another drink.

VOICE
three, four, five, six, seven-
thirty --

Ron looks about desperately for another bottle with liquor in it.

VOICE
exactly
(tone, still louder)

He races to the lazy susan hitting his head on the overhead lamp. He says "Damn!" The lamp oscillates; he removes a bag. It contains a loaf of bread. He flings it away. The tone continues beeping with increasing rapidity and loudness. Ron groans; he staggers past the bookcase. He smashes bottles and heaves books from the shelves. He grabs the phone, nearly lifts the receiver, fights his inclination, and moans. The swinging light alternately lights and darkens the room. The insistent tone persists-louder and louder.

A series of fast cuts: Ron falls on the bed; he pours another drink; he drinks, convulsively; he cries; he screams; then, he hurls his glass; he throws the clock. He rises from the bed. Crying, he walks barefoot over the broken glass on the floor. He rips the calendar off the wall and tears it apart.

His bloody feet stomp over the glass-littered floor. He curls up on the bed in a fetal position sobbing convulsively. While the camera focuses on his heaving body and bloody feet, the screen continues to reflect the flashing light.

4. FADE IN:

Black. Ron's sobbing over. A dead branch. The camera pans over many bottles of liquor. A yacht (color). The camera backs away to reveal a "toy" boat in a tiny sea set in a desert locale.

VOICE

(distorted)

Five years. I bet my yacht -- you
go mad -- get, get, get, bet, bet,
bet...

(maniacal laughter over)

A barren landscape (color). Camera pans right while a yellow filter moves across the screen left. The creaking sound of a rocking chair over. The camera zooms in to a red glow, an isolated rocking chair rocking-a woman's face-his mother. She smiles. Dissolve to a smiling girl who puts her thumb in her mouth, sucks it, slowly withdraws her thumb, and smiles, sensually. From above, the camera sees the girl; she seems to be lying on her back, laughing. The camera zooms in on her open mouth; she screams. In a medium shot Ron sits up from his lying position. He screams. Black out.

5. FADE IN:

Diffused shot of a filigreed candelabra (part of a lamp). Ron's laughter over. The camera pans along well-ordered bookcases, around the room, now neat, and across the carefully made bed to the empty table. Ron, well-dressed, hair combed, beard and moustache trimmed, is reading a book and laughing. Piano and metronome sound over.

Ron playing the piano, with some hesitation. Camera moves back, across the books. Sound-over of piano playing becoming more assured. Pan to Ron on the floor doing pushups.

RON

31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36 --

Camera pans around room. Music accompanies exercises; camera reveals bed where Ron is doing sit-ups.

RON (V.O.)

37, 38, 39 --

RON
 (counting pushups)
 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48,
 49, 50.
 (counting of sit-ups, in
 bed)
 45,
 (pause)
 46,
 (pause)
 47-48-49-50.

Music stops. Ron sits up after last sit-up.

RON
 Whew!

He laughs, self-satisfied.

6. Ron in a dressing gown, eating a salad, and reading a book on hypnosis.

RON
 (reads)
 Time distortion is one of the most interesting and clinically valuable phenomena of hypnosis. It can be induced readily through post-hypnotic suggestions. Ten minutes of clock time can be condensed in one minute of subjective or experimental time. Hmm.

He rises, whistles, and dances into the bathroom. Sound of running water. Diffused shot (screen has blue tint). Music up. Clean ashtray with a pipe in it. Ron, back to camera, is at the piano, writing music. He rises, lights his pipe. He opens the lazy susan and takes out a stock of books. He puts them on the table. He selects one book and settles back on his bed to read. Back to scene.

RON
 (reads)
 In time distortion, the subject must concentrate on a phenomenon that is devoid of relation to time. This sublimation will therefore allow condensation or expansion of events without references to chronological conditioning. Close your eyes. Your eyes are getting very heavy and you're going to relax.

(MORE)

RON(cont'd)

Relax completely all over and
you're concentrating, concentrating
on a very vivid color. You can see
a color --

Close-up of Ron's closed eyes. A blue spot begins on his
right eye and becomes bigger, filling more screen space.

RON

-- a color that's becoming brighter
and brighter and larger and larger.
A color that is going to engulf you
--

RON (V.O.)

In your mind's eye you will see a
color; you can live and breathe
inside this color (shot of clock);
concentrate on color. Time means
nothing to you at all. Just
concentrate on the color blue,
indigo blue. Time will no longer be
--

RON

In auto-hypnosis --

VOICE

-- with you. You will not be able
to even think about time. You will
not know what time is anymore.
You're so very very relaxed and the
blue is so rich.

RON

Concentrate on color, on beautiful,
blue, rich color.

VOICE

Concentrate. Relax.
(long thin crystals of
blue)
Relax.
(piano over)

Flash cuts of Ron and piano. Raindrops on a bush. Pine
needles with lights filtering through. Music gets richer.
Ron's face, clean shaven. Piano keys. Piano hammers moving on
strings (they turn blue).

Ron's face, concentrating.

Pencil tip moving on paper.

7. Ron is playing a piano concerto. Ron at table writing in foreign language.

RON

During the time that I've been in this room, I have learned Italian, French, Greek, and words of various other languages.

(foreign words under)

Loud, abrupt telephone ringing. Camera zooms to phone; close-up of Ron's eyes; close-up of phone ringing with a normal sound. Ron, calmer, more collected, answers the phone.

RON

Go to Hell! I'll call you back later.

Ron hangs up the phone and begins writing.

Close-ups: hands writing, yacht, Ron's face, girl's face in black and white, papers placed in an "out" file above which is an Oscar Wilde quotation, as follows, "When the gods wish to punish us, they answer our prayers."

8. Ron sits and thinks. He turns out the desk light and walks to the other side of the room. Shots of him remembering his earlier experiences. This is a black montage; the screen is primarily black with bits of light flashing the following images: Ron with a short beard eating; Ron with a shaggy beard at table with liquor bottles; Ron at table with long but trimmed beard reading and then exercising. Ron turns out second lamp and walks to the piano. He plays a few bars and turns out the last light. Screen goes black; sounds of Ron walking across the room, quick cuts of the phone.

RON

(on the telephone)

I'm ready.

MIKE

What time?

RON

Huh!

(laughs)

Dawn!

(phone down)

Door creaks open. Mike peers in and waits as we hear Ron approaching. Ron and Mike look at each other in silhouette; Mike tips his head back in a moment of apprehension. Ron smiles; Mike smiles. Mike steps back to allow Ron to pass.

In a long shot from outside the house, Ron begins to emerge, hands over his eyes. He blinks and slowly moves his fingers from his face. He smiles as he sees an idyllic sunrise. Music up. Freeze; credits over.

THE GIRL WITH A PIMPLY FACE

by

William Carlos Williams

ONE of the local druggists sent in the call: 50 Summer St., second floor, the door to the left. It's a baby they've just brought from the hospital. Pretty bad condition I should imagine. Do you want to make it? I think they've had somebody else but don't like him, he added as an afterthought.

It was half past twelve. I was just sitting down to lunch. Can't they wait till after office hours?

Oh I guess so. But they're foreigners and you know how they are. Make it as soon as you can. I guess the baby's pretty bad.

It was two-thirty when I got to the place, over a shop in the business part of town. One of those street doors between plate glass windows. A narrow entry with mashed mail boxes on one side and a dark stair leading straight up. I'd been to the address a number of times during the past years to see various people who had lived there.

Going up I found no bell so I rapped vigorously on the wavy-glass door-panel to the left. I knew it to be the door to the kitchen which occupied the rear of that apartment.

Come in, said a loud childish voice.

I opened the door and saw a lank-haired girl of about fifteen standing, chewing gum, and eyeing me curiously from beside the kitchen table. The hair was coal black and one of her eyelids drooped a little as she spoke. Well, what do you want? she said. Boy, she was tough and no kidding but I fell for her immediately. There was that hard, straight thing about her that in itself gives an impression of excellence.

I'm the doctor, I said.

Oh, you're the doctor. The baby's inside. She looked at me. Want to see her?

Sure, that's what I came for. Where's your mother?

She's out. I don't know when she's coming back. But you can take a look at the baby if you want to.

All right. Let's see her.

She led the way into the bedroom, toward the front of the flat, one of the unlit rooms, the only windows being those in the kitchen and along the facade of the building.

There she is.

I looked on the bed and saw a small face, emaciated but quiet, unnaturally quiet, sticking out of the upper end of a tightly rolled bundle made by the rest of the baby encircled in a blue cotton blanket. The whole wasn't much larger than a good sized loaf of rye bread. Hands and everything were rolled up. Just the yellowish face showed, tightly hatted and framed around by a corner of the blanket.

What's the matter with her, I asked.

I dunno, said the girl as fresh as paint and seeming

about as indifferent as though it had been no relative of hers instead of her sister. I looked at my informer very much amused and she looked back at me, chewing her gum vigorously, standing there her feet well apart. She cocked her head to one side and gave it to me straight in the eye, as much as to say, Well? I looked back at her. She had one of those small, squeezed up faces, snub nose, overhanging eyebrows, low brow and a terrible complexion, pimply and coarse.

When's your mother coming back do you *think*, I asked again.

Maybe in an hour. But maybe you'd better come some time when my father's here. He talks English. He ought to come in around five I guess.

But can't you tell me something about the baby? I hear it's been sick. Does it have a fever?

I dunno.

But has it diarrhoea, are its movements green?

Sure, she said, I guess so. It's been in the hospital but it got worse so my father brought it home today.

What are they feeding it?

A bottle. You can see that yourself. There it is.

There was a cold bottle of half-finished milk lying on the coverlet, the nipple end of it fallen behind the baby's head.

How old is she? It's a girl, did you say?

Yeah, it's a girl.

Your sister?

Sure. Want to examine it?

No thanks, I said. For the moment at least I had lost all interest in the baby. This young kid in charge of the house did something to me that I liked. She was just a child but nobody was putting anything over on her if she knew it, yet the real thing about her was the complete lack of the rotten smell of liar. She wasn't in the least presumptive. Just straight.

But after all she wasn't such a child. She had breasts you knew would be like small stones to the hand, good muscular arms and fine hard legs. Her bare feet were stuck into broken down leather sandals such as you see worn by children at the beach in summer. She was heavily tanned too, wherever her skin showed. Just one of the kids you'll find loafing around the pools they have outside towns and cities everywhere these days. A tough little nut finding her own way in the world.

What's the matter with your legs? I asked. They were bare and covered with scabby sores.

Poison ivy, she answered, pulling up her skirts to show me.

Gee, but you ought to seen it two days ago. This ain't nothing. You're a doctor. What can I do for it?

Let's see, I said.

She put her leg up on a chair. It had been badly bitten by mosquitoes, as I saw the thing, but she insisted on poison ivy. She had torn at the affected places with her fingernails

and that's what made it look worse.

Oh that's not so bad, I said, you'll only leave it alone and stop scratching it.

Yeah, I know that but I can't. Scratching's the only thing makes it feel better.

What's that on your foot.

Where? looking.

That big brown spot there on the back of your foot.

Dirt I guess. Her gum chewing never stopped and her fixed defensive non-expression never changed.

Why don't you wash it?

I do. Say, what could I do for my face?

I looked at it closely. You have what they call acne, I told her. All those blackheads and pimples you see there, well, let's see, the first thing you ought to do, I suppose is to get some good soap.

What kind of soap? Lifebuoy?

No. I'd suggest one of those cakes of Lux. Not the flakes but the cake.

Yeah, I know, she said. Three for seventeen.

Use it. Use it every morning. Bathe your face in very hot water. You know, until the skin is red from it. That's to bring the blood up to the skin. Then take a piece of ice. You have ice, haven't you?

Sure, we have ice.

Hold it in a face cloth -- or whatever you have -- and rub that all over your face. Do that right after you've washed it in the very hot water -- before it has cooled. Rub the ice all over. And do it every day -- for a month. Your skin will improve. If you like, you can take some cold cream once in a while, not much, just a little and rub that in last of all, if your face feels too dry.

Will that help me?

If you stick to it, it'll help you.

All right.

There's a lotion I could give you to use along with that. Remind me of it when I come back later. Why aren't you in school?

Agh, I'm not going any more. They can't make me. Can they?

They can try.

How can they? I know a girl thirteen that don't go and they can't make her either.

Don't you want to learn things?

I know enough already.

Going to get a job?

I got a job. Here. I been helping the Jews across the hall. They give me three fifty a week -- all summer.

Good for you, I said. Think your father'll be here around five?

Guess so. He ought to be.

I'll come back then. Make it all the same call.

All right, she said, looking straight at me and chewing her gum as vigorously as ever.

Just then a little blond-haired thing of about seven came in through the kitchen and walked up to me looking curiously at my satchel and then at the baby.

What are you, a doctor?

See you later, I said to the older girl and went out.

At five-thirty I once more climbed the wooden stairs after passing two women at the street entrance who looked me up and down from where they were leaning on the brick wall of the building talking.

This time a woman's voice said, Come in, when I knocked on the kitchen door.

It was the mother. She was impressive, a bulky woman, growing toward fifty, in a black dress, with lank graying hair and a long seamed face. She stood by the enameled kitchen table. A younger, plumpish woman with blond hair, well-cared for and in a neat house dress -- as if she had dolled herself up for the occasion -- was standing beside her. The small blank child was there too and the older girl, behind the others, overshadowed by her mother, the two older women at least a head taller than she. No one spoke.

Hello, I said to the girl I had been talking to earlier. She didn't answer me.

Doctor, began the mother, save my baby. She very sick. The woman spoke with a thick, heavy voice and seemed overcome with grief and apprehension. Doctor! Doctor! she all but wept.

All right, I said to cut the woman short, let's take a look at her first.

So everybody headed toward the front of the house, the mother in the lead. As they went I lagged behind to speak to the second woman, the interpreter. What happened?

The baby was not doing so well. So they took it to the hospital to see if the doctors there could help it. But it got worse. So her husband took it out this morning. It looks bad to me.

Yes, said the mother who had overheard us. Me got seven children. One daughter married. This my baby, pointing to the child on the bed. And she wiped her face with the back of her hand. This baby no do good. Me almost crazy. Don't know who can help. What doctor, I don't know. Somebody tell me take to hospital. I think maybe do some good. Five days she there. Cost me two dollar every day. Ten dollar. I no got money. And when I see my baby, she worse. She look dead. I can't leave she there. No. No. I say to everybody, no. I take she home. Doctor, you save my baby. I pay you. I pay you everything --

Wait a minute, wait a minute, I said. Then I turned to the other woman. What happened?

The baby got like a diarrhoea in the hospital. And she was all dirty when they went to see her. They got all excited --

All sore behind, broke in the mother --

The younger woman said a few words to her in some language that sounded like Russian but it didn't stop her --

No. No. I send she to hospital. And when I see my baby like that I can't leave she there. My babies no that way. Never, she emphasized. Never! I take she home.

Take your time, I said. Take off her clothes. Everything off. This is a regular party. It's warm enough in here. Does she vomit?

She no eat. How she can vomit? said the mother.

But the other woman contradicted her. Yes, she was vomiting in the hospital the nurse said.

It happens that this September we had been having a lot of such cases in my hospital also, an infectious diarrhoea which practically all the children got when they came in from any cause. I supposed that this was what happened to this child. No doubt it had been in a bad way before that, improper feeding, etc., etc. And then when they took it in there for whatever had been the matter with it, the diarrhoea had developed. These things sometimes don't turn out so well. Lucky, no doubt, that they had brought it home when they did. I told them so, explaining at the same time: One nurse for ten or twenty babies, they do all they can but you can't run and change the whole ward every five minutes. But the infant looked too lifeless for that only to be the matter with it.

You want all clothes off, asked the mother again, hesitating and trying to keep the baby covered with the cotton blanket while undressing it.

Everything off, I said.

There it lay, just skin and bones with a round fleshless head at the top and the usual pot belly you find in such cases.

Look, said the mother, tilting the infant over on its right side with her big hands so that I might see the reddened buttocks. What kind of nurse that. My babies never that way.

Take your time, take your time, I told her. That's not bad. And it wasn't either. Any child with loose movements might have had the same half an hour after being cared for. Come on. Move away, I said and give me a chance. She kept hovering over the baby as if afraid I might expose it.

It had no temperature. There was no rash. The mouth was in reasonably good shape. Eyes, ears negative. The moment I put my stethoscope to the little bony chest, however, the whole thing became clear. The infant had a severe congenital heart defect, a roar when you listened over the heart that meant, to put it crudely, that she was no good, never would be.

The mother was watching me. I straightened up and looking at her told her plainly: She's got a bad heart.

That was the sign for tears. The big woman cried while she spoke. Doctor, she pleaded in blubbering anguish, save my baby.

I'll help her, I said, but she's got a bad heart. That will never be any better. But I knew perfectly well she wouldn't pay the least attention to what I was saying.

I give you anything, she went on. I pay you. I pay you

twenty dollar. Doctor, you fix my baby. You good doctor. You fix.

All right, all right, I said. What are you feeding it?

They told me and it was a ridiculous formula, unboiled besides. I regulated it properly for them and told them how to proceed to make it up. Have you got enough bottles, I asked the young girl.

Sure, we got bottles, she told me.

O.K., then go ahead.

You think you cure she? The mother with her long, tearful face was at me again, so different from her tough female fifteen-year-old.

You do what I tell you for three days, I said, and I'll come back and we'll see how you're getting on.

Thank you, doctor, so much. I pay you. I got today no money. I pay ten dollar to hospital. They cheat me. I got no more money. I pay you Friday when my husband get pay. You save my baby.

Boy! what a woman. I couldn't get away.

She my baby, doctor. I no want to lose. Me got seven children --

Yes, you told me.

But this my baby. You understand. She very sick. You good doctor --

Oh my God! To get away from her I turned again to the kid. You better get going after more bottles before the stores close. I'll come back Friday morning.

How about that stuff for my face you were gonna give me.

That's right. Wait a minute. And I sat down on the edge of the bed to write out a prescription for some lotio alba comp such as we use in acne. The two older women looked at me in astonishment -- wondering, I suppose, how I knew the girl. I finished writing the thing and handed it to her. Sop it on your face at bedtime, I said, and let it dry on. Don't get it into your eyes.

No, I won't.

I'll see you in a couple of days, I said to them all.

Doctor! the old woman was still after me. You come back. I pay you. But all a time short. Always tomorrow come milk man. Must pay rent, must pay coal. And no got money. Too much work. Too much wash. Too much cook. Nobody help. I don't know what's a matter. This door, doctor, this door. This house make. Make sick.

Do the best I can, I said as I was leaving.

The girl followed on the stairs. How much is this going to cost, she asked shrewdly holding the prescription.

Not much, I said and then started to think. Tell them you only got half a dollar. Tell them I said that's all it's worth.

Is that right, she said.

Absolutely. Don't pay a cent more for it.

Say, you're all right, she looked at me appreciatively. Have you got half a dollar.

Sure. Why not.

What's it all about, my wife asked me in the evening. She had heard about the case. Gee! I sure met a wonderful girl, I told her.

What! another?

Some tough baby. I'm crazy about her. Talk about straight stuff... And I recounted to her the sort of case it was and what I had done. The mother's an odd one too. I don't quite make her out.

Did they pay you?

No. I don't suppose they have any cash.

Going back?

Sure. Have to.

Well, I don't see why you have to do all this charity work. Now that's a case you should report to the Emergency Relief. You'll get at least two dollars a call from them.

But the father has a job, I understand. That counts me out.

What sort of a job?

I dunno. Forgot to ask.

What's the baby's name so I can put it in the book?

Damn it. I never thought to ask them that either. I think they must have told me but I can't remember it. Some kind of a Russian name --

You're the limit. Dumbbell, she laughed. Honestly -- Who are they anyhow.

You know, I think it must be that family Kate was telling us about. Don't you remember. The time the little kid was playing there one afternoon after school, fell down the front steps and knocked herself senseless.

I don't recall.

Sure you do. That's the family. I get it now. Kate took the brat down there in a taxi and went up with her to see that everything was all right. Yep, that's it. The old woman took the older kid by the hair, because she hadn't watched her sister. And what a beating she gave her. Don't you remember Kate telling us afterward. She thought the old woman was going to murder the child she screamed and threw her around so. Some old gal. You can see they're all afraid of her. What a world. I suppose the damned brat drives her cuckoo. But boy, how she clings to that baby.

The last hope, I suppose, said my wife.

Yeah, and the worst bet in the lot. There's a break for you.

She'll love it just the same.

More, usually.

Three days later I called at the flat again. Come in. This time a resonant male voice. I entered, keenly interested.

By the same kitchen table stood a short, thickset man in baggy working pants and a heavy cotton undershirt. He seemed to have the stability of a cube placed on one of its facets, a smooth, highly colored Slavic face, long black moustaches and widely separated, perfectly candid blue eyes. His black hair, glossy and profuse stood out carelessly all over his

large round head. By his look he reminded me at once of his blond haired daughter, absolutely unruffled. The shoulders of an ox. You the doctor, he said. Come in.

The girl and the small child were beside him, the mother was in the bedroom.

The baby no better. Won't eat, said the man in answer to my first question.

How are its bowels?

Not so bad.

Does it vomit?

No.

Then it is better, I objected. But by this time the mother had heard us talking and came in. She seemed worse than the last time. Absolutely inconsolable. Doctor! Doctor! she came up to me.

Somewhat irritated I put her aside and went in to the baby. Of course it was better, much better. So I told them. But the heart, naturally was the same.

How she heart? the mother pressed me eagerly. Today little better?

I started to explain things to the man who was standing back giving his wife precedence but as soon as she got the drift of what I was saying she was all over me again and the tears began to pour. There was no use my talking. Doctor, you good doctor. You do something fix my baby. And before I could move she took my left hand in both hers and kissed it through her tears. As she did so I realized finally that she had been drinking.

I turned toward the man, looking a good bit like the sun at noonday and as indifferent, then back to the woman and I felt deeply sorry for her.

Then, not knowing why I said it nor of whom, precisely I was speaking, I felt myself choking inwardly with the words: Hell! God damn it. The sons of bitches. Why do these things have to be?

The next morning as I came into the coat room at the hospital there were several of the visiting staff standing there with their cigarettes, talking. It was about a hunting dog belonging to one of the doctors. It had come down with distemper and seemed likely to die.

I called up half a dozen vets around here, one of them was saying. I even called up the one in your town, he added turning to me as I came in. And do you know how much they wanted to charge me for giving the serum to that animal?

Nobody answered.

They had the nerve to want to charge me five dollars a shot for it. Can you beat that? Five dollars a shot.

Did you give them the job, someone spoke up facetiously.

Did I? I should say I did not, the first answered. But can you beat that. Why we're nothing but a lot of slop-heels compared to those guys. We deserve to starve.

Get it out of them someone rasped, kidding. That's the stuff.

Then the original speaker went on, buttonholing me as

some of the others faded from the room. Did you ever see practice so rotten. By the way, I was called over to your town about a week ago to see a kid i delivered up there during the summer. Do you know anything about the case?

I probably got them on my list, I said. Russians?

Yeah. I thought as much. Has a job as a road worker or something. Said they couldn't pay me. Well, I took the trouble of going up to your court house and finding out what he was getting. Eighteen dollars a week. Just the type. And they had the nerve to tell me they couldn't pay me.

She told me ten.

She's a liar.

Natural maternal instinct, I guess.

Whisky appetite, if you should ask me.

Same thing.

O.K. buddy. Only I'm telling you. And I tell *them*. They'll never call me down there again, believe me. I had that much satisfaction out of them anyway. You make 'em pay you. Don't you do anything for them unless they do. He's paid by the county. I tell you if I had taxes to pay down there I'd go and take it out of his salary.

You and how many others?

Say, they're bad actors, that crew. Do you know what they really do with their money? Whisky. Now I'm telling you. That old woman is the slickest customer you ever saw. She's drunk all the time. Didn't you notice it?

Not while I was there.

Don't you let them put any of that sympathy game over on you. Why they tell me she leaves that baby lying on the bed all day long screaming its lungs out until the neighbors complain to the police about it. I'm not lying to you.

Yeah, the old skate's got nerves, you can see that. I can imagine she's a bugger when she gets going.

But what about the young girl, I asked weakly. She seems like a pretty straight kid.

My confrere let out a wild howl. That thing! You mean that pimply faced little bitch. Say, if I had my way I'd run her out of the town tomorrow morning. There's about a dozen wise guys on her trail every night in the week. Ask the cops. Just ask them. They know. Only nobody wants to bring in a complaint. They say you'll stumble over her on the roof, behind the stairs anytime at all. Boy, they sure took you in.

Yes, I suppose they did, I said.

But the old woman's the ringleader. She's got the brains. Take my advice and make them pay.

The last time I went I heard the, Come in! from the front of the house. The fifteen-year-old was in there at the window in a rocking chair, with the tightly wrapped baby in her arms. She got up. Her legs were bare to the hips. A powerful little animal.

What are you doing? Going swimming? I asked.

Naw, that's my gym suit. What the kids wear for Physical Training in school.

How's the baby?

She's all right.

Do you mean it?

Sure, she eats fine now.

Tell your mother to bring it to the office some day so I can weigh it. The food'll need increasing in another week or two anyway.

I'll tell her.

How's your face?

Gettin' better.

My God, it *is*, I said. And it was much better. Going back to school now?

Yeah, I had tuh.

THE GIRL WITH A PIMPLY FACE

Written by

Daryl G. Nickens

Adapted from the short story
by
William Carlos Williams

FADE IN:

INT. HALLWAY - BARRIO APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

MOVING down a dim graffitti-covered wall, SOUNDS spilling into the hallway collide with each other: RAP MUSIC into BANDA into a BLARING TV SET into a COUPLE FIGHTING into KIDS SCREAMING into HOMIEZ LOUDLY CHILLIN'. REVEAL A GURNEY pushed by two paramedics, TRAVIS AND VASQUEZ.

VASQUEZ

Rule #1. I don't do dead babies. If it's dead, it's yours.

Stopping, Travis rings an apartment doorbell.

TRAVIS

Yeah? And why's that?

VASQUEZ

Rule #2. Rookies can't do shit about Rule #1.

TRAVIS

(rings the bell again)

What, I'm supposed to take a lot of shit and like it 'cause I'm the new guy?

VASQUEZ

No, you're supposed to do your job, so you don't become the gone guy.

The apartment door finally opens, REVEALING XOCHITL -- fifteen, bare midriff and short skirt, pretty under a noticeably bad complexion -- who gives them a gum-popping, tough girl once-over, as the "SCOOBY-DOO" THEME blares from inside her apartment.

TRAVIS

We got a call about a baby.

Scratching her leg, the girl opens the door wide, letting them into --

INT. BARRIO APARTMENT - DAY

The sparse furniture is third and fourth hand. TWO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AGE KIDS look up from "SCOOBY-DOO," eyes wide. Before they can say anything to the paramedics, the girl points at them admonishingly. Reluctantly, they resume watching the tube. Now she leads the paramedics across the room. Vasquez pointedly looks at his watch.

VASQUEZ
 (to Travis)
 Guess school let out early today...

The paramedics follow the girl to an old day-bed. Strung between the bed and the wall is a hammock. Above the hammock is a cross. The hammock separates the girl from the paramedics.

XOCHITL
 I think she's sleeping now.

VASQUEZ
 (to Travis)
 This one's all yours.

Travis bends down OUT OF FRAME. Watching Travis with detached curiosity, Xochitl absently scratches her calf, while Vasquez watches her, sizing her up... She feels Vasquez's eyes, and looks at him hard.

XOCHITL
 What?

VASQUEZ
 How long your daughter been sick?

XOCHITL
 She's my sister.

VASQUEZ
 Whatever. Talk to me, Travis.
 Whadda we got here?

Travis rises INTO SHOT.

TRAVIS
 Like she said, a sleeping baby.

VASQUEZ
 (handing him a clipboard)
 Get its vitals.

Taking out an ear thermometer, sphygmomanometer, stethoscope, Travis examines the never more than partially glimpsed baby.

VASQUEZ
 (to Xochitl)
 What's wrong with her?

XOCHITL
 She won't eat, and just cries all the time.

VASQUEZ
 You got a fussy baby so you called
 the paramedics?

Travis looks up from the baby.

TRAVIS
 What other symptoms does your
 sister have?

XOCHITL
 When she does eat, she gets this
 bad diarrhea --

TRAVIS
 What color?

XOCHITL
 Green.

VASQUEZ
 What've you been feeding her, chili
 verde?

XOCHITL
 Formula. Duh.

Travis smiles: score one for the girl. He puts the
 stethoscope to the baby's chest.

TRAVIS
 How long has she had the diarrhea?

XOCHITL
 A day.

Listening to the baby's heart, Travis's smile suddenly
 evaporates. Vasquez instantly reads Travis' face.

VASQUEZ
 What?

TRAVIS
 (to Xochitl)
 What do you know about the baby's
 heart?

XOCHITL
 She's got a whatchamacallit --

She flutters her hand, searching for the word.

TRAVIS
 An arrhythmia.
 (to Travis)
 You can't miss it.

XOCHITL
 They said maybe they can operate --

VASQUEZ
 Who said?

XOCHITL
 The doctors at county -- but we
 don't have no insurance, so they
 put her on this list, and made us
 take her home.
 (emotions showing)
 And when she started crying and
 getting diarrhea --

TRAVIS
 You called 911.

XOCHITL
 Yeah.

VASQUEZ
 How come you didn't mention the
 heart problems from the get-go?

TRAVIS
 What does it matter?
 (hands clipboard to
 Vasquez)
 Her vitals are stable. Why don't we
 just get her to county?

VASQUEZ
 Why don't we just call county, and
 see what they want us to do?
 (off Travis' look; re: the
 clipboard)
 Her vitals are normal. So unless
 there's some immediate jeopardy you
 haven't indicated, that's
 procedure.

Vasquez whips out a cell phone, and hits the speed dial.

VASQUEZ
 What's the baby's name?

XOCHITL
Marisol Racquel Marquez.

VASQUEZ
Mother's name.

XOCHITL
(slight hesitation)
Loretta. Marquez.

VASQUEZ
Your mother got a social?
(off her blank look)
You know, Social Security Number?

A defiant no response.

VASQUEZ
Figures.
(into phone)
This is Mike Vasquez... Lloyd, my
man. Yo, whaddup? I got one of your
patients here, and I wanna know
what you want me to do...

Next door the STEREO GOES ON (O.S.). Loud.

VASQUEZ
(beat)
Hold on. I can't hear shit in here.
It's like living inside a fuckin'
boombox.

Putting a hand to his ear, Vasquez moves away in search of a quiet corner. Xochitl scratches her calf again. Travis notices both legs are scabbed from scratching.

TRAVIS
Fleas?

XOCHITL
I guess. It's not like we got
animals or nothing. And we try to
keep the place clean.

TRAVIS
I can see that. You should put
something on the bites. And try not
to scratch.

XOCHITL
Yeah, like I gotta choice.

He looks in his first aid kit, and pulls out a tube of cream.

TRAVIS
Try this.
(offering the tube)
On the house.

XOCHITL
Yeah?
(taking the tube)
Thanks.

She opens it, and begins to rub the cream into her legs.

TRAVIS
What's your name?

XOCHITL
Xochitl.

TRAVIS
With an "X." Aztec, right?

Impressed, she smiles softly.

XOCHITL
Yeah. It means "flower."

TRAVIS
It suits you. So where's your mom?

XOCHITL
(hesitation)
Work.

TRAVIS
You go to school?

XOCHITL
Sometimes.

Slipping her foot out of her shoe, she places it on the edge of the bed, causing her skirt to ride up. She applies creme to her thighs.

TRAVIS
Don't like school?

XOCHITL
It's so boring. I don't get why they try to make you go.

TRAVIS
 Some of it sucks, no doubt about
 it. But somebody smart like you,
 you give it half a chance...

Her expression suddenly turns tough again. Travis thinks it's
 him... until he realizes her focus is on the door. He turns
 to see Vasquez staring at Xochitl.

TRAVIS
 (sharply)
 Vasquez, what are we doing?

Xochitl finishes smoothing in the creme. Only then does she
 remove her leg from the bed, and smooth down her skirt, as:

VASQUEZ
 Saying adios, kemosabe. Lloyd
 pulled up her chart. He figured we
 can save the taxpayers some money
 here.

TRAVIS
 Lloyd figured this out all on his
 own? Who the hell is Lloyd to make
 a decision like that?

VASQUEZ
 He had his reasons. "Technical
 stuff." We'll talk in the wagon.

A beat before Travis finally closes his first aid kit.

TRAVIS
 (to Xochitl)
 If the baby starts running a fever,
 throwing up, diarrhea doesn't stop,
 any of that stuff, call 911, okay?

She nods. Travis starts for the door.

XOCHITL
 (beat)
 That creme is working.

Stopping, he smiles.

TRAVIS
 Good.

He starts out the door again. Something's on her mind; she
 decides to go for it before he's gone.

XOCHITL

I was wondering... if you know
somethin' I can do for my face?

Vasquez jumps in.

VASQUEZ

Hey, we're not doctors, and we're
definitely not the free clinic on
wheels.

TRAVIS

Actually, I do know something she
can do. So unless there's some rule
against telling her ...

VASQUEZ

You don't get it, do you?

TRAVIS

Apparently not.

Shaking his head, Vasquez exits. Travis turns to Xochitl.

TRAVIS

Wash your face with plain soap and
hot water every morning.

XOCHITL

You mean like Ivory?

TRAVIS

Yeah. Make the water hot as you can
stand it until your face is red.
That's the blood rushing to the
skin. Then hold a piece of ice in a
face cloth, and rub it over your
face. Do that every morning for a
month.

XOCHITL

For real?

TRAVIS

Yeah. My sister had trouble with
her face until this doctor hooked
her up. He also gave her Retin A
creme to use at night.

XOCHITL

Retin A creme.

TRAVIS
 It's kinda expensive.
 (pulls out his wallet)
 But this should cover it...

XOCHITL
 I got money. You know, from baby-
 sitting in the building and stuff.

He pulls out ten dollars.

TRAVIS
 That's money you can spend on
 somethin' fun for yourself.

She takes the money with a shy smile.

XOCHITL
 Thanks.

TRAVIS
 Make sure you do the hot water and
 ice thing. Okay, Xochitl with an
 "X"?

She nods, flashing a winning smile. As he exits the bedroom --

THE FRONT DOOR OF THE APARTMENT

opening, as Travis steps into --

INT. BARRIO APARTMENT BUILDING HALLWAY - DAY

Duelling LOUD MUSIC fills the hall. Travis shuts the door,
 and turns... into Vasquez.

TRAVIS
 You mind?

As Travis pushes past him:

VASQUEZ
 She's playing you.

TRAVIS
 That's those fuckin' immigrants for
 you, always taking advantage, never
 playing by your rules.

VASQUEZ
 It's a scam. That baby's got enough
 problems to fill a medical journal.
 (MORE)

VASQUEZ(cont'd)

She's been in emergency three time this week, and it ain't even Friday. Your little downtrodden angel and her crack-head mother keep sticking that baby in county, and they're gonna keep it up until county throws up their hands and keeps it.

TRAVIS

Bullshit.

VASQUEZ

Talk to Lloyd. The mother's been in rehab so many times, she's got a coffee cup with her name on it.

TRAVIS

So the girl's guilty 'cause her mother's fucked up? You saw her, she was really upset.

VASQUEZ

She was really acting.

TRAVIS

She's just a kid.

VASQUEZ

You know how many kids I've seen been shot by a kid, stabbed by a kid, raped by a kid, O.D.ed off some shit they bought from a kid?

TRAVIS

And now that's all you can see.

VASQUEZ

What I see is a year from now your little chaquita is a mommacita for real -- if she's not already. Hell, maybe that isn't acne, she's got that pimply shit pregnant chicks get 'cause she's knocked up again.

TRAVIS

Fuck you, Vasquez.

VASQUEZ

Just tell me you didn't give her a couple of bucks to help her out?

(realizing)

Fuck me. You didn't?

TRAVIS

And I'd do it again. You know why?
Rule #3 -- nobody really knows
shit, so why not?

ON Travis, as he turns on his heels, and starts down the
hall.

VASQUEZ (O.S.)

What was it, Travis?! Five? Ten?

Travis ignores him... and, then, suddenly, Vasquez's hand is
on his shoulder. He angrily spins around to face Vasquez...

VASQUEZ

What was it?

TRAVIS

It was ten.

Vasquez holds a roll of bills in his other hand. He peels one
off, and stuffs it into Travis' shirt pocket.

VASQUEZ

Fuckin' rookie.

Shaking his head, Vasquez disappears down the hall as,
nonplussed, Travis pulls a FIVE DOLLAR BILL out of his pocket
and looks from it to Travis as, WE:

FADE OUT.

AMONG THE PATHS TO EDEN

by

Truman Capote

One Saturday in March, an occasion of pleasant winds and sailing clouds, Mr. Ivor Belli bought from a Brooklyn florist a fine mass of jonquils and conveyed them, first by subway, then foot, to an immense cemetery in Queens, a site unvisited by him since he had seen his wife buried there the previous autumn. Sentiment could not be credited with returning him today, for Mrs. Belli, to whom he had been married twenty-seven years, during which time she had produced two now-grown and matrimonially settled daughters, had been a woman of many natures, most of them trying: he had no desire to renew so unsoothing an acquaintance, even in spirit. No; but a hard winter had just passed, and he felt in need of exercise, air, a heart-lifting stroll through the handsome, spring-propheying weather; of course, rather as an extra dividend, it was nice that he would be able to tell his daughters of a journey to their mother's grave, especially so since it might a little appease the elder girl, who seemed resentful of Mr. Belli's too comfortable acceptance of life as lived alone.

The cemetery was not a reposeful, pretty place; was, in fact, a damned frightening one: acres of fog-colored stone spilled across a sparsely grassed and shadeless plateau. An unhindered view of Manhattan's skyline provided the location with beauty of a stage-prop sort -- it loomed beyond the graves like a steep headstone honoring these quiet folk, its used-up and very former citizens: the juxtaposed spectacle made Mr. Belli, who was by profession a tax accountant and therefore equipped to enjoy irony however sadistic, smile, actually chuckle -- yet, oh God in heaven, its inferences chilled him, too, deflated the buoyant stride carrying him along the cemetery's rigid, pebbled paths. He slowed until he stopped, thinking: "I ought to have taken Morty to the zoo"; Morty being his grandson, aged three. But it would be churlish not to continue, vengeful: and why waste a bouquet? The combination of thrift and virtue reactivated him; he was breathing hard from hurry when, at last, he stooped to jam the jonquils into a rock urn perched on a rough gray slab engraved with Gothic calligraphy declaring that

SARAH BELLI
1901-1959
had been the
DEVOTED WIFE OF IVOR
BELOVED MOTHER OF IVY AND REBECCA.

Lord, what a relief to know the woman's tongue was finally stilled. But the thought, pacifying as it was, and though supported by visions of his new and silent bachelor's apartment, did not relight the suddenly snuffed-out sense of

immortality, of glad-to-be-aliveness, which the day had earlier kindled. He had set forth expecting such good from the air, the walk, the aroma of another spring about to be. Now he wished he had worn a scarf; the sunshine was false, without real warmth, and the wind, it seemed to him, had grown rather wild. As he gave the jonquils a decorative pruning, he regretted he could not delay their doom by supplying them with water; relinquishing the flowers, he turned to leave.

A woman stood in his way. Though there were few other visitors to the cemetery, he had not noticed her before, or heard her approach. She did not step aside. She glanced at the jonquils; presently her eyes, situated behind steel-rimmed glasses, swerved back to Mr. Belli.

"Uh. Relative?"

"My wife," he said, and sighed as though some such noise was obligatory.

She sighed, too; a curious sigh that implied gratification. "Gee, I'm sorry."

Mr. Belli's face lengthened. "Well."

"It's a shame."

"Yes."

"I hope it wasn't a long illness. Anything painful."

"No-o-o", he said, shifting from one foot to the other. "In her sleep." Sensing an unsatisfied silence, he added, "Heart condition."

"Gee. That's how I lost my father. Just recently. Kind of gives us something in common. Something," she said, in a tone alarmingly plaintive, "something to talk about."

"-- know how you must feel."

"At least they didn't suffer. That's a comfort."

The fuse attached to Mr. Belli's patience shortened. Until now he had kept his gaze appropriately lowered, observing, after his initial glimpse of her, merely the woman's shoes, which were of the sturdy, so-called sensible type often worn by aged women and nurses. "A great comfort," he said; as he executed three tasks: raised his eyes, tipped his hat, took a step forward.

Again the woman held her ground; it was as though she had been employed to detain him. "Could you give me the time? My old clock," she announced, self-consciously tapping some dainty machinery strapped to her wrist, "I got it for graduating high school. That's why it doesn't run so good any more. I mean, it's pretty old. But it makes a nice appearance."

Mr. Belli was obliged to unbutton his topcoat and plow around for a gold watch embedded in a vest pocket. Meanwhile, he scrutinized the lady, really took her apart. She must have been blond as a child, her general coloring suggested so: the clean shine of her Scandinavian skin, her chunky cheeks, flushed with peasant health, and the blueness of her genial eyes -- such honest eyes, attractive despite the thin silver spectacles surrounding them; but the hair itself, what could be discerned of it under a drab felt hat, was poorly

permanented frizzle of no particular tint. She was a bit taller than Mr. Belli, who was five-foot-eight with the aid of shoe lifts, and she may have weighed more; at any rate he couldn't imagine that she mounted scales too cheerfully. Her hands: kitchen hands; and the nails: not only nibbled ragged, but painted with a pearly lacquer queerly phosphorescent. She wore a plain brown coat and carried a plain black purse. When the student of these components recomposed them he found they assembled themselves into a very decent-looking person whose looks he liked; the nail polish was discouraging; still he felt that here was someone you could trust. As he trusted Esther Jackson, Miss Jackson, his secretary. Indeed, that was who she reminded him of, Miss Jackson; not that the comparison was fair -- to Miss Jackson, who possessed, as he had once in the course of a quarrel informed Mrs. Belli, "intellectual elegance and elegance otherwise." Nevertheless, the woman confronting him seemed imbued with that quality of goodwill he appreciated in his secretary, Miss Jackson, Esther (as he'd lately, absentmindedly, called her). Moreover, he guessed them to be about the same age: rather on the right side of forty.

"Noon. Exactly."

"Think of that! Why, you must be famished," she said, and unclasped her purse, peered into it as though it were a picnic hamper crammed with sufficient treats to furnish a smorgasbord. She scooped out a fistful of peanuts. "I practically live on peanuts since Pop -- since I haven't anyone to cook for. I must say, even if I do say so, I miss my own cooking; Pop always said I was better than any restaurant he ever went to. But it's no pleasure cooking just for yourself, even when you can make pastries light as a leaf. Go on. Have some. They're fresh-roasted."

Mr. Belli accepted; he'd always been childish about peanuts and, as he sat down on his wife's grave to eat them, only hoped his friend had more. A gesture of his hand suggested that she sit beside him; he was surprised to see that the invitation seemed to embarrass her; sudden additions of pink saturated her cheeks, as though he'd asked her to transform Mrs. Belli's bier into a love bed.

"It's okay for you. A relative. But me. Would she like a stranger sitting on her-resting place?"

"Please. Be a guest. Sarah won't mind," he told her, grateful the dead cannot hear, for it both awed and amused him to consider what Sarah, that vivacious scene-maker, that energetic searcher for lipstick traces and stray blond strands, would say if she could see him shelling peanuts on her tomb with a woman not entirely unattractive.

And then, as she assumed a prim perch on the rim of the grave, he noticed her leg. Her left leg; it stuck straight out like a stiff piece of mischief with which she planned to trip passersby. Aware of his interest, she smiled, lifted the leg up and down. "An accident. You know. When I was a kid. I fell off a roller coaster at Coney. Honest. It was in the paper. Nobody knows why I'm alive. The only thing is I can't

bend my knee. Otherwise it doesn't make any difference. Except to go dancing. Are you much of a dancer?"

Mr. Belli shook his head; his mouth was full of peanuts.

"So that's something else we have in common. Dancing. I might like it. But I don't. I like music, though."

Mr. Belli nodded his agreement.

"And flowers, she added, touching the bouquet of jonquils; then her fingers traveled on and, as though she were reading Braille, brushed across the marble lettering on his name. "Ivor," she said, mispronouncing it. "Ivor Belli. My name is Mary O'Meaghan. But I wish I were Italian. My sister is; well, she married one. And oh, he's full of fun; happy-natured and outgoing, like all Italians. He says my spaghetti's the best he's ever had. Especially the kind I make with sea-food sauce. You ought to taste it."

Mr. Belli, having finished the peanuts, swept the hulls off his lap. "You've got a customer. But he's not Italian. Belli sounds like that. Only I'm Jewish."

She frowned, not with disapproval, but as if he had mysteriously daunted her.

"My family came from Russia; I was born there."

This last information restored her enthusiasm, accelerated it. "I don't care what they say in the papers. I'm sure Russians are the same as everybody else. Human. Did you see the Bolshoi Ballet on TV? Now didn't that make you proud to be a Russian?"

He thought: she means well; and was silent.

"Red cabbage soup - hot or cold - with sour cream. Hmnn. See," she said, producing a second helping of peanuts, "you were hungry. Poor fellow." She sighed. "How you must miss your wife's cooking."

It was true, he did; and the conversational pressure being applied to his appetite made him realize it. Sarah had set an excellent table: varied, on time, and well flavored. He recalled certain cinnamon-scented feastedays. Afternoons of gravy and wine, starchy linen, the "good" saver; followed by a nap. Moreover, Sarah had never asked him to dry a dish (he could hear her calmly humming in the kitchen), had never complained of housework; and she had contrived to make the raising of two girls a smooth series of thought-out, affectionate events; Mr. Belli's contribution to their upbringing had been to be an admiring witness; if his daughters were a credit to him (Ivy living in Bronxville, and married to a dental surgeon; her sister the wife of A. J. Krakower, junior partner in the law firm of Finnegan, Loeb and Krakower), he had Sarah to thank; they were her accomplishment. There was much to be said for Sarah, and he was glad to discover himself thinking so, to find himself remembering not the long bell of hours she had spent honing her tongue on his habits, supposed poker-playing, woman-chasing vices, but gentler episodes: Sarah showing off her self-made hats, Sarah scattering crumbs on snowy window sills for winter pigeons: a tide of visions that towed to sea the junk of harsher recollections. He felt, was all at once happy

to feel, mournful, sorry he had not been sorry sooner; but, though he did genuinely value Sarah suddenly, he could not pretend regret that their life together had terminated, for the current arrangement was, on the whole, preferable by far. However, he wished that, instead of jonquils, he had brought her an orchid, the gala sort she'd always salvaged from her daughters' dates and stored in the icebox until they shriveled.

"-- aren't they?" he heard, and wondered who had spoken until, blinking, he recognized Mary O'Meaghan, whose voice had been playing along unlistened to: a shy and lulling voice, a sound strangely small and young to come from so robust a figure.

"I said they must be cute, aren't they?"

"Well," was Mr. Belli's safe reply.

"Be modest. But I'm sure they are. If they favor their father; ha ha, don't take me serious, I'm joking. But, seriously, kids just slay me. I'll trade any kid for any grown-up that ever lived. My sister has five, four boys and a girl. Dot, that's my sister, she's always after me to babysit now that I've got the time and don't have to look after Pop every minute. She and Frank, he's my brother-in-law, the one I mentioned, they say Mary, nobody can handle kids like you and at the same time have fun. But it's so easy; there's nothing like hot cocoa and a mean pillow fight to make kids sleepy. Ivy," she said, reading aloud the tombstone's dour script. "Ivy and Rebecca. Sweet names. And I'm sure you do your best. But two little girls without a mother."

"No, no," said Mr. Belli, at last caught up. "Ivy's a mother herself. And Becky's expecting."

Her face restyled momentary chagrin into an expression of disbelief. "A grandfather? You?"

Mr. Belli had several vanities: for example, he thought he was saner than other people; also, he believed himself to be a walking compass; his digestion, and an ability to read upside down, were other ego-enlarging items. But his reflection in a mirror aroused little inner applause; not that he disliked his appearance; he just knew that it was very so-what. The harvesting of his hair had begun decades ago; now his head was an almost barren field. While his nose had character, his chin, though it made a double effort, had none. His shoulders were broad; but so was the rest of him. Of course he was neat: kept his shoes shined, his laundry laundered, twice a day scraped and talcumed his bluish jowls; but such measures failed to camouflage, actually they emphasized, his middle-class, middle-aged ordinariness. Nonetheless, he did not dismiss Mary O'Meaghan's flattery; after all, an undeserved compliment is often the most potent.

"Hell, I'm fifty-one," he said, subtracting four years. "Can't say I feel it." And he didn't; perhaps it was because the wind had subsided, the warmth of the sun grown more authentic. Whatever the reason, his expectations had reignited, he was again immortal, a man planning ahead.

"Fifty-one. That's nothing. The prime. Is if you take

care of yourself. A man your age needs tending to. Watching after."

Surely in a cemetery one was safe from husband stalkers? The question, crossing his mind, paused midway while he examined her cozy and gullible face, tested her gaze for guile. Though reassured, he thought it best to remind her of their surroundings. "Your father. Is he" -- Mr. Belli gestured awkwardly -- "nearby?"

Pop? Oh, no. He was very firm; absolutely refused to be buried. So he's at home." A disquieting image gathered in Mr. Belli's head, one that her next words, "His ashes are," did not fully dispel. "Well," she shrugged, "that's how he wanted it. Oh -- I see -- you wondered why I'm here? I don't live too far away. It's somewhere to walk, and the view. They both turned to stare at the skyline where the steeples of certain buildings flew pennants of cloud, and sun-dazzled windows glittered like a million bits of mica. Mary O'Meaghan said, "What a perfect day for a parade!"

Mr. Belli thought, *You're a very nice girl*; then he said it, too, and wished he hadn't, for naturally she asked him why. "Because. Well, that was nice what you said. About parades."

"See? So many things in common! I never miss a parade," she told him triumphantly. "The bugles. I play the bugle myself; used to, when I was at Sacred Heart. You said before --" She lowered her voice, as though approaching a subject that required grave tones. "You indicated you were a music lover. Because I have thousands of old records. Hundreds. Pop was in the business and that was his job. Till he retired. Shellacking records in a record factory. Remember Helen Morgan? She slays me, she really knocks me out."

"Jesus Christ," he whispered. Ruby Keeler, Jean Harlow: those had been keen but curable infatuations; but Helen Morgan, albino-pale, a sequined wraith shimmering beyond Ziegfeld footlights -- truly, truly he had loved her.

"Do you believe it? That she drank herself to death? On account of a gangster?"

"It doesn't matter. She was lovely."

"Sometimes, like when I'm alone and sort of fed up, I pretend I'm her. Pretend I'm singing in a night club. It's fun; you know?"

"Yes, I know," said Mr. Belli, whose own favorite fantasy was to imagine the adventures he might have if he were invisible.

"May I ask: would you do me a favor?"

"If I can. Certainly."

She inhaled, held her breath as if she were swimming under a wave of shyness; surfacing, she said: "Would you listen to my imitation? And tell me your honest opinion?" Then she removed her glasses: the silver rims had bitten so deeply their shape was permanently printed on her face. Her eyes, nude and moist and helpless, seemed stunned by freedom; the skimpily lashed lids fluttered like long-captive birds abruptly let loose. "There: everything's soft and smoky. Now

you've got to use your imagination. So pretend I'm sitting on a piano-gosh, forgive me, Mr. Belli."

"Forget it. Okay. You're sitting on a piano."

"I'm sitting on a piano," she said, dreamily drooping her head backward until it assumed a romantic posture. She sucked in her cheeks, parted her lips; at the same moment Mr. Belli bit into his. For it was a tactless visit that glamour made on Mary O'Meaghan's filled-out and rosy face; a visit that should not have been paid at all; it was the wrong address. She waited, as though listening for music to cue her; then, *"Don't ever leave me, now that you're here! Here is where you belong. Everything seems so right when you're near, When you're away it's all wrong."* and Mr. Belli was shocked, for what he was hearing was exactly Helen Morgan's voice, and the voice, with its vulnerable sweetness, refinement, its tender quaver toppling high notes, seemed not to be borrowed, but Mary O'Meaghan's own, a natural expression of some secluded identity. Gradually she abandoned theatrical poses, sat upright singing with her eyes squeezed shut: *"-- I'm so dependent, When I need comfort, I always run to you. Don't ever leave me! 'Cause if you do, I'll have no one to run to."* Until too late, neither she nor Mr. Belli noticed the coffin-laden entourage invading their privacy: a black caterpillar composed of sedate Negroes who stared at the white couple as though they had stumbled upon a pair of drunken grave robbers -- except one mourner, a dry-eyed little girl who started laughing and couldn't stop; her hiccup-like hilarity resounded long after the procession had disappeared around a distant corner.

"If that kid was mine," said Mr. Belli.

"I feel so ashamed."

"Say, listen. What for? That was beautiful. I mean it; you can sing."

"Thanks," she said; and, as though setting up a barricade against impending tears, clamped on her spectacles.

"Believe me, I was touched. What I'd like is, I'd like an encore."

It was as if she were a child to whom he'd handed a balloon, a unique balloon that kept swelling until it swept her upward, danced her along with just her toes now and then touching ground. She descended to say: "Only not here. Maybe," she began, and once more seemed to be lifted, lilted through the air, "maybe sometime you'll let me cook you dinner. I'll plan it really Russian. And we can play records."

The thought, the apparitional suspicion that had previously passed on tiptoe, returned with a heavier tread, a creature fat and foursquare that Mr. Belli could not evict.

"Thank you, Miss O'Meaghan. That's something to look forward to," he said. Rising, he reset his hat, adjusted his coat.

"Sitting on cold stone too long, you can catch something."

"When?"

"Why, never. You should never sit on cold stone."

"When will you come to dinner?"

Mr. Belli's livelihood rather depended upon his being a skilled inventor of excuses. "Any time," he answered smoothly. "Except any time soon. I'm a tax man; you know what happens to us fellows in March. Yes sir," he said, again hoisting out his watch, "back to the grind for me." Still he couldn't -- could he? -- simply saunter off, leave her sitting on Sarah's grave? He owed her courtesy; for the peanuts, if nothing more, though there was more -- perhaps it was due to her that he had remembered Sarah's orchids withering in the icebox. And anyway, she was nice, as likeable a woman, stranger, as he'd ever met. He thought to take advantage of the weather, but the weather offered none: clouds were fewer, the sun exceedingly visible. "Turned chilly," he observed, rubbing his hands together. "Could be going to rain."

"Mr. Belli. Now I'm going to ask you a very personal question," she said, enunciating each word decisively. "Because I wouldn't want you to think I go about inviting just anybody to dinner, My intentions are-" her eyes wandered, her voice wavered, as though the forthright manner had been a masquerade she could not sustain. "So I'm going to ask you a very personal question. Have you considered marrying again?"

He hummed, like a radio warming up before it speaks; when he did, it amounted to static: "Oh, at my age. Don't even want a dog. Just give me TV. Some beer. Poker once a week. Hell. Who the hell would want me?" he said; and, with a twinge, remembered Rebecca's mother-in-law, Mrs. A. J. Krakower, Sr., Dr. Pauline Krakower, a female dentist (retired) who had been an audacious participant in a certain family plot. Or what about Sarah's best friend, the persistent "Brownie" Pollock? Odd, but as long as Sarah lived he had enjoyed, upon occasion taken advantage of, "Brownie's" admiration; afterwards -- finally he had told her not to telephone him any more (and she had shouted: "Everything Sarah ever said, she was right. You fat little hairy little bastard"). Then; and then there was Miss Jackson. Despite Sarah's suspicions, her in fact devout conviction, nothing untoward, very untoward, had transpired between him and the pleasant Esther, whose hobby was bowling. But he had always surmised, and in recent months known, that if one day he suggested drinks, dinner, a workout in some bowling alley... He said: "I was married. For twenty-seven years. That's enough for any lifetime"; but as he said it, he realized that, in just this moment, he had come to a decision, which was: he *would* ask Esther to dinner, he would take her bowling and buy her an orchid, a gala purple one with a lavender-ribbon bow. And where, he wondered, do couples honeymoon in April? At the latest May. Miami? Bermuda? Bermuda! "No, I've never considered it. Marrying again."

One would have assumed from her attentive posture that Mary O'Meaghan was raptly listening to Mr. Belli -- except that her eyes played hookey, roamed as though she were hunting at a party for a different, more promising face. The

color had drained from her own face; and with it had gone most of her healthy charm. She coughed.

He coughed. Raising his hat, he said: "It's been very pleasant meeting you, Miss O'Meaghan."

"Same here," she said, and stood up. "Mind if I walk with you to the gate?"

He did, yes; for he wanted to mosey along alone, devouring the tart nourishment of this spring-shiny, parade-weather, be alone with his many thoughts of Esther, his hopeful, zestful, live-forever mood. "A pleasure," he said, adjusting his stride to her slower pace and the slight lurch her stiff leg caused.

"But it *did* seem like a sensible idea," she said argumentatively. "And there was old Annie Austin: the living proof. Well, nobody had a better idea. I mean, everybody was at me: Get married. From the day Pop died, my sister and everybody was saying: Poor Mary, what's to become of her? A girl that can't type. Take shorthand. With her leg and all; can't even wait on table. What happens to a girl -- a grown woman -- that doesn't know anything, never done anything? Except cook and look after her father. All I heard was: Mary, you've got to get married."

"So. Why fight that? A fine person like you, you ought to be married. You'd make some fellow very happy."

"Sure I would. But who?" She flung out her arms, extended a hand toward Manhattan, the country, the continents beyond. "So I've looked; I'm not lazy by nature. But honestly, frankly, how does anybody ever find a husband? If they're not very, very pretty; a terrific dancer. If they're just -- oh ordinary. Like me."

"No, no, not at all," Mr. Belli mumbled. "Not ordinary, no. Couldn't you make something of your talent? Your voice?"

She stopped, stood clasping and unclasping her purse. "Don't poke fun. Please. My life is at stake." And she insisted: "I am ordinary. So is old Annie Austin. And she says the place for me to find a husband -- a decent, comfortable man -- is in the obituary column."

For a man who believed himself a human compass, Mr. Belli had the anxious experience of feeling he had lost his way; with relief he saw the gates of the cemetery a hundred yards ahead. "She does? She says that? Old Annie Austin?"

"Yes. And she's a very practical woman. She feeds six people on \$58.75 a week: food, clothes, everything. And the way she explained it, it certainly sounded logical. Because the obituaries are full of unmarried men. Widowers. You just go to the funeral and sort of introduce yourself: sympathize. Or the cemetery: come here on a nice day, or go to Woodlawn, there are always widowers walking around. Fellows thinking how much they miss home life and maybe wishing they were married again."

When Mr. Belli understood that she was in earnest, he was appalled; but he was also entertained: and he laughed, jammed his hands in his pockets and threw back his head. She joined him, spilled a laughter that restored her color, that,

in skylarking style, made her rock against him. "Even I --" she said, clutching at his arm, even I can see the humor." But it was not a lengthy vision; suddenly solemn, she said: "But that is how Annie met her husbands. Both of them: Mr. Cruikshank, and then Mr. Austin. So it *must* be a practical idea. Don't you think?"

"Oh, I do think."

She shrugged. "But it hasn't worked out too well. Us, for instance. *We* seemed to have such a lot in common." "One day," he said, quickening his steps. "With a livelier fellow."

"I don't know. I've met some grand people. But it always ends like this. Like us..." she said, and left unsaid something more, for a new pilgrim, just entering through the gates of the cemetery, had attached her interest: an alive little man spouting cheery whistlings and with plenty of snap to his walk. Mr. Belli noticed him, too, observed the black band sewn round the sleeve of the visitor's bright green tweed coat, and commented: "Good luck, Miss O'Meaghan. Thanks for the peanuts."

AMONG THE PATHS TO EDEN

Screenplay by

Eleanor Perry & Truman Capote

EXT. RESIDENTIAL CITY STREET

A row of houses, fairly substantial but old, most of them in need of paint. They have seen much better days and probably their early occupants were more prosperous than the ones who live there now. However, the small front lawns are tidily kept.

She, wearing a coat and hat, comes out of one of the houses and down the steps to the sidewalk. It is a sunny breezy day in early spring. She wears a brown coat, neat but far from new, and a nondescript felt hat. Her shoes are what is known as "sensible" and she is carrying a capacious black handbag. She is about forty and must have been quite pretty as a young girl. Her features are pleasant, her skin still has a shine and her eyes are large and warm, ringed with dark lashes.

She turns up the sidewalk and starts off as if she has a destination firmly in mind. We notice that she has a very slight limp.

EXT. CITY STREET-BUSINESS SECTION

He emerges from a large office building and walks towards a subway entrance. He is a middle-aged man of quite ordinary appearance, obviously a nice man but with a soft disappointed expression. He wears a neat gray coat and felt hat. He strides along the street enjoying the spring weather.

At the entrance to the subway he comes to a flower stall. He stops and examines the flowers. Finally he takes a bunch of yellow jonquils out of its container and holds it out. The flower seller wraps them in tissue. He pays for them and continues down into the subway.

EXT. BRIDGE

She is striding across the bridge which provides pedestrians a safe way over the several traffic-loaded highways below. In the background we see a vast cemetery. In the distance is Manhattan, the skyscrapers lined up irregularly against the sky almost duplicate the outlines of the tombstones.

EXT. CEMETERY

He is walking briskly along carrying the bunch of jonquils. He stops at the neat enclosure of a double grave site. The sparse grass is just beginning to recover from winter and shows a few blades of green. At one end of the grave is a double tombstone. One side of it is blank. The other reads:

ROSE BELLI
1907-1966

BELOVED WIFE OF IVOR
 BELOVED MOTHER OF IVY AND CARLA
 ALWAYS IN OUR HEARTS

A rusted metal container for flowers, empty now, has toppled over at the bottom of the lettered half of the tombstone. He crosses to it, puts his flowers down on the grave and straightens the container. He unwraps his flowers and starts to arrange them in the container. He doesn't see her as she approaches quite near and stands behind him watching.

SHE
 (after a moment)
 My, they're pretty!

He turns.

SHE
 The flowers. I'm very partial to
 jonquils myself.

HE
 They had white ones, but I thought
 that...

SHE
 Oh, you were absolutely right.

He has turned back to fuss with his arrangement.

SHE
 That looks very nice indeed.
 (cocks her head
 critically)
 Maybe if the stems weren't all the
 same length. Maybe if the ones in
 front were a little shorter...

HE
 I see what you mean.

He takes a flower out of the holder and is about to break off the stem.

SHE
 Oh no, no, no! Don't do that! Here.

She opens her bag and takes out a manicure scissors.

HE
 Thank you.

He starts to cut off a few of the stems.

SHE
 (indicating the grave)
 Uh. Relative?

HE
 Wife.

SHE
 Gee, I'm sorry.

HE
 (with a long face)
 Well...

SHE
 I hope it wasn't a long illness...
 anything painful...

HE
 No. In her sleep. Heart condition.

SHE
 That's how I lost my father.

HE
 I'm sorry...

SHE
 At least they didn't suffer. That's
 some comfort.

He has finished shortening the flowers and rearranges them again.

SHE
 Now that's going to look much
 better.
 (he gives the flowers a
 final poke)
 Wonder how long they'll last. Too
 bad even flowers have to... pass
 on, isn't it?
 (he nods)
 What makes things precious is when
 you know they have to... to pass
 on. That's how I felt about my Pop.
 My sisters only came to see him
 once a month but I was with him all
 the time. You only have one father
 in this life and he's not going to
 be with you forever. I expect you
 felt the same way about your wife.

HE

Yes...

SHE

Of course a wife isn't the same as a parent. I mean a man can have more than one wife... without being at all disloyal.

HE

That's true.

SHE

(stares at the gravestone,
then sympathetically)
You just lost her last year

HE

October.

SHE

If you married again nobody in the world would criticize you. They say when a widower marries again it's a real compliment to the first wife.

HE

I've heard that.

SHE

You losing your wife and me losing my father -- gives us something to talk about, doesn't it?

HE

(pretending sympathy)
Yes, it's very sad.
(hands her the scissors)
Well, thank you.

She sees that he is contemplating the gravestone.

SHE

(indicating the blank side
and the space in front of
it)
Now that's nice... there's a place
here for you too.

HE

(with a little laugh)
Nice?

SHE
(hurriedly)
I mean that when the time comes
that you can rest beside her
forever. For Eternity.

He rises. She is aware from his expression that she hasn't struck the right note and adds quickly:

SHE
This cemetery's so crowded. Lots of
people, they don't think ahead...
there won't be room for them... but
your mind can be at peace. You *know*
there's a place here for you.

He gives her a look, and tips his hat. It is obvious he is about to leave.

SHE
(anxiously, almost
blocking his way)
Aren't you going to put some water
in the flowers?

HE
(eager to be on his way)
I, I don't think there's any water
around

SHE
Oh, sure, over there on the left by
the road, there's a faucet. Didn't
you see it?

He shakes his head.

SHE
Oh goodness, I'll show you...

He seems reluctant.

SHE
(reproachfully)
You can't leave those poor little
flowers without any water!

He resigns himself, picks up the metal container of flowers and they start off. During the following they are walking. She realizes he has noticed her limp.

SHE

An accident. When I was a kid I fell off a roller coaster at Coney Island. Honest! It was in all the papers. The leg healed fine though... just a little stiff.

HE

(politely, attempting to make conversation)
Your... your father... is he nearby?

SHE

Oh no. Pop refused to be in the ground, he's at home.

(laughs)

I mean his ashes are.

(frowns)

Cremation's a terrible sin, I know -
- but Pop insisted on it. To be honest with you, I don't really like it.

She hesitates and looks at him. His expression seems sympathetic.

SHE

It's kind of spooky having your own father... in a jar that you have to dust and all. Right on the mantelpiece. Know what I mean?

HE

I can imagine.

SHE

I tried putting him in the china closet but my sisters and brothers had a fit. They said it didn't show the proper respect.

HE

Well, uh, why didn't they keep the... the urn?

SHE

They thought Pop belonged in his own house where he's always been. Of course it's *my* house now.

(with a sideways glance)

He left it to me. I just rattle around in that big old place.

(MORE)

SHE(cont'd)

(another sideways glance)
It's a very well-built house...
high ceilings... you know... those
new apartments... they may be new
but they have such low ceilings!

HE

I know. I live in one.

SHE

(quickly)
Of course there is something cozy
about low ceilings.

They arrive at a faucet at the top of a pipe protruding from
the ground.

SHE

Here we are!

HE

Well! Looks like I walked right
past it.

He turns the faucet and starts to fill the container.

SHE

Guess you're as unfamiliar with
this cemetery as I am.

HE

I don't come as often as I should.

SHE

(comfortingly)
A person gets involved with a whole
new life -- new friends --
(then, significantly))
New family even?

HE

It's a long trip -- it's two buses,
one subway...

He has filled the container. She opens her handbag and takes
out two paper cups.

SHE

Care for a drink of water?

HE

(surprised at the sight of
the cups)
Thanks.

He fills the cups for them both, turns off the faucet. They drink.

SHE

This is the first time I've been in this cemetery... even though I live right near by. I just suddenly thought to myself -- it's a nice peaceful place to take a walk.

HE

Yes it is peaceful.

His cup is empty. She takes it and puts it inside her own.

SHE

There s a litter basket over there.

She leads him off around another path. They come to a small grave, the tombstone decorated with two cherubs. It reads:

EDWARD DENNIS FOY
BELOVED SON OF
JAMES AND IRENE FOY
1926-1930

SHE

(shaking her head)
1926 to 1930!

HE

Foy. Wonder if that's any relation. No, it couldn't be. Still it could be a nephew or a cousin. Did you ever hear of a comic named Eddie Foy?

SHE

I don't think so...

HE

You're too young.

She is very pleased. They walk on. She tosses the cups into a litter basket.

HE

Eddie Foy was one funny Irishman. All he had to do was open his mouth and the audience rolled in the aisles.

SHE

Gee!

HE

I used to play hookey from school to catch his act. I thought that must be the greatest feeling in the world... to make people laugh. It's like... like...

SHE

They're all blowing kisses at you!

HE

Yeah, like that! You know one summer when I was about fifteen I got a job in a theater selling lemonade. I not only sold it, I made it. We used to make it in those big tin wash-buckets... with big chunks of ice. It wasn't exactly what you'd call sanitary... but nobody got poisoned. That much I know. Anyway, I used to see Eddie Foy's act four times a day.

(proudly as he thinks
back)

You know once Eddie Foy gave me a nickel for getting his shoes shined. I never spent it. I kept it as a lucky piece.

SHE

Do you still have it?

HE

I lost it a long, long time ago.

SHE

(with sympathy)

That's too bad.

His expression changes. His luck hasn't been exactly wonderful since he's grown up.

HE

Wasn't anything magic about it. Just a nickel from Eddie Foy.

(makes a move to go)

Well, thanks a lot for showing me the water faucet.

Quickly she opens her purse and scoops out a crumpled bag of peanuts.

SHE
Would you like a peanut?

HE
No thanks.

SHE
It's been so long since lunch, you
must be famished!
(offers the bag again)

HE
No, really, thank you.

SHE
They're fresh-roasted! Don't you
like peanuts?

HE
Yes, I do... but you know, they
sure put the weight on...

SHE
(with an approving look at
him)
You don't have to worry about that!

HE
They say extra weight puts a strain
on the heart.

SHE
But you're not fat! Besides I don't
think a man looks very manly -- if
he's all skin and bones!

She holds out the bag again. He does like peanuts and he can't find it in his heart to reject her friendliness.

HE
Okay, thank you.
(takes a peanut and pops
it in his mouth)
You know Rose would have a fit if
she could see me eating peanuts.

SHE
(putting a peanut in her
mouth)
But you have a big frame...
(MORE)

SHE(cont'd)

a man with a big frame, he needs a few extra pounds.

HE

(with a glance at the gravestone)

That's what I used to tell her.

SHE

Just take a little walk after dinner. You'll cancel those calories right out.

HE

I'm the kind of guy who never walks when he can stand and never stands when he can sit...

He looks around. There is no place to sit except his wife's grave. He sits down and gestures to her to sit beside him.

SHE

(embarrassed)

That's all right for you... you're a relative. But... would she like a stranger sitting on her resting place?

HE

Be a guest. Rose won't mind.

She crosses over and sits beside him. She offers him the bag of peanuts and during the following they are eating. She is careful to present the bag, offering a new peanut, every time he swallows.

SHE

They're good, aren't they? I practically live on peanuts since Pop died.

(sighs)

Oh, I miss him terribly. It's no fun cooking for yourself... even if you can make pastry light as a leaf.

HE

One thing Rose never had in the house was pastry... Sometimes I used to sneak out at night for a couple of Danish or some donuts...

(glances triumphantly at the gravestone)

Rose never knew...

SHE
(laughs)
After all, nobody can smell cake on
your breath!

HE
Of course I can eat whatever I want
-- now that I'm alone.

SHE
(with an almost
imperceptible sigh of
relief)
You haven't married again?

HE
Rose's old friends are always
trying to fix me up. But I've
discouraged them.

SHE
Why?

HE
Don't like the candidates. There
was this female dentist. First time
I went out with her she offered to
cap all my front teeth!

SHE
What?

HE
Fifteen hundred dollar job... free.
How do you like that for a bribe?

She gives him a shocked look.

HE
Then there was this widow...
Brownie Krakower. I told her to
stop telephoning me. Know what she
called me?

She shakes her head.

HE
You'll pardon the language,
Miss...?

SHE
O'Meaghan. Mary O'Meaghan.

HE

She called me a "little fat hairy bastard..." Excuse me.

SHE

(drawing in her breath,
indignant)

And as I said before, you're not fat!

HE

(really warming towards
her now)

By the way, my name's Belli. Ivor Belli... with an "I."

SHE

(glancing at the marble
headstone)

Yes, I know.

(chummily)

I think it's wonderful to be Italian. My sister married an Italian. He's full of fun, good-natured and outgoing. He's crazy about the way I make spaghetti. Especially with a seafood sauce. You ought to taste it.

HE

Belli only sounds Italian. I'm Russian.

SHE

(taken aback -- then,
quickly)

Oh, that's wonderful too. I'm sure Russians are just like everybody else.

(hurries on)

Red cabbage soup, hot or cold -- with sour cream! Delicious!

(reaches into the peanut
bag)

Oh there's only one left...

(holds it out to him)

You take it.

He does so.

A slight pause. Then she glances at the tombstone and reads aloud.

SHE
Ivy and Carla. I bet they're cute --
aren't they?

He smiles proudly and shrugs.

SHE
Oh be modest! But I'm sure they
are. If they favor their father.
You know kids just slay me. I'd
trade any grown-up for any kid. My
sister has five, four girls and a
boy. She's always after me to baby-
sit.

HE
Well, Ivy's a mother herself and
Carla's expecting.

SHE
(chagrined)
A grandfather!

HE
That's right.

SHE
You!

HE
I'm fifty-one. Can't say I feel it.

SHE
Fifty-one. That's nothing! That's
the prime of life if you look after
yourself. Of course, a man like
you, he needs watching over. It's
not good to live alone.

HE
I manage all right.

SHE
A person alone... he's apt to
forget meals, shirts without
buttons; house gets dusty... first
thing you know, they've gone all to
seed.

He laughs.

SHE
What are you laughing at?

HE

You sound just like my daughters.
Always after me to move in with
them.

SHE

They must be very fond of you.

HE

I like my independence. I don't
like to be told what to do and when
to come and go...

(a slightly resentful
glance at the gravestone)
Rose was what you might call a
little bossy. She liked to run
things-be in charge.

SHE

I firmly believe a man should be
the lord and master in his own
house.

HE

(quickly)
Don't get me wrong. She was a
wonderful woman...

SHE

Oh, I'm sure she was!

HE

She had a wild imagination... she
got it into her head that I was
interested in my secretary. More
than interested, if you follow me.

She nods, all ears.

HE

Esther's been with me since I
started in business... twenty-two
years. She's a wonderful woman. I
never even took her to lunch until
after Rose died.

SHE

(anxious)
Your secretary, she... she's not
married?

HE

No. She never met Mr. Right.

SHE
(trying hard)
She must be a great help to you...
having been with you so long and
all.

HE
She's... she's devoted to her job.
And to her hobby. Bowling.

SHE
Do you bowl?

HE
Esther's been encouraging me to
take it up, but...

SHE
I can't bowl on account of my
leg... but you'd be surprised how
well I can dance.

HE
I don't dance too well.

SHE
Oh I bet you can.

HE
I mean, not the kind of dancing
they do today... all that wiggling
and jigging around.

SHE
I like the real old-fashioned kind -
- waltzes, and foxtrots. Dancing is
just as good exercise as bowling
and then you have the added
advantage of listening to nice
music.

HE
Do you like music?

SHE
(nods happily)
You know; I have thousands of old
records, well hundreds. Pop used to
work for a record company,
shellacking records... until he
retired. Do you remember Helen
Morgan?

HE

(enthusiastic)

Do I remember Helen Morgan! She was my goddess! I was crazy about her. That white face and that black hair! I was in love with Helen Morgan!

SHE

(eagerly)

She slays me. She just knocks me out! I know all her songs... from listening to her records. Sometimes like when I'm alone and sort of fed up, I pretend I'm her. Pretend I'm singing in a nightclub...

HE

You remember that she always sat on the piano --

SHE

Could you do me a favor?

HE

If I can, certainly.

She draws in her breath and exhales it slowly.

SHE

(shyly)

Would you listen to my imitation and tell me your honest opinion?

HE

Your imitation of Helen Morgan?

She nods.

SHE

Sure you won't be embarrassed?

HE

No, I'd love to hear it.

SHE

(shyly)

All right...

(rises and glances around)

Since there's nobody around...

HE

Go on, sing...

She crosses to Rose's gravestone and perches herself up on it.

SHE

You've got to use your imagination.
Pretend I'm sitting on a piano --
(suddenly aware she is
sitting on Rose's stone
she utters a little
exclamation and leaps
off)
Oh, I'm sorry, Mr. Belli.

HE

It's okay... Forget it... It's all
right...

He motions her to get back up on the stone. Reassured, she does.

SHE

Well I'm sitting on a piano... and
the spotlight is shining down on
me...

She tilts her chin upwards, her head back and assumes what she believes to be a romantic posture. She sucks in her cheeks and parts her lips. She waits, as if listening to the music to cue her. She sings in a small sweet, vulnerable voice, rather like Helen Morgan's in tone and phrasing.

FOR MY SAKE

My arms, you've been empty long enough,
What good are arms when there's no man to hold?
If one should pass by, I beg you unfold,
For my sake, arms,
Reach and unfold!

My eyes, you've been guarded long enough,
What good are eyes with no glance meeting mine?
If he should stop here, I beg you to shine,
For my sake, eyes,
Soften and shine!

Let me feel again
Be alive and real again
Head over heel again...
Let me try again,
Radiant and high again,
Or learn to cry again...

My heart, you've been peaceful long enough,

What good's a heart with no reason to ache?
 If he should roam on, I want you to break,
 For my sake, heart,
 Shatter and break... shatter and break.

As she comes to the end of the song, unnoticed by both of them a mother and two children pass by. One of the children giggles.

CHILD

What is that lady doing?

MOTHER

(glaring at Mary on the
 gravestone)

Disgraceful! Some people have no
 respect!

Mother turns her back and marches her children off.

HE

I'm sorry. Silly kid.

She has slipped off the stone and now stands in front of him close to tears.

SHE

I feel so ashamed.

HE

What for? That was beautiful! I
 mean it!

(she shakes her head)

I really do. You can sing.

SHE

(her voice breaking)

That's very sweet of you to say
 so...

HE

Believe me I was touched. It
 brought back my whole youth.

She wipes her eyes. Suddenly her face brightens.

SHE

(softly)

Mr. Belli ... I've got a good
 idea... Why don't you come over to
 my house for dinner? Any date you
 pick...

(she doesn't notice his
 wary glance)

(MORE)

SHE(cont'd)

I'll plan all the food really
Russian and I'll sing to you all
you want! And we can play records.
Helen Morgan records.

HE

Thank you, Miss O'Meaghan. That's
something to look forward to.
(arches his back a bit)
You know, sitting on cold stone too
long... you can catch something.

He stands and adjusts his coat.

SHE

When could you come to dinner?

HE

I don't think I could make it very
soon. I'm way behind in my work.
You know what happens to us tax
fellows in April...

SHE

Oh you just pick any time that
you'll be free and I'll see to it
that I'm free too...

HE

I'll be working nights for a long
time. I don't think I'd better
commit myself right now...
(she realizes that he is
rejecting her invitation)
I'd better be getting back to the
office. It's late. Esther'll give
me hell.

SHE

(trying to hide her hurt)
Your secretary?

HE

She'll probably have phone messages
waiting for me and all that. She
has a fit when I'm not there to
close the office with her.

SHE

You're the boss, aren't you?

HE

Esther keeps a tight rein on me.
(he laughs)
(MORE)

HE(cont'd)

She's a lot like Rose in that respect. Esther made me wear this top coat. Esther says it's not Spring until she says it's Spring.

SHE

(intense with anxiety)
Mr. Belli, I don't want you to think I ask just anyone to dinner...

HE

Of course not! You're really a very likeable person...

SHE

Maybe you won't think so because of what I'm going to do...

(he raises his eyebrows)

I want to ask you a very personal question.

(quickly with all the courage she has)

Mr. Belli, have you considered marrying again?

HE

(clearing his throat to gain time)

At my age? By the way, I told you a little fib before. I'm not fifty-one -- I'm fifty-five -- and who the hell would want me?

SHE

I'm sure many women would want you, Mr. Belli.

HE

I was married... twenty-seven years. That's enough for any lifetime.

The color has drained from her face. He fumbles on.

HE

Listen, I -- all I want is my TV, some beer. Poker one a week. I... I... don't want to be responsible for a puppy even... or a cat...

She is staring at him, her face pale. He coughs and raises his hat.

HE

It's certainly been very pleasant meeting you, Miss O'Meaghan.

SHE

(attempting a smile)

Same here.

(desperately, as he starts off)

Mind if I walk with you to the gate?

HE

A pleasure.

They stroll along a path among the graves. He adjusts his pace to her limp. During the following they are walking through the cemetery.

SHE

Since my father died my whole family's been at me to get married. "Poor Mary, what's to become of her? A grown woman doesn't know how to type, take shorthand -- can't even wait on table because of her leg --" All I heard was "Mary, why don't you get married."

HE

Why fight that? You're a fine person -- you should be married. You'd make some man a wonderful wife.

SHE

Sure I would. But who?

She flings her arm towards Manhattan, the country, the continent.

SHE

Especially if... if you're just an ordinary person like me.

HE

No, no, not at all. You're not ordinary. Couldn't you do something with your talent? Your voice?

SHE

(clasping and unclasping her handbag)

(MORE)

SHE(cont'd)

Don't poke fun, please. I am ordinary.

(a pause)

But so is my friend Annie Austin.

(sighs)

Funny, isn't it? The things that work out for one person don't necessarily work out for another person.

HE

How... do you mean?

SHE

She met both her husbands in a cemetery.

HE

(startled)

Both?

SHE

Mr. Cruikshank. And after he ran away, Mr. Austin. So you see, for her it worked out.

HE

But... how did she happen to be in a cemetery?

SHE

She went there on purpose.

(he gives her a puzzled look)

First she'd read the obituary columns and then she'd go to some funerals -- sort of hung around and introduced herself and sympathized. That didn't work out so well because the families are there, you know... watching like hawks. So then she hit on this idea of just going to cemeteries. On a nice day she'd come here or go to Woodlawn. There are always widowers walking around thinking how much they miss home life and wishing they were married again...

He stops and throws his head back bursting into loud laughter. She joins him, laughing too.

SHE
 (after a moment, hardly
 able to catch her breath)
 Even I can see the humor of it!
 (more laughter from them
 both)
 But it does sound sensible, don't
 you think?

HE
 (highly amused)
 Yes I do.

SHE
 That's why I'm here today. I wanted
 to try it myself.

They walk along.

SHE
 I wish you would tell me frankly --
 how does a woman find a husband, if
 she's not young and pretty?

HE
 (a pause, then suddenly)
 Esther's not young and pretty...

He seems surprised at what he has just said. For the first
 time it is clear to him that he has, without knowing it, been
 planning to marry Esther for a long time.

SHE
 (with an understanding
 glance at him)
 I guess you two have a lot in
 common?

HE
 (thoughtfully)
 Yes, yes, we do.

SHE
 It sounds like a terrific
 combination... the two of you.
 (he nods; she sighs
 slightly)
 Guess I'll just have to keep
 trying. I'm not lazy by nature.

HE
 You'll find someone. A livelier
 fellow than me...

They are approaching the gates of the cemetery and he sees she is looking at a man who is just entering. He is a little man spouting cheery whistlings and with a snap to his step. There is black band sewn around the sleeve of his coat. He is carrying bunch of red tulips.

SHE
(staring)
My, those flowers are pretty! I'm
very partial to tulips myself!

They are at the gate. He raises his hat. She has turned her head to watch the direction taken by the newcomer.

HE
Good luck, Miss O'Meaghan...

They smile at each other. She starts courageously off after the little man.

HE
(calling)
And thanks for the peanuts!

LONG SLOW DISSOLVE TO *A Christmas Memory*

THREE HOURS BETWEEN PLANES

by

F. S. Fitzgerald

IT WAS a wild chance but Donald was in the mood, healthy and bored, with a sense of tiresome duty done. He was now rewarding himself. Maybe.

When the plane landed he stepped out into a midwestern summer night and headed for the isolated pueblo airport, conventionalized as an old red "railway depot." He did not know whether she was alive, or living in this town, or what was her present name. With mounting excitement he looked through the phone book for her father who might be dead too, somewhere in these twenty years.

No. Judge Harmon Holmes -- Hillside 3194.

A woman's amused voice answered his inquiry for Miss Nancy Holmes.

"Nancy is Mrs. Walter Gifford now. Who is this?"

But Donald hung up without answering. He had found out what he wanted to know and had only three hours. He did not remember any Walter Gifford and there was another suspended moment while he scanned the phone book. She might have married out of town.

No. Walter Gifford -- Hillside 119r. Blood flowed back into his fingertips.

"Hello?"

"Hello. Is Mrs. Gifford there--this is an old friend of hers."

"This is Mrs. Gifford."

He remembered, or thought he remembered, the funny magic in the voice.

"This is Donald Plant. I haven't seen you since I was twelve years old."

"Oh-h-h!" The note was utterly surprised, very polite, but he could distinguish in it neither joy nor certain recognition.

"-- Donald!" added the voice. This time there was something more in it than struggling memory.

"... when did you come back to town?" Then cordially, "Where are you?"

"I'm out at the airport--for just a few hours."

"Well, come up and see me."

"Sure you're not just going to bed."

"Heavens, no!" she exclaimed. "I was sitting here -- having a highball by myself. Just tell your taxi man..."

On his way Donald analyzed the conversation. His words "at the airport" established that he had retained his position in the upper bourgeoisie. Nancy's aloneness might indicate that she had matured into an unattractive woman without friends. Her husband might be either away or in bed. And -- because she was always ten years old in his dreams -- the highball shocked him. But he adjusted himself with a

smile -- she was very close to thirty.

At the end of a curved drive he saw a dark-haired little beauty standing against the lighted door, a glass in her hand. Startled by her final materialization, Donald got out of the cab, saying:

"Mrs. Gifford?"

She turned on the porch light and stared at him, wide-eyed and tentative. A smile broke through the puzzled expression.

"Donald -- it *is* you -- we all change so. Oh, this is remarkable!"

As they walked inside, their voices jingled the words "all these years," and Donald felt a sinking in his stomach. This derived in part from a vision of their last meeting -- when she rode past him on a bicycle, cutting him dead -- and in part from fear lest they have nothing to say. It was like a college reunion -- but there the failure to find the past was disguised by the hurried boisterous occasion. Aghast, he realized that this might be a long and empty hour. He plunged in desperately.

"You always were a lovely person. But I'm a little shocked to find you as beautiful as you are."

It worked. The immediate recognition of their changed state, the bold compliment, made them interesting strangers instead of fumbling childhood friends.

"Have a highball?" she asked. "No? Please don't think I've become a secret drinker, but this was a blue night. I expected my husband but he wired he'd be two days longer. He's very nice, Donald, and very attractive. Rather your type and coloring." She hesitated, "-- and I think he's interested in someone in New York -- and I don't know."

"After seeing you it sounds impossible," he assured her. "I was married for six years, and there was a time I tortured myself that way. Then one day I just put jealousy out of my life forever. After my wife died I was very glad of that. It left a very rich memory -- nothing marred or spoiled or hard to think over."

She looked at him attentively, then sympathetically as he spoke.

"I'm very sorry," she said. And after a proper moment, "You've changed a lot. Turn your head. I remember father saying, 'That boy has a brain.'"

"You probably argued against it."

"I was impressed. Up to then I thought everybody had a brain. That's why it sticks in my mind."

"What else sticks in your mind?" he asked smiling.

Suddenly Nancy got up and walked quickly a little away.

"Ah, now," she reproached him. "That isn't fair! I suppose I was a naughty girl."

"You were not," he said stoutly. "And I will have a drink now."

As she poured it, her face still turned from him, he continued:

"Do you think you were the only little girl who was ever

kissed?"

"Do you like the subject?" she demanded. Her momentary irritation melted and she said: "What the hell! We did have fun. Like in the song."

"On the sleigh ride."

"Yes -- and somebody's picnic -- Trudy James'. And at Frontenac that -- those summers."

It was the sleigh ride he remembered most and kissing her cool cheeks in the straw in one corner while she laughed up at the cold white stars. The couple next to them had their backs turned and he kissed her little neck and her ears and never her lips.

"And the Macks' party where they played post office and I couldn't go because I had the mumps," he said.

"I don't remember that."

"Oh, you were there. And you were kissed, and I was crazy with jealousy like I never have been since."

"Funny I don't remember. Maybe I wanted to forget."

"But why?" he asked in amusement. "We were two perfectly innocent kids. Nancy, whenever I talked to my wife about the past, I told her you were the girl I loved almost as much as I loved her. But I think I really loved you just as much. When we moved out of town I carried you like a cannon ball in my insides."

"Were you that *much* -- stirred up?"

"My God, yes! I --" He suddenly realized that they were standing just two feet from each other, that he was talking as if he loved her in the present, that she was looking up at him with her lips half-parted and a clouded look in her eyes.

"Go on," she said, "I'm ashamed to say -- I like it. I didn't know you were so upset *then*. I thought it was *me* who was upset."

"You!" he exclaimed. "Don't you remember throwing me over at the drugstore." He laughed. "You stuck out your tongue at me."

"I don't remember, at all. It seemed to me you did the throwing over." Her hand fell lightly, almost consolingly on his arm. "I've got a photograph book upstairs I haven't looked at for years. I'll dig it out."

Donald sat for five minutes with two thoughts -- first the hopeless impossibility of reconciling what different people remembered about the same event -- and secondly that in a frightening way Nancy moved him as a woman as she had moved him as a child. Half an hour had developed an emotion that he had not known since the death of his wife -- that he had never hoped to know again.

Side by side on a couch they opened the book between them. Nancy looked at him, smiling and very happy.

"Oh, this is *such* fun," she said. "Such fun that you're so nice, that you remember me so -- beautifully. Let me tell you -- I wish I'd known it then! After you'd gone I hated you."

"What a pity," he said gently,

"But not now," she reassured him, and then impulsively,

"Kiss and make up --

"... that isn't being a good wife," she said after a minute. "I really don't think I've kissed two men since I was married."

He was excited -- but most of all confused. Had he kissed Nancy? or a memory? or this lovely trembly stranger who looked away from him quickly and turned a page of the book?

"Wait I" he said. "I don't think I could see a picture for a few seconds."

"We won't do it again. I don't feel so very calm myself."

Donald said one of those trivial things that cover so much ground.

"Wouldn't it be awful if we fell in love again."

"Stop it!" She laughed, but very breathlessly. "It's all over. It was a moment. A moment I'll have to forget."

"Don't tell your husband."

"Why not? Usually I tell him everything."

"It'll hurt him. Don't ever tell a man such things."

"All right I won't."

"Kiss me once more," he said inconsistently, but Nancy had turned a page and was pointing eagerly at a picture.

"Here's you," she cried. "Right away!"

He looked. It was a little boy in shorts standing on a pier with a sailboat in the background.

"I remember --" she laughed triumphantly, "-- the very day it was taken. Kitty took it, and I stole it from her."

For a moment Donald failed to recognize himself in the photo -- then, bending closer -- he failed utterly to recognize himself.

"That's not me," he said.

"Oh yes. It was at Frontenac -- the summer we -- we used to go to the cave."

"What cave? I was only three days in Frontenac." Again he strained his eyes at the slightly yellowed picture. "And that isn't me. That's Donald Bowers. We did look rather alike."

Now she was staring at him -- leaning back, seeming to lift away from him.

"But you're Donald Bowers!" she exclaimed; her voice rose a little. "No, you're not. You're Donald *Plant*."

"I told you on the phone."

She was on her feet -- her face faintly horrified.

"Plant! Bowers! I must be crazy. Or it was that drink? I was mixed up a little when I first saw you. Look here! What have I told you?"

He tried for a monkish calm as he turned a page of the book.

"Nothing at all," he said. Pictures that did not include him formed and re-formed before his eyes -- Frontenac -- a cave -- Donald Bowers -- "You threw *me* over!"

Nancy spoke from the other side of the room.

"You'll never tell this story," she said. "Stories have

a way of getting around."

"There isn't any story," he hesitated. But he thought: So she was a bad little girl.

And now suddenly he was filled with wild raging jealousy of little Donald Bowers -- he who had banished jealousy from his life forever. In the five steps he took across the room he crushed out twenty years and the existence of Walter Gifford with his stride.

"Kiss me again, Nancy," he said, sinking to one knee beside her chair, putting his hand upon her shoulder. But Nancy strained away.

"You said you had to catch a plane."

"It's nothing. I can miss it. It's of no importance."

"Please go," she said in a cool voice. "And please try to imagine how I feel."

"But you act as if you don't remember me," he cried, "-- as if you don't remember Donald *Plant!*"

"I do. I remember you too... But it was all so long ago." Her voice grew hard again. "The taxi number is Crestwood 8484."

On his way to the airport Donald shook his head from side to side. He was completely himself now but he could not digest the experience. Only as the plane roared up into the dark sky and its passengers became a different entity from the corporate world below did he draw a parallel from the fact of its flight. For five blinding minutes he had lived like a madman in two worlds at once. He had been a boy of twelve and a man of thirty-two, indissolubly and helplessly commingled.

Donald had lost a good deal, too, in those hours between the planes -- but since the second half of life is a long process of getting rid of things, that part of the experience probably didn't matter.

THE KILLERS

by

Ernest Hemingway

THE DOOR of Henry's lunch-room opened and two men came in. They sat down at the counter.

What's yours?" George asked them.

"I don't know," one of the men said. "What do you want to eat, Al?"

"I don't know," said Al. "I don't know what I want to eat."

Outside it was getting dark. The street-light came on outside the window. The two men at the counter read the menu. From the other end of the counter Nick Adams watched them. He had been talking to George when they came in.

"I'll have a roast pork tenderloin with apple sauce and mashed potatoes," the first man said.

"It isn't ready yet."

"What the hell do you put it on the card for?"

"That's the dinner," George explained. "You can get that at six o'clock."

George looked at the clock on the wall behind the counter.

"It's five o'clock."

"The clock says twenty minutes past five," the second man said.

"It's twenty minutes fast."

"Oh, to hell with the clock," the first man said. "What have you got to eat?"

"I can give you any kind of sandwiches," George said. "You can have ham and eggs, bacon and eggs, liver and bacon, or a steak."

"Give me chicken croquettes with green peas and cream sauce and mashed potatoes."

"That's the dinner."

"Everything we want's the dinner, eh? That's the way you work it."

"I can give you ham and eggs, bacon and eggs, liver --"

"I'll take ham and eggs," the man called Al said. He wore a derby hat and a black overcoat buttoned across the chest. His face was small and white and he had tight lips. He wore a silk muffler and gloves.

"Give me bacon and eggs," said the other man. He was about the same size as Al. Their faces were different, but they were dressed like twins. Both wore overcoats too tight for them. They sat leaning forward, their elbows on the counter.

"Got anything to drink?" Al asked.

"Silver beer, bevo, ginger-ale," George said.

"I mean you got anything to *drink*?"

"Just those I said."

"This is a hot town," said the other. "What do they call

it?"

"Summit."

"Ever hear of it?" Al asked his friend.

"No," said the friend.

"What do you do here nights?" Al asked.

"They eat the dinner," his friend said. "They all come here and eat the big dinner."

"That's right," George said.

"So you think that's right?" Al asked George.

"Sure."

"You're a pretty bright boy, aren't you?"

"Sure," said George.

"Well, you're not," said the other little man. "Is he, Al?"

"He's dumb," said Al. He turned to Nick. "What's your name?"

"Adams."

"Another bright boy," Al said. "Ain't he a bright boy, Max?"

"The town's full of bright boys," Max said.

George put the two platters, one of ham and eggs, the other of bacon and eggs, on the counter. He set down two side-dishes of fried potatoes and closed the wicket into the kitchen.

"Which is yours?" he asked Al.

"Don't you remember?"

"Ham and eggs."

"Just a bright boy," Max said. He leaned forward and took the ham and eggs. Both men ate with their gloves on. George watched them eat.

"What are you looking it?" Max looked at George.

"Nothing."

"The hell you were. You were looking at me."

"Maybe the boy meant it for a joke, Max," Al said.

George laughed.

"You don't have to laugh," Max said to him. "You don't have to laugh at all, see?"

"All right," said George.

"So he thinks it's all right." Max turned to Al. "He thinks it's all right. That's a good one."

"Oh, he's a thinker," Al said. They went on eating.

"What's the bright boy's name down the counter?" Al asked Max.

"Hey, bright boy," Max said to Nick. "You go around on the other side of the counter with your boy friend."

"What's the idea?" Nick asked.

"There isn't any idea."

"You better go around, bright boy," Al said. Nick went around behind the counter.

"What's the idea?" George asked.

"None of your damn business," Al said. "Who's out in the kitchen?"

"The nigger."

"What do you mean the nigger?"

"The nigger that cooks."

"Tell him to come in."

"What's the idea?"

"Tell him to come in."

"Where do you think you are?"

"We know damn well where we are," the man called Max said. "Do we look silly?"

"You talk silly," Al said to him. "What the hell do you argue with this kid for? Listen," he said to George, "tell the nigger to come out here."

"What are you going to do to him?"

"Nothing. Use your head, bright boy. What would we do to a nigger?"

George opened the slit that opened back into the kitchen.

"Sam," he called. "Come in here a minute."

The door to the kitchen opened and the nigger came in. "What was it?" he asked. The two men at the counter took a look at him.

"All right, nigger. You stand right there," Al said.

Sam, the nigger, standing in his apron, looked at the two men sitting at the counter. "Yes, sir," he said. Al got down from his stool.

"I'm going back to the kitchen with the nigger and bright boy," he said. "Go on back to the kitchen, nigger. You go with him, bright boy." The little man walked after Nick and Sam, the cook, back into the kitchen. The door shut after them. The man called Max sat at the counter opposite George. He didn't look at George but looked in the mirror that ran along back of the counter. Henry's had been made over from a saloon into a lunch-counter.

"Well, bright boy," Max said, looking into the mirror, "why don't you say something?"

"What's it all about?"

"Hey, Al," Max called, "bright boy wants to know what it's all about."

"Why don't you tell him?" Al's voice came from the kitchen.

"What do you think it's all about?"

"I don't know."

"What do you think?"

Max looked into the mirror all the time he was talking.

"I wouldn't say."

"Hey, Al, bright boy says he wouldn't say what he thinks it's all about."

"I can hear you, all right," Al said from the kitchen. He had propped open the slit that dishes passed through into the kitchen with a catsup bottle. "Listen, bright boy," he said from the kitchen to George. "Stand a little further along the bar. You move a little to the left, Max." He was like a photographer arranging for a group picture.

"Talk to me, bright boy," Max said. "What do you think's going to happen?"

George did not say anything.

"I'll tell you," Max said. "We're going to kill a Swede. Do you know a big Swede named Ole Andreson?"

"Yes."

"He comes here to eat every night, don't he?"

"Sometimes he comes here."

"He comes here at six o'clock, don't he?"

"If he comes."

"We know all that, bright boy," Max said. "Talk about something else. Ever go to the movies?"

"Once in a while."

"You ought to go to the movies more. The movies are fine for a bright boy like you."

"What are you going to kill Ole Andreson for? What did he ever do to you?"

"He never had a chance to do anything to us. He never even seen us."

"And he's only going to see us once," Al said from the kitchen.

"What are you going to kill him for, then?" George asked.

"We're killing him for a friend. Just to oblige a friend, bright boy."

"Shut up," said Al from the kitchen. "You talk too goddamn much."

"Well, I got to keep bright boy amused. Don't I, bright boy?"

"You talk too damn much," Al said. "The nigger and my bright boy are amused by themselves. I got them tied up like a couple of girl friends in the convent."

"I suppose you were in a convent?"

"You never know."

"You were in a kosher convent. That's where you were."

George looked up at the clock.

"If anybody comes in you tell them the cook is off, and if they keep after it, you tell them you'll go back and cook yourself. Do you get that, bright boy?"

"All right," George said. "What you going to do with us afterward?"

"That'll depend," Max said. "That's one of those things you never know at the time."

George looked up at the clock. It was a quarter past six. The door from the street opened. A street-car motorman came in.

"Hello, George," he said. "Can I get supper?"

"Sam's gone out," George said. "He'll be back in about half an hour."

"I'd better go up the street," the motorman said. George looked at the clock. It was twenty minutes past six.

"That was nice, bright boy," Max said. "You're a regular little gentleman."

"He knew I'd blow his head off," Al said from the kitchen.

"No," said Max. "It ain't that. Bright boy is nice. He's a nice boy. I like him."

At six-fifty-five George said: "He's not coming."

Two other people had been in the lunch-room. Once George had gone out to the kitchen and made a ham-and-egg sandwich "to go" that a man wanted to take with him. Inside the kitchen he saw Al, his derby hat tipped back, sitting on a stool beside the wicket with the muzzle of a sawed-off shotgun resting on the ledge. Nick and the cook were back to back in the corner, a towel tied in each of their mouths. George had cooked the sandwich, wrapped it up in oiled paper, put it in a bag, brought it in, and the man had paid for it and gone out.

"Bright boy can do everything," Max said. "He can cook and everything. You'd make some girl a nice wife, bright boy."

"Yes?" George said. "Your friend, Ole Andreson, isn't going to come."

"We'll give him ten minutes," Max said.

Max watched the mirror and the clock. The hands of the clock marked seven o'clock, and then five minutes past seven.

"Come on, Al," said Max. "We better go. He's not coming."

"Better give him five minutes," Al said from the kitchen.

In the five minutes a man came in, and George explained that the cook was sick.

"Why the hell don't you get another cook?" the man asked. "Aren't you running a lunch-counter?" He went out.

"Come on, Al," Max said.

"What about the two bright boys and the nigger?"

"They're all right."

"You think so?"

"Sure. We're through with it."

"I don't like it," said Al. "It's sloppy. You talk too much."

"Oh, what the hell," said Max. "We got to keep amused, haven't we?"

"You talk too much, all the same," Al said. He came out from the kitchen. The cut-off barrels of the shotgun made a slight bulge under the waist of his too tight-fitting overcoat. He straightened his coat with his gloved hands.

"So long, bright boy," he said to George. "You got a lot of luck."

"That's the truth," Max said. "You ought to play the races, bright boy."

The two of them went out the door. George watched them, through the window, pass under the arc-light and cross the street. In their tight overcoats and derby hats they looked like a vaudeville team. George went back through the swinging-door into the kitchen and untied Nick and the cook.

"I don't want any more of that," said Sam, the cook. "I don't want any more of that."

Nick stood up. He had never had a towel in his mouth before.

"Say," he said. "What the hell?" He was trying to

swagger it off.

"They were going to kill Ole Andreson," George said.

"They were going to shoot him when he came in to eat."

"Ole Andreson?"

"Sure."

The cook felt the corners of his mouth with his thumbs.

"They all gone?" he asked.

"Yeah," said George. "They're gone now."

"I don't like it," said the cook. "I don't like any of it at all." "Listen," George said to Nick. "You better go see Ole Andreson."

"All right."

"You better not have anything to do with it at all," Sam, the cook, said. "You better stay way out of it."

"Don't go if you don't want to," George said.

"Mixing up in this ain't going to get you anywhere," the cook said. "You stay out of it."

"I'll go see him," Nick said to George. "Where does he live?" The cook turned away.

"Little boys always know what they want to do," he said.

"He lives up at Hirsch's rooming-house," George said to Nick.

"I'll go up there."

Outside the arc-light shone through the bare branches of a tree. Nick walked up the street beside the car-tracks and turned at the next arc-light down a side-street. Three houses up the street was Hirsch's rooming-house. Nick walked up the two steps and pushed the bell. A woman came to the door.

"Is Ole Andreson here?"

"Do you want to see him?"

"Yes, if he's in."

Nick followed the woman up a flight of stairs and back to the end of a corridor. She knocked on the door.

"Who is it?"

"It's somebody to see you, Mr. Andreson," the woman said.

"It's Nick Adams."

"Come in."

Nick opened the door and went into the room. Ole Andreson was lying on the bed with all his clothes on. He had been a heavyweight prizefighter and he was too long for the bed. He lay with his head on two pillows. He did not look at Nick.

"What was it?" he asked.

"I was up at Henry's," Nick said, "and two fellows came in and tied up me and the cook, and they said they were going to kill you."

It sounded silly when he said it. Ole Andreson said nothing.

"They put us out in the kitchen," Nick went on. "They were going to shoot you when you came in to supper."

Ole Andreson looked at the wall and did not say anything.

"George thought I better come and tell you about it."

"There isn't anything I can do about it," Ole Andreson said.

"I'll tell you what they were like."

"I don't want to know what they were like," Ole Andreson said. He looked at the wall. "Thanks for coming to tell me about it."

"That's all right."

Nick looked at the big man lying on the bed.

"Don't you want me to go and see the police?"

"No," Ole Andreson said. "That wouldn't do any good."

"Isn't there something I could do?"

"No. There ain't anything to do."

"Maybe it was just a bluff."

"No. It ain't just a bluff."

Ole Andreson rolled over toward the wall.

"The only thing is," he said, talking toward the wall, "I just can't make up my mind to go out. I been in here all day."

"Couldn't you get out of town?"

"No," Ole Andreson said. "I'm through with all that running around."

He looked at the wall.

"There ain't anything to do now."

"Couldn't you fix it up some way?"

"No. I got in wrong." He talked in the same flat voice. "There ain't anything to do. After a while I'll make up my mind to go out."

"I better go back and see George," Nick said.

"So long," said Ole Andreson. He did not look toward Nick. "Thanks for coming around."

Nick went out. As he shut the door he saw Ole Andreson with all his clothes on, lying on the bed looking at the wall.

"He's been in his room all day," the landlady said downstairs. "I guess he don't feel well. I said to him: 'Mr. Andreson, you ought to go out and take a walk on a nice fall day like this,' but he didn't feel like it."

"He doesn't want to go out."

"I'm sorry he don't feel well," the woman said. "He's an awfully nice man. He was in the ring, you know."

"I know it."

"You'd never know it except from the way his face is," the woman said. They stood talking just inside the street door. "He's just as gentle."

"Well, good-night, Mrs. Hirsch," Nick said.

"I'm not Mrs. Hirsch," the woman said. "She owns the place. I just look after it for her. I'm Mrs. Bell."

"Well, good-night, Mrs. Bell," Nick said.

"Good-night," the woman said.

Nick walked up the dark street to the corner under the arc-light, and then along the car-tracks to Henry's eating-house. George was inside, back of the counter.

"Did you see Ole?"

"Yes," said Nick. "He's in his room, and he won't go

out."

The cook opened the door from the kitchen when he heard Nick's voice.

"I don't even listen to it," he said and shut the door.

"Did you tell him about it?" George asked.

"Sure. I told him but he knows what it's all about."

"What's he going to do?"

"Nothing."

"They'll kill him."

"I guess they will."

"He must have got mixed up in something in Chicago."

"I guess so," said Nick.

"It's a hell of a thing."

"It's an awful thing," Nick said.

They did not say anything. George reached down for a towel and wiped the counter.

"I wonder what he did?" Nick said.

"Double-crossed somebody. That's what they kill them for."

"I'm going to get out of this town," Nick said.

"Yes," said George. "That's a good thing to do."

"I can't stand to think about him waiting in the room and knowing he's going to get it. It's too damned awful."

"Well," said George, "you better not think about it."

THE WEDDING
A Farce in One Act
by
Anton Chekhov

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

YEVDOKIM ZAHAROVITCH ZHIGALOV (retired Collegiate registry-clerk).

NASTASYA TIMOFEYEVNA (his wife).

DASHENKA (their daughter).

EPAMINOND MAXIMOVITCH APLOBOV (her bridegroom).

FYODOR YAKOVLEVITCH REVUNOV-KARAULOV (retired Naval Captain of the second rank).

ANDREY ANDREYEVITCH NYUNIN (Insurance Agent).

ANNA MARTYNOVNA ZMEYUKIN (a Midwife, about thirty, in a bright magenta dress).

IVAN MIHAILOVITCH YAT (a Telegraph Clerk).

HARLAMPY SPIRIDONOVITCH DYMBA (a Greek keeper of a confectioner's shop).

DMITRY STEPANOVITCH MOZGOVOY (a Sailor in the Volunteer fleet).

BEST MEN, DANCING GENTLEMEN, WAITERS, etc.

The action takes place in one of the rooms of a second-class restaurant.

THE WEDDING

A brilliantly lighted room. A big table laid for supper. WAITERS in swallowtails are busy at the tables. Behind the scenes a band is playing the last figure of the quadrille.

MADAME ZMEYUKIN, YAT, and the Bridegroom's BEST MAN walk across the stage.

MADAME ZMEYUKIN

No, no, no!

YAT

(following her)

Have pity on me!

MADAME ZMEYUKIN

No, no, no!

BEST MAN

(hastening after them)

I say, you can't go on like that! Where are you off to? And the Grand-rond? Grand-rond, silvoo-play!

They go out. Enter NASTASYA TIMOFEYEVNA and APLOMBOV.

NASTASYA

Instead of worrying me, saying all sorts of things, you had much better go and dance.

APLOMBOV

I am not a Spinoza, to go twirling my legs like a top. I am a practical man and a man of character, and I find no entertainment in idle diversions. But dancing is not what I am talking about. Forgive me, *maman*, but there's a great deal I can't make out in your conduct. For instance, apart from objects of household utility, you promised to give me two lottery tickets with your daughter. Where are they?

NASTASYA

I've got a shocking headache... It must be the weather... There's going to be a thaw!

APLOMBOV

Don't try to put me off. I found out to-day that your tickets are pawned. Excuse me, *maman*, no one but an exploiter would do a thing like that. I don't say this from egoisticism -- I don't want your lottery tickets -- but it's a matter of principle, and I won't allow anyone to do me. I've made your daughter's happiness, and if you don't give me the tickets to-day, I'll make it hot for her! I am a man of honour!

NASTASYA
 (looking round the table
 and counting the places
 laid)

One, two, three, four, five...

WAITER
 The cook told me to ask you how you will have the ices
 served: with rum, with Madeira, or with nothing.

APLOMBOV
 With rum. And tell the manager there is not enough wine. Tell
 him to send some Haut-Sauterne as well.

(to Nastasya Timofeyevna)
 You promised, too, and it was an agreed thing, that at supper
 tonight there should be a general. And where is he, I should
 like to know?

NASTASYA
 That's not my fault, my dear.

APLOMBOV
 Whose then?

NASTASYA
 Andrey Andreyevitch's. He was here yesterday and promised to
 bring a real general.

(sighs)
 I suppose he could not find one anywhere, or he would have
 brought him. As though we were mean about it! There's nothing
 we'd grudge for our child's happiness. A general by all
 means, if you want one.

APLOMBOV
 And another thing... Everybody knows, and so do you, *maman*,
 that that telegraph clerk Yat was courting Dashenka before I
 made her an offer. Why have you invited him? Surely you must
 have known I should dislike it?

NASTASYA
 Oh, what's your name? Epaminond Maximovitch, here you have
 not been married one day, and already you've worn me out, and
 Dashenka too, with your talk. And what will it be in a year?
 You are a trying man, you really are!

APLOMBOV
 You don't like to hear the truth? A-ha! So that's how it is.
 But you should behave honourably. All I want of you is to be
 honourable!

Couples dancing the Grand-rond come in at one door, cross the
 stage, and go out at another. The first couple are DASHENKA
 and the BEST MAN, the last YAT and MADAME ZMEYUKIN.

The last couple drop behind and remain in the room. ZHIGALOV and DYMBBA enter and go up to the table.

BEST MAN

(shouts)

Promenade! Messieurs, promenade!
(behind the scenes)

Promenade!

The couples dance out.

YAT

(to Madame Zmeyukin)

Have pity, have pity, enchanting Anna Martynovna!

MADAME ZMEYUKIN

Oh, what a man!... I have told you already that I am not in voice today.

YAT

I entreat you, do sing! If it's only one note! Have pity! If only one note!

MADAME ZMEYUKIN

You worry me...

(sits down and waves her fan)

YAT

Yes, you really are pitiless! To think of such a cruel creature, if I may use the expression, having such a lovely voice! With such a voice you oughtn't to be a midwife, if you'll allow me to say so, but to sing at public concerts! How divine is your rendering of this phrase, for instance... this one...

(hums)

... "I loved you, love that was in vain"... Exquisite!

MADAME ZMEYUKIN

(hums)

"I loved you, and still it may be love" Is that it?

YAT

Yes, that's it. Exquisite!

MADAME ZMEYUKIN

No, I am not in voice today... There, fan me... it's hot!
(to Aplombov)

Epaminond Maximitch, why are you so melancholy? That's not the thing on your wedding day! You ought to be ashamed, you horrid man! Why, what are you thinking about?

APLOMBOV

Marriage is a serious step. It needs serious consideration

from every point of view.

MADAME ZMEYUKIN

What hateful sceptics you all are! I cannot breathe in your society... Give me atmosphere! Do you hear? Give me atmosphere!

(hums)

YAT

Exquisite! Exquisite!

MADAME ZMEYUKIN

Fan me, fan me! I feel as though my heart were going to burst... Tell me, please, why is it I feel suffocated?

YAT

It's because you are in a sweat...

MADAME ZMEYUKIN

Ough, what vulgarity! Don't dare to use such expressions!

YAT

I beg your pardon! Of course you are used to aristocratic society, if you'll excuse the expression...

MADAME ZMEYUKIN

Oh, let me alone! Give me poetry.

(raptured))

Fan me, fan me!...

ZHIGALOV

(to Dymba)

Shall we repeat?

(fills glasses)

One can drink at any minute. The great thing is not to neglect one's business, Harlampy Spiridonitch. Drink, but keep your wits about you!... But as for drinking, why not drink? There's no harm in a drink... To your good health!

(they drink)

And are there tigers in Greece?

DYMBA

Dere are.

ZHIGALOV

And lions?

DYMBA

Yes, lions too. In Russia dere's noding, but in Greece dere's everyding. Dere I have fader, and uncle, and broders, and here I have noding.

ZHIGALOV

Hm... And are there whales in Greece?

DYMBA

Dere's everyding.

NASTASYA

(to her husband)

Why are you eating and drinking all anyhow? It's time for everyone to sit down. Don't stick your fork into the tinned lobster... That's for the general. Perhaps he may come yet...

ZHIGALOV

And are there lobsters in Greece, too?

DYMBA

Yes... dere's everyding dere.

ZHIGALOV

Hm... And collegiate registry clerks too?

MADAME ZMEYUKIN

I can imagine what the atmosphere is in Greece!

ZHIGALOV

And I expect there's a lot of roguery... Greeks are much the same as Armenians or gypsies. They sell you a sponge or a goldfish, and are all agog to fleece you over it. Shall we repeat?

NASTASYA

What's the good of repeating? It's time we were all sitting down. It's past eleven...

ZHIGALOV

Well, let us sit down, then. Ladies and gentlemen, pray come to supper!

(shouts)

Supper! Young people!

NASTASYA

Dear friends, please come! Sit down!

MADAME ZMEYUKIN

(sitting down at the
table)

Give me poetry! "His restless spirit seeks the storm as though in tempest there were peace!" Give me tempest!

YAT

(aside)

A remarkable woman! I am in love! Head over ears in love!

Enter DASHENKA, MOZGOVOY, the BEST MAN, gentlemen and ladies. They all sit down noisily; a moment's pause; the band plays a march.

MOZGOVOY

(getting up)

Ladies and gentlemen, I have something to say... We have a great many toasts to drink and speeches to make. Don't let us put them off, but begin at once. Ladies and gentlemen, I propose the toast of the bride and bridegroom!

The band plays a flourish. Shouts of "Hurrah!" and clinking of glasses.

MOZGOVOY

It needs sweetening!

ALL

It needs sweetening!

APLOMBOV and DASHENKA kiss.

YAT

Exquisite! Exquisite! I must declare, ladies and gentlemen -- and it's only paying credit where credit is due -- that this room and the establishment generally is magnificent! Superb, enchanting! But, you know, there's one thing wanting to complete it: electric lighting, if you will excuse the expression! In all countries they have electric light now, and only Russia lags behind.

ZHIGALOV

(with an air of profundity)

Electric light... Hm... But to my mind electric light is nothing but roguery... They stick a bit of coal in, and think they will hoax you with that! No, my good man, if you are going to give us light, don't give us a little bit of coal, but give us something substantial, something solid that you can get hold of! Give us light -- you understand -- light that's natural and not intellectual!

YAT

If you had seen an electric battery, and what it's made of, you'd think differently.

ZHIGALOV

I don't want to see it. It's roguery. They take simple folks in... Squeeze the last drop out of them... We know all about them... Instead of sticking up for roguery, young man, you had better have a drink and fill other people's glasses. Yes, indeed!

APLOMBOV

I quite agree with you, Pa. What's the use of trotting out these learned subjects? I am quite ready to talk of all sorts of discoveries in the scientific sense, but there's a time

for everything!

(To Dashenka)

What do you think about it, *ma chère*?

DASHENKA

He wants to show off his learning, and always talks of things no one can understand.

NASTASYA

Thank God, we have lived all our lives without learning, and this is the third daughter we are marrying to a good husband. And if you think we are so uneducated, why do you come to see us? You should go to your learned friends!

YAT

I've always had a respect for your family, Nastasya Timofeyevna, and if I did say a word about electric lighting, it doesn't mean I spoke out of conceit. I am ready enough to have a drink! I have always wished Darya Yevdokimovna a good husband with all the feelings of my heart. It's difficult to find a good husband nowadays, Nastasya Timofeyevna. Nowadays everybody is keen on marrying for money...

APLOMBOV

That's a hint at me!

YAT

(scared)

Not the slightest hint intended... I was not speaking of present company... I meant it as a general remark... Upon my word! Everyone knows you are marrying for love... The dowry is not worth talking about!

NASTASYA

Not worth talking about, isn't it? You mind what you are saying, sir. Besides a thousand roubles in cash, we are giving three pelisses, the bedding and all the furniture. You try and find a dowry to match that!

YAT

I didn't mean anything... The furniture is certainly nice... and... and the pelisses, of course; I only spoke in the sense that they're offended as though I'd dropped a hint.

NASTASYA

Well, you shouldn't drop hints. It's out of regard for your parents we asked you to the wedding, and you keep saying all sorts of things. And if you knew that Epaminond Maximovitch was after her money, why didn't you speak before?

(tearfully)

I have reared and nurtured her... I've watched over her like a diamond or an emerald, my sweet child...

APLOMBOV

And you believe him? Much obliged, I am sure! Very much obliged.

(to Yat)

And as for you, Mr. Yat, though you are a friend, I won't allow you to behave so disgracefully in other people's houses! Kindly take yourself off!

YAT

What do you mean?

APLOMBOV

I could wish you were as much of a gentleman as I am! In fact, kindly take yourself off.

The band plays a flourish.

GENTLEMEN

(to Aplombov)

Oh, stop it! Leave off! It doesn't matter! Sit down! Let him alone!

YAT

I wasn't saying anything... why, I... In fact, I don't understand it... Certainly, I'll go... But first pay me the five roubles you borrowed from me a year ago to buy yourself a piqué waistcoat; excuse the expression. I'll have another drink and I'll... I'll go, only first pay me what you owe me.

GENTLEMEN

Come, stop it, stop it! That's enough! Making such a fuss about nothing!

BEST MAN

(shouts)

To the health of the bride's parents, Yevdokim Zaharitch and Nastasya Timofeyevna!

The band plays a flourish. Shouts of "Hurrah!"

ZHIGALOV

(touched, bows in all directions)

Thank you, good friends! I am very grateful to you for not forgetting us and not being too proud to come!... Don't think that I am a knave or that it's roguery. I speak merely as I feel! In the simplicity of my heart! For my friends I grudge nothing! I thank you sincerely!

(kisses those near him)

DASHENKA

(to her mother)

Ma, why are you crying? I am so happy.

APLOMBOV

Maman is upset at the approaching separation. But I would advise her to think over our conversation.

YAT

Don't cry, Nastasya Timofeyevna! Think what human tears are! Neurotic weakness, that's all!

ZHIGALOV

And are there mushrooms in Greece?

DYMBA

Yes, dere is everyding dere.

ZHIGALOV

But, I bet, there are no brown ones, like ours.

DYMBA

Yes, dere are.

MOZGOVOY

Harlampy Spiridonitch, it's your turn to make a speech! Ladies and gentlemen, let him make a speech!

ALL

A speech! A speech! It's your turn.

DYMBA

Why? What for? I not understand what it is...

MADAME ZMEYUKIN

No, no! Don't dare to refuse! It's your turn! Get up!

DYMBA

(stands up, in confusion)

I can say dis... Dere's Russia and dere's Greece. Dere's people in Russia and dere's people in Greece... And *caravies* floating on de sea, dat is in Russia, ships, and on de earth de different railways. I know very well... We Greeks, you Russians, and not want noding. I can tell you... dere's Russia and dere's Greece.

Enter NYUNIN.

NYUNIN

Stay, ladies and gentlemen, don't eat yet! Wait a bit! Nastasya Timofeyevna, one minute; come this way!

(draws Nastasya
Timofeyevna aside,
breathlessly)

I say, the general is just coming... At last I've got hold of him... I am simply worn out... A real general, so dignified, elderly, eighty I should think, or perhaps ninety...

NASTASYA

When is he coming?

NYUNIN

This minute! You will be grateful to me to the end of your days. Not a general but a peach, a Boulanger! Not a common general, not an infantry man, but a naval one! In grade he is a captain of the second rank, but in their reckoning, in the fleet, it's equal to a major-general, or, in the civil service, to an actual civil councillor. It's exactly the same; higher, in fact.

NASTASYA

You are not deceiving me, Andryushenka?

NYUNIN

What next! Am I a swindler? Set your mind at rest.

NASTASYA

(with a sigh)

I don't want to spend my money for nothing, Andryushenka...

NYUNIN

Set your mind at rest! He is a perfect picture of a general!
(raising his voice)

I said to him: "You have quite forgotten us, your Excellency! It's too bad, your Excellency, to forget your old friends! Nastasya Timofeyevna," I said, "is quite huffy!"

(goes to the table and
sits down)

And he said to me: "Upon my soul, my boy, how can I go when I don't know the bridegroom?" "What next, your Excellency Why stand on ceremony? The bridegroom is a splendid fellow, an open-hearted chap. He is a valuer in a pawnbroker's shop," I told him, "but don't imagine, your Excellency, that he is a paltry beggar or a cad. Even well-born ladies serve in pawnshops nowadays." He slapped me on the shoulder, we each had a Havana cigar, and here he is coming now.... Wait a minute, ladies and gentlemen, don't eat...

APLOMBOV

And when will he be here?

NYUNIN

This minute. He was putting on his goloshes when I came away.

APLOMBOV

Then we must tell them to play a march.

NYUNIN

(shouts)

Hey, bandmaster! A march!

The band plays a march for a minute.

WAITER

(announces)

Mr. Revunov-Karaulov!

ZHIGALOV, NASTASYA TIMOFEYEVNA, and NYUNIN hasten to meet him. Enter REVUNOV-KARAULOV.

NASTASYA

(bowing)

You are very welcome, your Excellency! Delighted to see you!

REVUNOV

Delighted!

ZHIGALOV

We are not distinguished or wealthy people, your Excellency, we are plain folks; but don't think there's any roguery on our part. We grudge nothing for nice people, nothing is too good for them. You are very welcome!

REVUNOV

Delighted!

NYUNIN

Allow me to introduce, your Excellency! The bridegroom Epaminond Maximitch Aplombov, with his new-born... I mean newly married bride! Ivan Mihailitch Yat, of the telegraph department. Harlampy Spiridonitch Dymba, a foreigner of Greek extraction, in the confectionery line! Osip Lukitch Babelmandebksky, and so on... and so on... The rest are not much account. Sit down, your Excellency.

REVUNOV

Delighted! Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen, I want to say a couple of words to Andryusha.

(leads Nyunin aside)

I feel rather awkward, my boy... Why do you call me "your Excellency"? Why, I am not a general! A captain of the second rank; it isn't even as good as a colonel.

NYUNIN

(speaks into his ear as to
a deaf man)

I know, but, Fyodor Yakovlevitch, be so good as to let us say "your Excellency"! They are a patriarchal family here, you know; they honour their betters, and like to show respect where respect is due...

REVUNOV

Well, if that's how it is, of course...

(going to the table)

Delighted!

NASTASYA

Sit down, your Excellency! Do us the honour! What will you take, your Excellency? Only you must excuse us, you are accustomed to dainty fare at home, while we are plain people!

REVUNOV

(not hearing)

What? Hm... Yes...

(pause)

Yes... In old days people all lived plainly and were satisfied. I am a man of rank in the service, but I live plainly... Andryusha came to me today and invited me here to the wedding. "How can I go," said I, "when I don't know them? That would be awkward!" But, he said, "They are plain people, a patriarchal family, always glad to see a visitor." "Oh well, of course if that is how it is... Why not? I am delighted. It's dull for me at home all alone, and if my being at the wedding can give pleasure to anyone, well, by all means," I said.

ZHIGALOV

So it was in the kindness of your heart, your Excellency? I honour you! I am a plain man, with no sort of roguery about me, and I respect those that are the same. Pray take something, your Excellency.

APLOMBOV

Have you long left the service, your Excellency?

REVUNOV

Eh? Yes, yes... to be sure. That's true. Yes... But how is this? The herring is bitter and the bread is bitter, I can't eat it.

ALL

It needs sweetening!

APLOMBOV and DASHENKA kiss.

REVUNOV

He-he-he!... Your health!

(pause)

Yes... In old days everything was plain, and everyone was satisfied... I like plain ways... I am an old man. Of course, I retired from the service in 1865. I am seventy-two... Yes. In old days to be sure, they liked, too, on occasion to make a show, but...

(seeing Mozgovoy)

You... er... are a sailor, aren't you?

MOZGOVOY

Yes, sir.

REVUNOV

Aha!... To be sure... Yes... The naval service was always a hard one. You've something to think about and rack your brains over. Every trivial word has, so to say, a special meaning. For instance: Mast-hands, to the top-sail lifts and the mainsail braces! What does that mean? A sailor understands, no fear about that! Ha-ha! It's as hard as any mathematics.

NYUNIN

To the health of his Excellency, Fyodor Yakovievitch Revunov-Karaulov!

Band plays a flourish.

ALL

Hurrah!

YAT

Well, your Excellency, you've just been pleased to tell us something about the difficulties of the naval service. But is the telegraph service any easier? Nowadays, your Excellency, no one can go in for the telegraph service unless he can read and write French and German. But the hardest job for us is transmitting the telegrams! It's awfully difficult! Just listen --

(taps with his fork on the table, imitating the telegraph code)

REVUNOV

And what does that mean?

YAT

That means: I respect you, your Excellency, for your noble qualities. Do you suppose that's easy? And now listen --
(taps)

REVUNOV

A little louder... I don't hear.

YAT

That means: Madam, how happy I am to hold you in my arms.

REVUNOV

What madam are you talking about? Yes...
(to Mozgovoy)

And now if you are sailing with a strong wind and want to hoist the top gallant sail and the royal, then you must shout: Sail hands, on the cross-trees to the top-gallant sail and the royal sail!... and while they pay out the sails on the yards below, they are at the top-gallant and royal halyards, stays and braces...

BEST MAN

(getting up)

Ladies and gentle...

REVUNOV

(interrupting)

Yes... there are all sorts of orders to be given... Yes... Top-gallant sheets and royal sheets taut, let go the lifts! Sounds fine, doesn't it? But what does it mean? Oh, it's very simple. They pull the top-pliant and royal sheets and raise the lifts... All at once! And at the same time as they raise them, level the royal sheets and the royal lifts, and, where necessary, slacken the braces of those sails, and when the sheets are taut and all the lifts have been raised to their places, the top-gallant braces and the royal braces are taut and the yards are turned the way of the wind...

NYUNIN

(to Revunov)

Fyodor Yakovievitch! Our hostess begs you to talk of something else. Our guests can't understand this, they are bored...

REVUNOV

What? Who is bored?

(to Mozgovoy)

Young man! Now, if the ship is lying with the wind on the starboard tack, under full sail, and you want to bring her round before the wind, what order must you give? Why, pipe all hands on deck, bring her round before the wind.

NYUNIN

Fyodor Yakovlevitch, that's enough, eat your supper!

REVUNOV

As soon as they have all run up, you give the command at once: Stand to your places, bring her round before the wind! Ah, what a life! You give the command and see the sailors run like lightning to their places and pull the stays and the braces, then you can't help shouting, Bravo, lads!
(chokes and coughs)

BEST MAN

(hastening to take
advantage of the ensuing
pause)

On this, so to speak, festive occasion, on which we, all gathered together here, to do honour to our beloved...

REVUNOV

(interrupting)

Yes! And you have to remember all that! For instance: let out the fore-top-sail-sheet, top-gallant-sail sheet!...

BEST MAN

(offended)

Why does he interrupt? At this rate we shan't get through a single speech!

NASTASYA

We are ignorant people, your Excellency, we don't understand a word of all this. If you would tell us something that would amuse...

REVUNOV

(not hearing)

Thank you, I have had some. Did you say goose? Thank you... Yes. I was recalling old days. It's a jolly life, young man! You float over the sea without a care in your heart and...

(in a shaking voice)

Do you remember the excitement of tacking? What sailor isn't fired by the thought of that manoeuvre! Why, as soon as the command is given: Pipe all hands on deck, it's like an electric shock running through them all. From the commanding officer to the lowest sailor they are all in a flutter...

MADAME ZMEYUKIN

I am bored, I am bored!

(a general murmur)

REVUNOV

(not hearing)

Thank you, I have had some.

(with enthusiasm)

Everyone is ready and all eyes are fixed on the senior officer... "Fore-topsail and mainsail braces to starboard, mizzen-braces to larboard, counter-braces to port," shouts the senior officer. Every order is carried out instantly. "Slacken fore-sheet and jib-stay... right to starboard!"

(gets up)

Then the ship rolls to the wind and the sails begin to flap. The senior officer shouts "To the braces! To the braces! Look alive!" While he fixes his eyes on the topsail and when at last it begins to flap, that is, when the ship begins to turn, a terrific yell is heard: "Loose the mainsail-stays, let go the braces!" Then everything is flying and creaking -- a regular tower of Babel! It's all done without a break. The ship is turned!

NASTASYA

(flaring up)

For all you are a general, you've no manners! You should be ashamed at your age!

REVUNOV

Greengage? No, I have not had any... Thank you.

NASTASYA

(aloud)

I say, you ought to be ashamed at your age! You are a general, but you have no manners!

NYUNIN

(in confusion)

Come, friends!... Why make a fuss?... really.

REVUNOV

To begin with, I am not a general, but a captain of the second rank, which corresponds to a lieutenant-colonel of military rank.

NASTASYA

If you are not a general, what did you take the money for? We did not pay you money to be rude to us!

REVUNOV

(in perplexity)

What money?

NASTASYA

You know very well what money. You got the twenty-five roubles from Andrey Andreyevitch right enough...

(to Nyunin)

It's too bad of you, Andryusha! I didn't ask you to engage a fellow like this.

NYUNIN

Oh, come... Drop it! Why make a fuss?

REVUNOV

Engaged... Paid... What does it mean?

APLOMBOV

Allow me... You've received twenty-five roubles from Andrey Andreyevitch, haven't you?

REVUNOV

Twenty-five roubles?

(grasping the situation)

So that's how it is! Now I understand it! What a dirty trick! What a dirty trick!

APLOMBOV

Well, you had the money, hadn't you?

REVUNOV

I've had no money! Get away with you!

(gets up from the table)

What a dirty trick! What a mean trick! To insult an old man like this -- a sailor -- an officer who has seen honourable

service!... If these were decent people I might challenge someone to a duel, but as it is, what can I do?

(distractedly)

Where is the door? Which way do I go? Waiter! Show me out! Waiter!

(going)

What a mean trick! What a dirty trick!

(goes out)

NASTASYA

Andryusha, where is that twenty-five roubles, then?

NYUNIN

Oh, don't make a fuss about such a trifle! As though it matters. Here everyone is rejoicing, while you keep on about this silly business.

(shouts)

To the health of the happy pair! Band, a march!

(the band plays a march)

To the health of the happy pair!

MADAME ZMEYUKIN

I am stifling! Give me atmosphere! At your side I am suffocated!

YAT

(delighted)

Exquisite creature!

Hubbub.

BEST MAN

(trying to shout above the rest)

Ladies and gentlemen! On this, so to say, festive occasion...

CURTAIN

ARE THESE ACTUAL MILES?

by

Raymond Carver

Fact is the car needs to be sold in a hurry, and Leo sends Toni out to do it. Toni is smart and has personality. She used to sell children's encyclopedias door to door. She signed him up, even though he didn't have kids. Afterward, Leo asked her for a date, and the date led to this. This deal has to be cash, and it has to be done tonight. Tomorrow somebody they owe might slap a lien on the car. Monday they'll be in court, home free-but word on them went out yesterday, when their lawyer mailed the letters of intention. The hearing on Monday is nothing to worry about, the lawyer has said. They'll be asked some questions, and they'll sign some papers, and that's it. But sell the convertible, he said-today, tonight. They can hold onto the little car, Leo's car, no problem. But they go into court with that big convertible, the court will take it, and that's that.

Toni dresses up. It's four o'clock in the afternoon. Leo worries the lots will close. But Toni takes her time dressing. She puts on a new white blouse, wide lacy cuffs, the new two-piece suit, new heels. She transfers the stuff from her straw purse into the new patent-leather handbag. She studies the lizard makeup pouch and puts that in too. Toni has been two hours on her hair and face. Leo stands in the bedroom doorway and taps his lips with his knuckles, watching.

"You're making me nervous," she says. "I wish you wouldn't just stand," she says. "So tell me how I look. "

"You look fine," he says. "You look great. I'd buy a car from you anytime.

"But you don't have money," she says, peering into the mirror. She pats her hair, frowns. "And your credit's lousy. You're nothing," she says. "Teasing," she says and looks at him in the mirror. "Don't be serious," she says. "It has to be done, so I'll do it. You take it out, you'd be lucky to get three, four hundred and we both know it. Honey, you'd be lucky if you didn't have to pay *them*." She gives her hair a final pat, gums her lips, blots the lipstick with a tissue. She turns away from the mirror and picks up her purse. "I'll have to have dinner or something, I told you that already, that's the way they work, I know them. But don't worry, I'll get out of it," she says. "I can handle it."

"Jesus," Leo says, "did you have to say that?"

She looks at him steadily. "Wish me luck," she says.

"Luck," he says. "You have the pink slip?" he says.

She nods. He follows her through the house, a tall woman with a small high bust, broad hips and thighs. He scratches a pimple on his neck. "You're sure?" he says. "Make sure. You have to have the pink slip."

"I have the pink slip," she says.

"Make sure."

She starts to say something, instead looks at herself in the front window and then shakes her head.

"At least call," he says. "Let me know what's going on.

"I'll call," she says. "Kiss, kiss. Here," she says and points to the corner of her mouth. "Careful," she says.

He holds the door for her. "Where are you going to try first?" he says. She moves past him and onto the porch.

Ernest Williams looks from across the street. In his Bermuda shorts, stomach hanging, he looks at Leo and Toni as he directs a spray onto his begonias. Once, last winter, during the holidays, when Toni and the kids were visiting his mother's, Leo brought a woman home. Nine o'clock the next morning, a cold foggy Saturday, Leo walked the woman to the car, surprised Ernest Williams on the sidewalk with a newspaper in his hand. Fog drifted, Ernest Williams stared, then slapped the paper against his leg, hard.

Leo recalls that slap, hunches his shoulders, says, "You have someplace in mind first?"

"I'll just go down the line," she says. "The first lot, then I'll just go down the line."

"Open at nine hundred," he says. "Then come down. Nine hundred is low bluebook, even on a cash deal."

"I know where to start," she says.

Ernest Williams turns the hose in their direction. He stares at them through the spray of water. Leo has an urge to cry out a confession.

"Just making sure," he says.

"Okay, okay," she says. "I'm off."

It's her car, they call it her car, and that makes it all the worse. They bought it new that summer three years ago. She wanted something to do after the kids started school, so she went back to selling. He was working six days a week in the fiber-glass plant. For a while they didn't know how to spend the money. Then they put a thousand on the convertible and doubled and tripled the payments until in a year they had it paid. Earlier, while she was dressing, he took the jack and spare from the trunk and emptied the glove compartment of pencils, matchbooks, Blue Chip stamps. Then he washed it and vacuumed inside. The red hood and fenders shine.

"Good luck," he says and touches her elbow.

She nods. He sees she is already gone, already negotiating.

"Things are going to be different!" he calls to her as she reaches the driveway. "We start over Monday. I mean it."

Ernest Williams looks at them and turns his head and spits. She gets into the car and lights a cigarette.

"This time next week!" Leo calls again. "Ancient history!"

He waves as she backs into the street. She changes gear and starts ahead. She accelerates and the tires give a little scream.

In the kitchen Leo pours Scotch and carries the drink to the backyard. The kids are at his mother's. There was a letter three days ago, his name penciled on the outside of the dirty envelope, the only letter all summer not demanding payment in full. We are having fun, the letter said. We like Grandma. We have a new dog called Mr. Six. He is nice. We love him. Good-bye.

He goes for another drink. He adds ice and sees that his hand trembles. He holds the hand over the sink. He looks at the hand for a while, sets down the glass, and holds out the other hand. Then he picks up the glass and goes back outside to sit on the steps. He recalls when he was a kid his dad pointing at a fine house, a tall white house surrounded by apple trees and a high white rail fence. "That's Finch," his dad said admiringly. "He's been in bankruptcy at least twice. Look at that house." But bankruptcy is a company collapsing utterly, executives cutting their wrists and throwing themselves from windows, thousands of men on the street.

Leo and Toni still had furniture. Leo and Toni had furniture and Toni and the kids had clothes. Those things were exempt. What else? Bicycles for the kids, but these he had sent to his mother's for safekeeping. The portable air-conditioner and the appliances, new washer and dryer, trucks came for those things weeks ago. What else did they have? This and that, nothing mainly, stuff that wore out or fell to pieces long ago. But there were some big parties back there, some fine travel. To Reno and Tahoe, at eighty with the top down and the radio playing. Food, that was one of the big items. They gorged on food. He figures thousands on luxury items alone. Toni would go to the grocery and put in everything she saw. I had to do without when I was a kid," she says. "These kids are not going to do without," as if he'd been insisting they should. She joins all the book clubs. "We never had books around when I was a kid," she says as she tears open the heavy packages. They enroll in the record clubs for something to play on the new stereo. They sign up for it all. Even a pedigreed terrier named Ginger. He paid two hundred and found her run over in the street a week later. They buy what they want. If they can't pay, they charge. They sign up.

His undershirt is wet; he can feel the sweat rolling from his underarms. He sits on the step with the empty glass in his hand and watches the shadows fill up the yard. He stretches, wipes his face. He listens to the traffic on the highway and considers whether he should go to the basement, stand on the utility sink, and hang himself with his belt. He understands he is willing to be dead.

Inside he makes a large drink and he turns the TV on and he fixes something to eat. He sits at the table with chili and crackers and watches something about a blind detective. He clears the table. He washes the pan and the bowl, dries these things and puts them away, then allows himself a look at the clock.

It's after nine. She's been gone nearly five hours.

He pours Scotch, adds water, carries the drink to the living room. He sits on the couch but finds his shoulders so stiff they won't let him lean back. He stares at the screen and sips, and soon he goes for another drink. He sits again. A news program begins -- it's ten o'clock -- and he says, "God, what in God's name has gone wrong?" and goes to the kitchen to return with more Scotch. He sits, he closes his eyes, and opens them when he hears the telephone ringing.

"I wanted to call," she says.

"Where are you?" he says. He hears piano music, and his heart moves.

"I don't know," she says. "Someplace. We're having a drink, then we're going someplace else for dinner. I'm with the sales manager. He's crude, but he's all right. He bought the car. I have to go now. I was on my way to the ladies and saw the phone."

"Did somebody buy the car?" Leo says. He looks out the kitchen window to the place in the drive where she always parks.

"I told you," she says. "I have to go now."

"Wait, wait a minute, for Christ's sake," he says. "Did somebody buy the car or not?"

"He had his checkbook out when I left," she says. "I have to go now. I have to go to the bathroom."

"Wait!" he yells. The line goes dead. He listens to the dial tone. "Jesus Christ," he says as he stands with the receiver in his hand.

He circles the kitchen and goes back to the living room. He sits. He gets up. In the bathroom he brushes his teeth very carefully, then he uses dental floss. He washes his face and goes back to the kitchen. He looks at the clock and takes a clean glass from a set that has a hand of playing cards painted on each glass. He fills the glass with ice. He stares for a while at the glass he left in the sink.

He sits against one end of the couch and puts his legs up at the other end. He looks at the screen, realizes he can't make out what the people are saying. He turns the empty glass in his hand and considers biting off the rim. He shivers for a time and thinks of going to bed, though he knows he will dream of a large woman with gray hair. In the dream he is always leaning over tying his shoelaces. When he straightens up, she looks at him, and he bends to tie again. He looks at his hand. It makes a fist as he watches. The telephone is ringing.

"Where are you, honey?" he says slowly, gently.

"We're at this restaurant," she says, her voice strong, bright.

"Honey, which restaurant?" he says. He puts the heel of his hand against his eye and pushes.

"Downtown someplace," she says. "I think it's New Jimmy's. Excuse me," she says to someone off the line, "is this place New Jimmy's? This is New Jimmy's, Leo," she says to him. "Everything is all right, we're almost finished, then he's going to bring me home."

"Honey?" he says. He holds the receiver against his ear and rocks back and forth, eyes closed. "Honey?"

"I have to go," she says. "I wanted to call. Anyway, guess how much?"

"Honey," he says.

"Six and a quarter," she says. "I have it in my purse. He said there's no market for convertibles. I guess we're born lucky," she says and laughs. "I told him everything. I think I had to."

"Honey," Leo says.

"What?" she says.

"Please, honey," Leo says.

"He said he sympathizes," she says. "But he would have said anything." She laughs again. "He said personally he'd rather be classified a robber or a rapist than a bankrupt. He's nice enough, though," she says.

"Come home," Leo says. "Take a cab and come home."

"I can't," she says. "I told you, we're halfway through dinner."

"I'll come for you," he says.

"No," she says. "I said we're just finishing. I told you, it's part of the deal. They're out for all they can get. But don't worry, we're about to leave. I'll be home in a little while." She hangs up.

In a few minutes he calls New Jimmy's. A man answers. "New Jimmy's has closed for the evening," the man says.

"I'd like to talk to my wife," Leo says.

"Does she work here?" the man asks. "Who is she?"

"She's a customer," Leo says. "She's with someone. A business person."

"Would I know her?" the man says. "What is her name?"

"I don't think you know her," Leo says.

"That's all right," Leo says. "That's all right. I see her now."

"Thank you for calling New Jimmy's," the man says.

Leo hurries to the window. A car he doesn't recognize slows in front of the house, then picks up speed. He waits. Two, three hours later, the telephone rings again. There is no one at the other end when he picks up the receiver. There is only a dial tone.

"I'm right here!" Leo screams into the receiver.

Near dawn he hears footsteps on the porch. He gets up from the couch. The set hums, the screen glows. He opens the door. She bumps the wall coming in. She grins. Her face is puffy, as if she's been sleeping under sedation. She works her lips, ducks heavily and sways as he cocks his fist.

"Go ahead," she says thickly. She stands there swaying. Then she makes noise and lunges, catches his shirt, tears it down the front. "Bankrupt!" she screams. She twists loose, grabs and tears his undershirt at the neck. "You son of a bitch," she says, clawing.

He squeezes her wrists, then lets go, steps back,

looking for something heavy. She stumbles as she heads for the bedroom. "Bankrupt," she mutters. He hears her fall on the bed and groan.

He waits awhile, then splashes water on his face and goes to the bedroom. He turns the lights on, looks at her, and begins to take her clothes off. He pulls and pushes her from side to side undressing her. She says something in her sleep and moves her hand. He takes off her underpants, looks at them closely under the light, and throws them into a corner. He turns back the covers and rolls her in, naked. Then he opens her purse. He is reading the check when he hears the car come into the drive.

He looks through the front curtain and sees the convertible in the drive, its motor running smoothly, the headlamps burning, and he closes and opens his eyes. He sees a tall man come around in front of the car and up to the front porch. The man lays something on the porch and starts back to the car. He wears a white linen suit.

Leo turns on the porch light and opens the door cautiously. Her makeup pouch lies on the top step. The man looks at Leo across the front of the car, and then gets back inside and releases the handbrake.

"Wait!" Leo calls and starts down the steps. The man brakes the car as Leo walks in front of the lights. The car creaks against the brake. Leo tries to pull the two pieces of his shirt together, tries to bunch it all into his trousers.

"What is it you want?" the man says. "Look," the man says, "I have to go. No offense. I buy and sell cars, right? The lady left her makeup. She's a fine lady, very refined. What is it?"

Leo leans against the door and looks at the man. The man takes his hands off the wheel and puts them back. He drops the gear into reverse and the car moves backward a little.

"I want to tell you," Leo says and wets his lips.

The light in Ernest Williams' bedroom goes on. The shade rolls up.

Leo shakes his head, tucks in his shirt again. He steps back from the car. "Monday," he says.

"Monday," the man says and watches for sudden movement. Leo nods slowly.

"Well, goodnight," the man says and coughs. "Take it easy, hear? Monday, that's right. Okay, then." He takes his foot off the brake, puts it on again after he has rolled back two or three feet. "Hey, one question. Between friends, are these actual miles?" The man waits, then clears his throat. "Okay, look, it doesn't matter either way," the man says. "I have to go. Take it easy. " He backs into the street, pulls away quickly, and turns the corner without stopping.

Leo tucks at his shirt and goes back in the house. He locks the front door and checks it. Then he goes to the bedroom and locks that door and turns back the covers. He looks at her before he flicks the light. He takes off his clothes, folds them carefully on the floor, and gets in beside her. He lies on his back for a time and pulls the hair

on his stomach, considering. He looks at the bedroom door, outlined now in the faint outside light. Presently he reaches out his hand and touches her hip. She does not move. He turns on his side and puts his hand on her hip. He runs his fingers over her hip and feels the stretch marks there. They are like roads, and he traces them in her flesh. He runs his fingers back and forth, first one, then another. They run everywhere in her flesh, dozens, perhaps hundreds of them. He remembers waking up the morning after they bought the car, seeing it, there in the drive, in the sun, gleaming.

WHY DON'T YOU DANCE?

by

Raymond Carver

In the kitchen, he poured another drink and looked at the bedroom suite in his front yard. The mattress was stripped and the candy-striped sheets lay beside two pillows on the chiffonier. Except for that, things looked much the way they had in the bedroom -- nightstand and reading lamp on his side of the bed, nightstand and reading lamp on her side.

His side, her side.

He considered this as he sipped the whiskey.

The chiffonier stood a few feet from the foot of the bed. He had emptied the drawers into cartons that morning, and the cartons were in the living room. A portable heater was next to the chiffonier. A rattan chair with a decorator pillow stood at the foot of the bed. The buffed aluminum kitchen set took up a part of the driveway. A yellow muslin cloth, much too large, a gift, covered the table and hung down over the sides. A potted fern was on the table, along with a box of silverware and a record player, also gifts. A big console-model television set rested on a coffee table, and a few feet away from this stood a sofa and chair and a floor lamp. The desk was pushed against the garage door. A few utensils were on the desk, along with a wall clock and two framed prints. There was also in the driveway a carton with cups, glasses, and plates, each object wrapped in newspaper. That morning he had cleared out the closets, and except for the three cartons in the living room, all the stuff was out of the house. He had run an extension cord on out there and everything was connected. Things worked, no different from how it was when they were inside.

Now and then a car slowed and people stared. But no one stopped.

It occurred to him that he wouldn't, either.

"It must be a yard sale," the girl said to the boy.

This girl and this boy were furnishing a little apartment.

"Let's see what they want for the bed," the girl said.

"And for the TV," the boy said.

The boy pulled into the driveway and stopped in front of the kitchen table.

They got out of the car and began to examine things, the girl touching the muslin cloth, the boy plugging in the blender and turning the dial to MINCE, the girl picking up a chafing dish, the boy turning on the television set and making little adjustments.

He sat down on the sofa to watch. He lit a cigarette, looked around, flipped the match into the grass.

The girl sat on the bed. She pushed off her shoes and lay back. She thought she could see a star.

"Come here, Jack. Try this bed. Bring one of those pillows," she said.

"How is it?" he said.

"Try it," she said.

He looked around. The house was dark.

"I feel funny," he said. "Better see if anybody's home."

She bounced on the bed.

"Try it first," she said.

He lay down on the bed and put the pillow under his head.

"How does it feel?" she said.

"It feels firm," he said.

She turned on her side and put her hand to his face.

"Kiss me," she said.

"Let's get up," he said.

"Kiss me," she said.

She closed her eyes. She held him.

He said, "I'll see if anybody's home."

But he just sat up and stayed where he was, making believe he was watching the television.

Lights came on in houses up and down the street.

"Wouldn't it be funny if," the girl said and grinned and didn't finish.

The boy laughed, but for no good reason. For no good reason, he switched the reading lamp on.

The girl brushed away a mosquito, whereupon the boy stood up and tucked in his shirt.

"I'll see if anybody's home," he said. "I don't think anybody's home. But if anybody is, I'll see what things are going for."

"Whatever they ask, offer ten dollars less. It's always a good idea," she said. "And, besides, they must be desperate or something."

"It's a pretty good TV," the boy said.

"Ask them how much," the girl said.

The man came down the sidewalk with a sack from the market. He had sandwiches, beer, whiskey. He saw the car in the driveway and the girl on the bed. He saw the television set going and the boy on the porch.

"Hello," the man said to the girl. "You found the bed. That's good."

"Hello," the girl said, and got up. "I was just trying it out." She patted the bed. "It's a pretty good bed."

"It's a good bed, the man said, and put down the sack and took out the beer and the whiskey.

"We thought nobody was here," the boy said. "We're interested in the bed and maybe in the TV. Also maybe the desk. How much do you want for the bed?"

"I was thinking fifty dollars for the bed," the man said.

"Would you take forty?" the girl asked.

"I'll take forty," the man said.

He took a glass out of the carton. He took the newspaper off the glass. He broke the seal on the whiskey.

"How about the TV?" the boy said.

"Twenty-five."

"Would you take fifteen?" the girl said.

"Fifteen's okay. I could take fifteen," the man said.

The girl looked at the boy.

"You kids, you'll want a drink," the man said. "Glasses in that box. I'm going to sit down. I'm going to sit down on the sofa."

The man sat on the sofa, leaned back, and stared at the boy and the girl.

The boy found two glasses and poured whiskey.

"That's enough," the girl said. "I think I want water in mine."

She pulled out a chair and sat at the kitchen table.

"There's water in that spigot over there," the man said.

"Turn on that spigot."

The boy came back with the watered whiskey. He cleared his throat and sat down at the kitchen table. He grinned. But he didn't drink anything from his glass.

The man gazed at the television. He finished his drink and started another. He reached to turn on the floor lamp. It was then that his cigarette dropped from his fingers and fell between the cushions.

The girl got up to help him find it.

"So what do you want?" the boy said to the girl.

The boy took out the checkbook and held it to his lips as if thinking.

"I want the desk," the girl said. "How much money is the desk?"

The man waved his hand at this preposterous question.

"Name a figure," he said.

He looked at them as they sat at the table. In the lamplight, there was something about their faces. It was nice or it was nasty. There was no telling.

"I'm going to turn off this TV and put on a record," the man said. "This record-player is going, too. Cheap. Make me an offer."

He poured more whiskey and opened a beer.

"Everything goes," said the man.

The girl held out her glass and the man poured.

"Thank you," she said. "You're very nice," she said.

"It goes to your head," the boy said. "I'm getting it in the head." He held up his glass and jiggled it.

The man finished his drink and poured another, and then he found the box with the records.

"Pick something," the man said to the girl, and he held

the records out to her.

The boy was writing the check.

"Here," the girl said, picking something, picking anything, for she did not know the names on these labels. She got up from the table and sat down again. She did not want to sit still.

"I'm making it out to cash," the boy said.

"Sure," the man said.

They drank. They listened to the record. And then the man put on another.

Why don't you kids dance? he decided to say, and then he said it. "Why don't you dance?"

"I don't think so," the boy said.

"Go ahead," the man said. "It's my yard. You can dance if you want to."

Arms about each other, their bodies pressed together, the boy and the girl moved up and down the driveway. They were dancing. And when the record was over, they did it again, and when that one ended, the boy said, "I'm drunk."

The girl said, "You're not drunk."

"Well, I'm drunk," the boy said.

The man turned the record over and the boy said, "I am."

"Dance with me," the girl said to the boy and then to the man, and when the man stood up, she came to him with her arms wide open.

"Those people over there, they're watching," she said.

"It's okay," the man said. "It's my place," he said.

"Let them watch," the girl said.

"That's right," the man said. "They thought they'd seen everything over here. But they haven't seen this, have they?" he said.

He felt her breath on his neck.

"I hope you like your bed," he said.

The girl closed and then opened her eyes. She pushed her face into the man's shoulder. She pulled the man closer.

"You must be desperate or something," she said.

Weeks later, she said: "The guy was about middle-aged. All his things right there in his yard. No lie. We got real pissed and danced. In the driveway. Oh, my God. Don't laugh. He played us these records. Look at this record-player. The old guy gave it to us. And all these crappy records. Will you look at this shit?"

She kept talking. She told everyone. There was more to it, and she was trying to get it talked out. After a time, she quit trying.

EMERGENCY
(from: JESUS' SON)

by

Denis Johnson

I'd been working in the emergency room for about three weeks, I guess. This was in 1973, before the summer ended. With nothing to do on the overnight shift but batch the insurance reports from the daytime shifts, I just started wandering around, over to the coronary-care unit, down to the cafeteria, et cetera, looking for Georgie, the orderly, a pretty good friend of mine. He often stole pills from the cabinets.

He was running over the tiled floor of the operating room with a mop. "Are you still doing that?" I said.

"Jesus, there's a lot of blood here," he complained.

"Where?" The floor looked clean enough to me.

"What the hell were they doing in here?" he asked me.

"They were performing surgery, Georgie," I told him.

"There's so much goop inside of it, man," he said, "and it all wants to get out." He leaned his mop against a cabinet.

"What are you crying for?" I didn't understand.

He stood still, raised both arms slowly behind his head, and tightened his ponytail. Then he grabbed the mop and started making broad random arcs with it, trembling and weeping and moving all around the place really fast. "What am I crying for?" he said. "Jesus. Wow, oh boy, perfect."

I was hanging out in the E.R. with fat, quivering Nurse. One of the Family Service doctors that nobody liked came in looking for Georgie to wipe top after him. "Where's Georgie?" this guy asked.

"Georgie's in O.R.," Nurse said.

"Again?"

"No," Nurse said. "Still."

"Still? Doing what?"

"Cleaning the floor."

"Again?"

"No." Nurse said again. "Still."

Back in O.R., Georgie dropped his mop and bent over in the posture of a child soiling its diapers. He stared down with his mouth open in terror.

He said, "What am I going to do about these fucking shoes, man?"

"Whatever you stole." I said. "I guess you already ate it all, right?"

"Listen to how they squish," he said, walking around

carefully on his heels.

"Let me check your pockets, man."

He stood still a minute, and I found his stash. I left him two of each, whatever they were. "Shift is about half over." I told him.

"Good. Because I really, really, really need a drink," he said. "Will you please help me get this blood mopped up?"

Around 3:30 a.m. a guy with a knife in his eye came in, led by Georgie.

"I hope you didn't do that to him," Nurse said.

"Me?" Georgie said. "No. He was like this."

"My wife did it," the man said. The blade was buried to the hilt in the outside corner of his left eye. It was a hunting knife kind of thing.

"Who brought you in?" Nurse said.

"Nobody. I just walked down. It's only three blocks," the man said.

Nurse peered at him. "We'd better get you lying down."

"Okay, I'm certainly ready for something like that," the man said.

She peered a bit longer into his face.

"Is your other eye," she said, "a glass eye?"

"It's plastic, or something artificial like that," he said.

"And you can see out of this eye?" she asked, meaning the wounded one.

"I can see. But I can't make a fist out of my left hand because this knife is doing something to my brain."

"My God," Nurse said.

"I guess I'd better get the doctor," I said.

"There you go," Nurse agreed.

They got him lying down, and Georgie says to the patient, "Name?"

"Terrence Weber."

"Your face is dark. I can't see what you're saying."

"Georgie," I said.

"What are you saying, man? I can't see."

Nurse came over, and Georgie said to her, "His face is dark."

She leaned over the patient. "How long ago did this happen, Terry?" she shouted down into his face.

"Just a while ago. My wife did it. I was asleep," the patient said.

"Do you want the police?"

He thought about it and finally said. "Not unless I die."

Nurse went to the wall intercom and buzzed the doctor on ditty, the Family Service person. "Got a surprise for you", she said over the intercom. He took his time getting down the hall to her, because he knew she hated Family Service and her happy tone of voice could only mean something beyond his competence and potentially humiliating.

He peeked into the trauma room and saw the situation: the clerk -- that is, me -- standing next to the orderly, Georgie, both of us on drugs, looking down at a patient with a knife sticking up out of his face.

"What seems to be the trouble?" he said.

The doctor gathered the three of us around him in the office and said, "Here's the situation. We've got to get a team here, an entire team. I want a good eye man. A great eye man. The best eye man. I want a brain surgeon. And I want a really good gas man, get me a genius. I'm not touching that head. I'm just going to watch this one. I know my limits. We'll just get him prepped and sit tight. Orderly!"

"Do you mean me?" Georgie said. "Should I get him prepped?"

"Is this a hospital?" the doctor asked. "Is this the emergency room? Is that a patient? Are you the orderly?"

I dialed the hospital operator and told her to get me the eye man and the brain man and the gas man.

Georgie could he heard across the hall, washing his hands and singing a Neil Young song that went "Hello, cowgirl in the sand. Is this place at your command?"

"That person is not right, not at all, not one bit," the doctor said.

"As long as my instructions are audible to him it doesn't concern me," Nurse insisted, spooning stuff up out of a little Dixie cup. "I've got my own life and the protection of my family to think of."

"Well, okay, okay. Don't chew my head off," the doctor said.

The eye man was on vacation or something. While the hospital's operator called around to find someone else just as good, the other specialists were hurrying through the night to join us. I stood around looking at charts and chewing up more of Georgie's pills. Some of them tasted the way urine smells, some of them burned, some of them tasted like chalk. Various nurses, and two physicians who'd been tending somebody in I.C.U., were hanging out down here with us now.

Everybody had a different idea about exactly how to approach the problem of removing the knife from Terrence Weber's brain. But when Georgie came in from prepping the patient front, shaving the patient's eyebrow and disinfecting the area around the wound, and so on -- he seemed to be holding the hunting knife in his left hand.

The talk just dropped off a cliff.

"Where," the doctor asked finally, "did you get that?" Nobody said one thing more, not for quite a long time.

After a while, one of the I.C.U. nurses said, "Your shoelace is untied." Georgie laid the knife on a chart and bent down to fix his shoe.

There were twenty more minutes left to get through.

"How's the guy doing?" I asked.

"Who?" Georgie said.

It turned out that Terrence Weber still had excellent vision in the one good eye, and acceptable motor and reflex, despite his earlier motor complaint. "His vitals are normal," Nurse said. "There's nothing wrong with the guy. It's one of those things."

After a while you forget it's summer. You don't remember what the morning is. I'd worked two doubles with eight hours off in between, which I'd spent sleeping on a gurney in the nurse's station. Georgie's pills were making me feel like a giant helium-filled balloon, but I was wide awake. Georgie and I went out to the lot, to his orange pickup.

We lay down on a stretch of dusty plywood in the back of the truck with the daylight knocking against our eyelids and the fragrance of alfalfa thickening on our tongues.

"I want to go to church," Georgie said.

"Let's go to the county fair."

"I'd like to worship. I would."

"They have these injured hawks and eagles there. From the Humane Society," I said.

"I need a quiet chapel about now."

Georgie and I had a terrific time driving around. For a while the day was clear and peaceful. It was one of the moments you stay in, to hell with all the troubles of before and after. The sky is blue and the dead are coming back. Later in the afternoon, with sad resignation, the county fair bares its breasts. A champion of the drug LSD, a very famous guru of the love generation, is being interviewed amid a TV crew off to the left of the poultry cages. His eyeballs look like he bought them in a joke shop. It doesn't occur to me, as I pity this extraterrestrial, that in my life I've taken as much as he has.

After that, we got lost. We drove for hours, literally hours, but we couldn't find the road back to town.

Georgie started to complain. "That was the worst fair I've been to. Where were the rides?"

"They had rifles," I said.

"I didn't see one ride."

A jackrabbit scurried out in front of us, and we hit it.

"There was a merry-go-round, a Ferris wheel, and a thing called the Hammer that people were bent over vomiting from after they got off", I said. "Are you completely blind?"

"What was that?"

"A rabbit."

"Something thumped."

"You hit him. He thumped."

Georgie stood on the brake pedal. "Rabbit stew."

He threw the truck in reverse and zigzagged back toward

the rabbit. "Where's my hunting knife?" He almost ran over the poor animal a second time.

"We'll camp in the wilderness," he said. "In the morning we'll breakfast on its haunches." He was waving Terrence Weber's hunting knife around in what I was sure was a dangerous way.

In a minute he was standing at the edge of the fields, cutting the scrawny little thing up, tossing away its organs. "I should have been a doctor," he cried.

A family in a big Dodge, the only car we'd seen for a long time, slowed down and gawked out the windows as they passed by. The father said, "What is it, a snake?"

"No, it's not a snake," Georgie said. "It's a rabbit with babies inside it."

"Babies!" the mother said, and the father sped the car forward, over the protests of several little kids in the back.

Georgie came back to my side of the truck with his shirtfront stretched out in front of him as if he were carrying apples in it, or some such, but they were, in fact, slimy miniature bunnies. "No way I'm eating those things," I told him.

"Take them, take them. I gotta drive, take them," he said, dumping them in my lap and getting in on his side of the truck. He started driving along faster and faster, with a look of glory on his face. "We killed the mother and saved the children," he said.

"It's getting late," I said. "Let's get back to town."

"You bet." Sixty, seventy, eighty-five, just topping ninety.

"These rabbits better be kept warm." One at a time I slid the little things in between my shirt buttons and nestled them against my belly. "They're hardly moving," I told Georgie.

"We'll get some milk and sugar and all that, and we'll raise them up ourselves. They'll get as big as gorillas."

The road we were lost on cut straight through the middle of the world. It was still daytime, but the sun had no more power than an ornament or a sponge. In this light the truck's hood, which had been bright orange, had turned a deep blue.

Georgie let us drift to the shoulder of the road, slowly, slowly, as if he'd fallen asleep or given up trying to find his way.

"What is it?"

"We can't go on. I don't have any headlights." Georgie said.

We parked under a strange sky with a faint image of a quarter-moon superimposed on it.

There was a little woods beside us. This day had been dry and hot, the buck pines and what-all simmering patiently, but as we sat there smoking cigarettes it started to get very cold.

"The summer's over," I said.

That was the year when arctic clouds moved down over the

Midwest and we had two weeks of winter in September.

"Do you realize it's going to snow?" Georgie asked me.

He was right, a gun-blue storm was shaping up. We got out and walked around idiotically. The beautiful chill! That sudden crispness, and the tang of evergreen stabbing us!

The gusts of snow twisted themselves around our heads while the night fell. I couldn't find the truck. We just kept getting more and more lost. I kept calling, "Georgie, can you see?" and he kept saying, "See what? See what?"

The only light visible was a streak of sunset flickering below the hem of the clouds. We headed that way.

We bumped softly down a hill toward an open field that seemed to be a military graveyard, filled with rows and rows of austere, identical markers over soldiers' graves. I'd never before come across this cemetery. On the farther side of the field, just beyond the curtains of snow, the sky was torn away and the angels were descending out of a brilliant blue summer, their huge faces streaked with light and full of pity. The sight of them cut through my heart and down the knuckles of my spine, and if there'd been anything in my bowels I would have messed my pants from fear.

Georgie opened his arms and cried out, "It's the drive-in, man!"

"The drive-in..." I wasn't sure what these words meant.

"They're showing movies in a fucking blizzard!" Georgie screamed.

"I see. I thought it was something else." I said.

We walked carefully down there and climbed through the busted fence and stood in the very back. The speakers, which I'd mistaken for grave markers, muttered in unison. Then there was tinkly music, of which I could very nearly make out the tune. Famous movie stars rode bicycles beside a river, laughing out of their gigantic, lovely mouths. If anybody had come to see this show, they'd left when the weather started. Not one car remained, not even a broken-down one from last week, or one left here because it was out of gas. In a couple of minutes, in the middle of a whirling square dance, the screen turned black, the cinematic summer ended, the snow went dark, there was nothing but my breath.

"I'm starting to get my eyes back," Georgie said in another minute.

A general greyness was giving birth to various shapes, it was true. "But which ones are close' and which ones are far off?" I begged him to tell me.

By trial and error, with a lot of walking back and forth in wet shoes, we found the truck and sat inside it shivering.

"Let's get out of here," I said.

"We can't go anywhere without headlights."

"We've gotta get back. We're a long way from home."

"No, we're not."

"We must have come three hundred miles."

"We're right outside town, Fuckhead. We've just been driving around and around."

"This is no place to camp. I hear the Interstate over

there."

"We'll just stay here till it gets late. We can drive home late. We'll be invisible."

We listened to the big rigs going from San Francisco to Pennsylvania along the Interstate, like shudders down a long hacksaw blade, while the snow buried us.

Eventually Georgie said, "We better get some milk for those bunnies."

"We don't have *milk*," I said.

"We'll mix sugar up with it."

"Will you forget about this milk all of a sudden?"

"They're mammals, man."

"Forget about those rabbits."

"Where are they, anyway?"

"You're not listening to me. I said, 'Forget the rabbits.'"

"Where are they?"

The truth was I'd forgotten all about them, and they were dead.

"They slid around behind me and got squashed," I said tearfully.

"They slid around behind?"

He watched while I pried them out from behind my back.

I picked them out one at a time and held them in my hands and we looked at them. There were eight. They weren't any bigger than my fingers, but everything was there.

Little feet! Eyelids! Even whiskers! "Deceased," I said. Georgie asked. "Does everything you touch turn to shit? Does this happen to you every time?"

"No wonder they call me Fuckhead."

"It's a name that's going to stick."

"I realize that."

"'Fuckhead' is gonna ride you to your grave."

"I just said so. I agreed with you in advance," I said.

Or maybe that wasn't the time it snowed. Maybe it was the time we slept in the truck and I rolled over on the bunnies and flattened them. It doesn't matter. What's important for me to remember now is that early the next morning the snow was melted off the windshield and the daylight woke me up. A mist covered everything and, with the sunshine, was beginning to grow sharp and strange. The bunnies weren't a problem yet, or they'd already been a problem and were already forgotten, and there was nothing on my mind. I felt the beauty of the morning. I could understand how a drowning man might suddenly feel a deep thirst being quenched. Or how the slave might become a friend to his master. Georgie slept with his face right on the steering wheel.

I saw bits of snow resembling an abundance of blossoms on the steins of the drive-in speakers -- no, revealing the blossoms that were always there. A bull elk stood still in the pasture beyond the fence, giving off an air of authority and stupidity. And a coyote jogged across the pasture and faded away among the saplings.

That afternoon we got back to work in time to resume everything as if it had never stopped happening and we'd never been anywhere else.

"The Lord," the intercom said, "is my shepherd." It did that each evening because this was a Catholic hospital. "Our Father, who art in Heaven," and so on.

"Yeah, yeah," Nurse said.

The man with the knife in his head, Terrence Weber, was released around suppertime. They'd kept him overnight and given him an eye-patch -- all for no reason, really.

He stopped off at E.R. to say goodbye. "Well, those pills they gave me make everything taste terrible," he said.

"It could have been worse," Nurse said.

"Even my tongue."

"It's just a miracle you didn't end up sightless or at least dead," she reminded him.

The patient recognized me. He acknowledged me with a smile. "I was peeping on the lady next door while she was out there sunbathing," he said. "My wife decided to blind me."

He shook Georgie's hand. Georgie didn't know him. "Who are you supposed to be?" he asked Terrence Weber.

Some hours before that, Georgie had said something that had suddenly and completely explained the difference between us. We'd been driving back toward town, along the Old Highway, through the flatness. We picked up a hitchhiker, a boy I knew. We stopped the truck and the boy climbed slowly up out of the fields as out of the mouth of a volcano. His name was Hardee. He looked even worse than we probably did.

"We got messed up and slept in the truck all night," I told Hardee.

"I had a feeling." Hardee said. "Either that or, you know, driving a thousand miles."

"That too," I said.

"Or you're sick or diseased or something."

"Who's this guy?" Georgie asked.

"This is Hardee. He lived with me last summer. I found him on the doorstep. What happened to your dog?" I asked Hardee.

"He's still down there."

"Yeah, I heard you went to Texas."

"I was working on a bee farm," Hardee said.

"Wow. Do those things sting you?"

"Not like you'd think," Hardee said. "You're part of their daily drill. It's all part of a harmony."

Outside, the same identical stretch of ground repeatedly rolled past our faces. The day was cloudless, blinding. But Georgie said, "Look at that," pointing straight ahead of us.

One star was so hot it showed, bright and blue, in the empty sky.

"I recognized you right away," I told Hardee. "But what

happened to your hair? Who chopped it off?"

"I hate to say."

"Don't tell me."

"They drafted me."

"Oh no."

"Oh yeah. I'm AWOL. I'm bad AWOL. I got to get to Canada."

"Oh, that's terrible," I said to Hardee.

"Don't worry," Georgie said. "We'll get you there."

"How?"

"Somehow. I think I know some people. Don't worry. You're on your way to Canada."

That world! These days it's all been erased and they've rolled it up like a scroll and put it away somewhere. Yes, I can touch it with my fingers. But where is it?

After a while Hardee asked Georgie, "What do you do for a job," and Georgie said, "I save lives."

THE GIRLS IN THEIR SUMMER DRESSES

by

Irwin Shaw

Fifth Avenue was shining in the sun when they left the Brevoort and started walking toward Washington Square. The sun was warm, even though it was November, and everything looked like Sunday morning -- the buses, and the well-dressed people walking slowly in couples and the quiet buildings with the windows closed.

Michael held Frances' arm tightly as they walked downtown in the sunlight. They walked lightly, almost smiling, because they had slept late and had a good breakfast and it was Sunday. Michael unbuttoned his coat and let it flap around him in the mild wind. They walked, without saying anything, among the young and pleasant-looking people who somehow seem to make up most of the population of that section of New York City.

"Look out," Frances said, as they crossed Eighth Street. "You'll break your neck."

Michael laughed and Frances laughed with him.

"She's not so pretty, anyway," Frances said. "Anyway, not pretty enough to take a chance breaking your neck looking at her."

Michael laughed again. He laughed louder this time, but not as solidly. "She wasn't a bad-looking girl. She had a nice complexion. Country-girl complexion. How did you know I was looking at her?" Frances cocked her head to one side and smiled at her husband under the tip-tilted brim of her hat. "Mike, darling..." she said.

Michael laughed, just a little laugh this time. "Okay," he said. "The evidence is in. Excuse me. It was the complexion. It's not the sort of complexion you see much in New York. Excuse me."

Frances patted his arm lightly and pulled him along a little faster toward Washington Square.

"This is a nice morning," she said. "This is a wonderful morning. When I have breakfast with you it makes me feel good all day."

"Tonic," Michael said. "Morning pickup. Rolls and coffee with Mike and you're on the alkali side, guaranteed."

"That's the story. Also, I slept all night, wound around you like a rope."

"Saturday night," he said. "I permit such liberties only when the week's work is done."

"You're getting fat," she said.

"Isn't it the truth? The lean man from Ohio."

"I love it," she said, "an extra five pounds of husband."

"I love it, too," Michael said gravely.

"I have an idea," Frances said.

"My wife has an idea. That pretty girl."

"Let's not see anybody all day," Frances said. "Let's just hang around with each other. You and me. We're always up to our neck in people, drinking their Scotch, or drinking our Scotch, we only see each other in bed."

"The Great Meeting Place," Michael said. "Stay in bed long enough and everybody you ever knew will show up there."

"Wise guy," Frances said. "I'm talking serious."

"Okay, I'm listening serious."

"I want to go out with my husband all day long. I want him to talk only to me and listen only to me."

"What's to stop us?" Michael asked. "What party intends to prevent me from seeing my wife alone on Sunday? What party?"

"The Stevensons. They want us to drop by around one o'clock and they'll drive us into the country."

"The lousy Stevensons," Mike said. "Transparent. They can whistle. They can go driving in the country by themselves. My wife and I have to stay in New York and bore each other tete-a-tete."

"Is it a date?"

"It's a date."

Frances leaned over and kissed him on the tip of the ear. "Darling," Michael said. "This is Fifth Avenue."

"Let me arrange a program," Frances said. "A planned Sunday in New York for a young couple with money to throw away."

"Go easy."

"First let's go see a football game. A professional football game," Frances said, because she knew Michael loved to watch them. "The Giants are playing. And it'll be nice to be outside all day today and get hungry and later we'll go down to Cavanagh's and get a steak as big as a blacksmith's apron, with a bottle of wine, and after that, there's a new French picture at the Filmarte that everybody says... Say, are you listening to me?"

"Sure," he said. He took his eyes off the hatless girl with the dark hair, cut dancer-style, like a helmet, who was walking past him with the self-conscious strength and grace dancers have. She was walking without a coat and she looked very solid and strong and her belly was flat, like a boy's, under her skirt, and her hips swung boldly because she was a dancer and also because she knew Michael was looking at her. She smiled a little to herself as she went past and Michael noticed all these things before he looked back at his wife. "Sure," he said, "we're going to watch the Giants and we're going to eat steak and we're going to see a French picture. How do you like that?"

"That's it," Frances said flatly. "That's the program for the day. Or maybe you'd just rather walk up and down Fifth Avenue."

"No," Michael said carefully. "Not at all."

"You always look at other women," Frances said. "At every damn woman in the city of New York."

"Oh, come now," Michael said, pretending to joke. "Only pretty ones. And, after all, how many pretty women are there in New York? Seventeen?"

"More. At least you seem to think so. Wherever you go."

"Not the truth. Occasionally, maybe, I look at a woman as she passes. In the street. I admit, perhaps in the street I look at a woman once in a while..."

"Everywhere," Frances said. "Every damned place we go. Restaurants, subways, theaters, lectures, concerts."

"Now, darling," Michael said. "I look at everything. God gave me eyes and I look at women and men and subway excavations and moving pictures and the little flowers of the field. I casually inspect the universe."

"You ought to see the look in your eye," Frances said, "as you casually inspect the universe on Fifth Avenue."

"I'm a happily married man." Michael pressed her elbow tenderly, knowing what he was doing. "Example for the whole twentieth century, Mr. and Mrs. Mike Loomis."

"You mean it?"

"Frances, baby..."

"Are you really happily married?"

"Sure," Michael said, feeling the whole Sunday morning sinking like lead inside him. "Now what the hell is the sense in talking like that?"

"I would like to know." Frances walked faster now, looking straight ahead, her face showing nothing, which was the way she always managed it when she was arguing or feeling bad.

"I'm wonderfully happily married," Michael said patiently. "I am the envy of all men between the ages of fifteen and sixty in the state of New York."

"Stop kidding," Frances said.

"I have a fine home," Michael said. "I got nice books and a phonograph and nice friends. I live in a town I like the way I like and I do the work I like and I live with the woman I like. Whenever something good happens, don't I run to you? When something bad happens, don't I cry on your shoulder?"

"Yes," Frances said. "You look at every woman that passes."

"That's an exaggeration."

"Every woman." Frances took her hand off Michael's arm. "If she's not pretty you turn away fairly quickly. If she's halfway pretty you watch her for about seven steps..."

"My Lord, Frances!"

"If she's pretty you practically break your neck..."

"Hey, let's have a drink," Michael said, stopping.

"We just had breakfast."

"Now, listen, darling," Mike said, choosing his words with care, "it's a nice day and we both feel good and there's no reason why we have to break it up. Let's have a nice Sunday."

"I could have a fine Sunday if you didn't look as though you were dying to run after every skirt on Fifth Avenue."

"Let's have a drink," Michael said.

"I don't want a drink."

"What do you want, a fight?"

"No," Frances said, so unhappily that Michael felt terribly sorry for her. "I don't want a fight. I don't know why I started this. All right, let's drop it. Let's have a good time."

They joined hands consciously and walked without talking among the baby carriages and the old Italian men in their Sunday clothes and the young women with Scotties in Washington Square Park.

"I hope it's a good game today," Frances said after a while, her tone a good imitation of the tone she had used at breakfast and at the beginning of their walk. "I like professional football games. They hit each other as though they're made out of concrete. When they tackle each other," she said, trying to make Michael laugh, "they make divots. It's very exciting."

"I want to tell you something," Michael said very seriously. "I have not touched another woman. Not once. In all the five years."

"All right," Frances said.

"You believe that, don't you?"

"All right."

They walked between the crowded benches, under the scrubby city park trees.

"I try not to notice it," Frances said, as though she were talking to herself. "I try to make believe it doesn't mean anything. Some men're like that, I tell myself, they have to see what they're missing."

"Some women're like that, too," Michael said. "In my time I've seen a couple of ladies."

"I haven't even looked at another man," Frances said, walking straight ahead, "since the second time I went out with you."

"There's no law," Michael said.

"I feel rotten inside, in my stomach, when we pass a woman and you look at her and I see that look in your eye and that's the way you looked at me the first time, in Alice Maxwell's house. Standing there in the living room, next to the radio, with a green hat on and all those people."

"I remember the hat," Michael said.

"The same look," Frances said. "And it makes me feel bad. It makes me feel terrible."

"Sssh, please, darling, sssh..."

"I think I would like a drink now," Frances said.

They walked over to a bar on Eighth Street, not saying anything, Michael automatically helping her over curbstones and guiding her past automobiles. He walked, buttoning his coat, looking thoughtfully at his neatly shined heavy brown shoes as they made the steps toward the bar. They sat near a window in the bar and the sun streamed in, and there was a small cheerful fire in the fireplace. A little Japanese waiter came over and put down some pretzels and smiled

happily at them.

"What do you order after breakfast?" Michael asked.

"Brandy, I suppose," Frances said.

"Courvoisier," Michael told the waiter. "Two Courvoisier."

The waiter came with the glasses and they sat drinking the brandy in the sunlight. Michael finished half his and drank a little water.

"I look at women," he said. "Correct. I don't say it's wrong or right, I look at them. If I pass them on the street and I don't look at them, I'm fooling you, I'm fooling myself."

"You look at them as though you want them," Frances said, playing with her brandy glass. "Every one of them."

"In a way," Michael said, speaking softly and not to his wife, "in a way that's true. I don't do anything about it, but it's true."

"I know it. That's why I feel bad."

"Another brandy," Michael called. "Waiter, two more brandies."

"Why do you hurt me?" Frances asked. "What're you doing?"

Michael sighed and closed his eyes and rubbed them gently with his fingertips. "I love the way women look. One of the things I like best about New York is the battalions of women. When I first came to New York from Ohio that was the first thing I noticed, the million wonderful women, all over the city. I walked around with my heart in my throat."

"A kid," Frances said. "That's a kid's feeling."

"Guess again," Michael said. "Guess again. I'm older now, I'm a man getting near middle age, putting on a little fat and I still love to walk along Fifth Avenue at three o'clock on the east side of the street between Fiftieth and Fifty-seventh streets, they're all out then, making believe they're shopping, in their furs and their crazy hats, everything all concentrated from all over the world into eight blocks, the best furs, the best clothes, the handsomest women, out to spend money and feeling good about it, looking coldly at you, making believe they're not looking at you as you go past."

The Japanese waiter put the two drinks down, smiling with great happiness.

"Everything is all right?" he asked.

"Everything is wonderful," Michael said.

"If it's just a couple of fur coats," Frances said, "and forty-five-dollar hats..."

"It's not the fur coats. Or the hats. That's just the scenery for that particular kind of woman. Understand," he said, "you don't have to listen to this."

"I want to listen."

"I like the girls in the offices. Neat, with their eyeglasses, smart, chipper, knowing what everything is about, taking care of themselves all the time." He kept his eye on the people going slowly past outside the window. "I like the

girls on Forty-fourth Street at lunchtime, the actresses, all dressed up on nothing a week, talking to the good-looking boys, wearing themselves out being young and vivacious outside Sardi's, waiting for producers to look at them. I like the salesgirls in Macy's, paying attention to you first because you're a man, leaving lady customers waiting, flirting with you over socks and books and phonograph needles. I got all this stuff accumulated in me because I've been thinking about it for ten years and now you've asked for it and here it is."

"Go ahead," Frances said.

"When I think of New York City, I think of all the girls, the Jewish girls, the Italian girls, the Irish, Polack, Chinese, German, Negro, Spanish, Russian girls, all on parade in the city. I don't know whether it's something special with me or whether every man in the city walks around with the same feeling inside him, but I feel as though I'm at a picnic in this city. I like to sit near the women in the theaters, the famous beauties who've taken six hours to get ready and look it. And the young girls at the football games, with the red cheeks, and when the warm weather comes, the girls in their summer dresses..." He finished his drink.

"That's the story. You asked for it, remember. I can't help but look at them. I can't help but want them."

"You want them," Frances repeated without expression. "You said that."

"Right," Michael said, being cruel now and not caring, because she had made him expose himself. "You brought this subject up for discussion, we will discuss it fully."

Frances finished her drink and swallowed two or three times extra. "You say you love me?"

"I love you, but I also want them. Okay."

"I'm pretty, too," Frances said. "As pretty as any of them."

"You're beautiful," Michael said, meaning it.

"I'm good for you," Frances said, pleading. "I've made a good wife, a good housekeeper, a good friend. I'd do any damn thing for you."

"I know," Michael said. He put his hand out and grasped hers.

"You'd like to be free to..." Frances said.

"Sssh."

"Tell the truth." She took her hand away from under his. Michael flicked the edge of his glass with his finger. "Okay," he said gently. "Sometimes I feel I would like to be free."

"Well," Frances said defiantly, drumming on the table, "anytime you say..."

"Don't be foolish." Michael swung his chair around to her side of the table and patted her thigh.

She began to cry, silently, into her handkerchief, bent over just enough so that nobody else in the bar would notice. "Someday," she said, crying, "you're going to make a move..."

Michael didn't say anything. He sat watching the

bartender slowly peel a lemon.

"Aren't you?" Frances asked harshly. "Come on, tell me. Talk. Aren't you?"

"Maybe," Michael said. He moved his chair back again. "How the hell do I know?"

"You know," Frances persisted. "Don't you know?"

"Yes," Michael said after a while. "I know."

Frances stopped crying then. Two or three snuffles into the handkerchief and she put it away and her face didn't tell anything to anybody. "At least do me one favor," she said.

"Sure."

"Stop talking about how pretty this woman is, or that one. Nice eyes, nice breasts, a pretty figure, good voice," she mimicked his voice. "Keep it to yourself. I'm not interested."

"Excuse me." Michael waved to the waiter. "I'll keep it to myself."

Frances flicked the corner of her eyes. "Another brandy," she told the waiter.

"Two," Michael said.

"Yes, ma'am, yes, sir," said the waiter, backing away.

Frances regarded him coolly across the table. "Do you want me to call the Stevensons?" she asked. "It'll be nice in the country."

"Sure," Michael said. "Call them up."

She got up from the table and walked across the room toward the telephone. Michael watched her walk, thinking, What a pretty girl, what nice legs.

GOING TO THE DOGS

by

Richard Ford

My wife had just gone out West with a groom from the local dog track, and I was waiting around the house for things to clear up, thinking about catching the train to Florida to change my luck. I already had my ticket in my wallet.

It was the day before Thanksgiving, and all week long there had been hunters parked down at the gate: pickups and a couple of old Chevys sitting empty all day -- mostly with out-of-state tags -- occasionally, two men standing beside their car doors drinking coffee and talking. I hadn't given them any thought. Gainsborough -- who I was thinking at that time of stiffing for the rent -- had said not to antagonize them, and let them hunt unless they shot near the house, and then to call the state police and let them handle it. No one had shot near the house, though I had heard shooting back in the woods and had seen one of the Chevys drive off fast with a deer on top, but I didn't think there would be any trouble.

I wanted to get out before it began to snow and before the electricity bills started coming. Since my wife had sold our car before she left getting my business settled wasn't easy, and I hadn't had time to pay much attention.

Just after ten o'clock in the morning there was a knock on the front door. Standing out in the brown grass were two fat women with a dead deer.

"Where's Gainsborough?" the one fat woman said. They were both dressed like hunters. One had on a red plaid lumberjack's jacket and the other a green camouflage suit. Both of them had the little orange cushions that hang from your back belt loops and get hot when you sit on them. Both of them had guns.

"He's not here," I said. "He's gone back to England. Some trouble with the government. I don't know about it."

Both women were staring at me as if they were trying to get me in better focus. They had green-and-black camouflage paste on their faces and looked like they had something on their minds. I still had on my bathrobe.

"We wanted to give Gainsborough a deer steak," said the one who was wearing the red lumberjack's jacket and who had spoken first. She turned and looked at the dead deer, whose tongue was out the side of his mouth and whose eyes looked like a stuffed deer's eyes. "He lets us hunt, and we wanted to thank him in that way," she said.

"You could give *me* a deer steak," I said. "I could keep it for him."

"I suppose we could do that," the one who was doing the talking said. But the other one, who was wearing the camouflage suit, gave her a look that said she knew Gainsborough would never get the steak if it got in my hands.

"Why don't you come in," I said. "I'd make some coffee and you can warm up."

"We are pretty cold," the one in the plaid jacket said and patted her hands together. "If Phyllis wouldn't mind"

Phyllis said she didn't mind at all, though it was clear that accepting an invitation to have coffee had nothing to do with giving away a deer steak.

"Phyllis is the one who actually brought him down," the pleasant fat woman said when they had their coffee and were holding their mugs cupped between their fat hands, sitting on the davenport. She said her name was Bonnie and that they were from across the state line. They were big women, in their forties with fat faces, and their clothes made them look like all their parts were sized too big. Both of them were jolly, though -- even Phyllis, when she forgot about the deer steaks and got some color back in her cheeks. They seemed to fill up the house and make it feel jolly. "He ran sixty yards after she hit him, and went down when he jumped the fence," Bonnie said authoritatively. "It was a heart shot, and sometimes those take time to take effect."

"He ran like a scalded dog," Phyllis said, "and dropped like a load of shit." Phyllis had short blond hair and a hard mouth that seemed to want to say hard things.

"We saw a wounded doe, too," Bonnie said and looked aggravated about it. "That really makes you mad."

"The man may have tracked it, though." I said. "It may have been a mistake. You can't tell about those things."

"That's true enough," Bonnie said and looked at Phyllis hopefully, but Phyllis didn't look up. I tried to imagine the two of them dragging a dead deer out of the woods, and it was easy.

I went out to the kitchen to get a coffee cake I had put in the oven, and they were whispering to each other when I came back in. The whispering, though, seemed good-natured, and I gave them the coffee cake without mentioning it. I was happy they were here. My wife is a slender, petite woman who bought all her clothes in the children's sections of department stores and said they were the best clothes you could buy because they were made for hard wearing. But she didn't have much presence in the house; there just wasn't enough of her to occupy the space -- not that the house was so big. In fact it was very small -- a prefab Gainsborough had had pulled in on a trailer. But these women seemed to fill everything and to make it seem like Thanksgiving was already here. Being that big never seemed to have a good side before, but now it did.

"Do you ever go to the dogs?" Phyllis asked with part of her coffee cake in her mouth and part floating in her mug.

"I do," I said. "How did you know that?"

"Phyllis says she thinks she's seen you at the dogs a few times," Bonnie said and smiled.

"I just bet the quinellas," Phyllis said. "But Bon will bet anything, won't you, Bon? Trifectas, daily doubles, anything at all. She doesn't care."

"I sure will." Bon smiled again and moved her orange hot-seat cushion from under her seat so that it was on top of the davenport arm. "Phyllis said she thought she saw you with a woman there once, a little, tiny woman who was pretty."

"Could be," I said.

"Who was *she*?" Phyllis said gruffly.

"My wife," I said.

"Is she here now?" Bon asked, looking pleasantly around the room as if someone was hiding behind a chair.

"No," I said. "She's on a trip. She's gone out West."

"What happened?" said Phyllis in an unfriendly way. "Did you blow all your money on the dogs and have her bolt?"

"No." I didn't like Phyllis nearly as well as Bon, though in a way Phyllis seemed more reliable if it ever came to that, and I didn't think it ever could. But I didn't like it that Phyllis knew so much, even if the particulars were not right on the money. We had, my wife and I, moved up from the city. I had some ideas about selling advertising for the dog track in the local restaurants and gas stations, and arranging coupon discounts for evenings out at the dogs that would make everybody some money. I had spent a lot of time, used up my capital. And now I had a basement full of coupon boxes that nobody wanted, and they weren't paid for. My wife came in laughing one day and said my ideas wouldn't make a Coke fizz in Denver, and the next day she left in the car and didn't come back. Later, a fellow had called to ask if I had the service records on the car -- which I didn't -- and that's how I knew it was sold, and who she'd left with.

Phyllis took a little plastic flask out from under her camouflage coat, unscrewed the top, and handed it across the coffee table to me. It was early in the day but, I thought, what the hell. Thanksgiving was tomorrow. I was alone and about to jump the lease on Gainsborough. It wouldn't make any difference.

"This place is a mess." Phyllis took back the flask and looked at how much I'd had of it. "It looks like an animal starved in here."

"It needs a woman's touch," Bon said and winked at me. She was not really bad looking, even though she was a little heavy. The camouflage paste on her face made her look a little like a clown, but you could tell she had a nice face.

"I'm just about to leave," I said and reached for the flask, but Phyllis put it back in her hunting jacket. "I'm just getting things organized back in the back."

"Do you have a car?" Phyllis said.

"I'm getting antifreeze put in it," I said. "It's down at the BP. It's a blue Camaro. You probably passed it. Are you girls married?" I was happy to steer away from my own troubles.

Bon and Phyllis exchanged a look of annoyance, and it disappointed me. I was disappointed to see any kind of displeasure cloud up on Bon's nice round features.

"We're married to a couple of rubber-band salesmen down in Petersburg. That's across the state line," Phyllis said.

"A real pair of monkeys, if you know what I mean."

I tried to imagine Bonnie's and Phyllis's husbands. I pictured two skinny men wearing nylon jackets, shaking hands in the dark parking lot of a shopping mall in front of a bowling alley bar. I couldn't imagine anything else. "What do you think about Gainsborough?" Phyllis said. Bon was just smiling at me now.

"I don't know him very well," I said. "He told me he was a direct descendant of the English painter. But I don't believe it."

"Neither do I," said Bonnie and gave me another wink.

"He's farting through silk," Phyllis said.

"He has two children who come snooping around here sometimes," I said. "One's a dancer in the city. And one's a computer repairman. I think they want to get in the house and live in it. But I've got the lease."

"Are you going to stiff him?" Phyllis said.

"No. I wouldn't do that. He's been fair to me, even if he lies sometimes."

"He's farting through silk," Phyllis said.

Phyllis and Bonnie looked at each other knowingly. Out the little picture window I saw it had begun to snow, just a mist, but unmistakable.

"You act to me like you could use a good snuggle," Bon said, and she broke a big smile at me so I could see her teeth. They were all there and white and small. Phyllis looked at Bonnie without any expression, as if she'd heard the words before. "What do you think about that?" Bonnie said and sat forward over her big knees.

At first I didn't know what to think about it. And then I thought it sounded pretty good, even if Bonnie was a little heavy. I told her it sounded all right with me.

"I don't even know your name," Bonnie said, and stood up and looked around the sad little room for the door to the back.

"Henderson," I lied. "Lloyd Henderson is my name. I've lived here six months." I stood up.

"I don't like *Lloyd*," Bonnie said and looked at me up and down now that I was up, in my bathrobe. "I think I'll call you Curly, because you've got curly hair. As curly as a Negro's," she said and laughed so that she shook under her clothes.

"You can call me anything you want," I said and felt good.

"If you two're going into the other room, I think I'm going to clean some things up around here," Phyllis said. She let her big hand fall on the davenport arm as if she thought dust would puff out. "You don't care if I do that, do you, Lloyd?"

"Curly," said Bonnie, "say Curly."

"No, I certainly don't," I said, and looked out the window at the snow as it began to sift over the field down the hill. It looked like a Christmas card.

"Men don't mind a little noise," she said and began

collecting the cups and plates on the coffee table.

Without her clothes on Bonnie wasn't all that bad looking. It was just as though there were a lot of heavy layers of her, but at the middle of all those layers you knew she was generous and loving and as nice as anybody you'd ever meet. She was just fat, though probably not as fat as Phyllis if you'd put them side by side.

A lot of clothes were heaped on my bed and I put them all on the floor. But when Bon sat on the cover she sat on a metal tic tack and some pieces of loose change and she yelled and laughed, and we both laughed. I felt good.

"This is what we always hope we'll find in the woods," Bonnie said and giggled. "Somebody like you."
"Same here," I said. It wasn't at all bad to touch her, just soft everywhere. I've often thought that fat women might be better because they don't get to do it so much and have more time to sit around and think about it and get ready to do it right.

"Do you know a lot of funny stories about fatties?" Bonnie asked.

"A few," I said. "I used to know a lot more, though." I could hear Phyllis out in the kitchen, running water and shuffling dishes around in the sink.

"My favorite is the one about driving the truck," Bonnie said.

I didn't know that one. "I don't know that one," I said.

"You don't know the one about driving the truck?" she said, surprised and astonished.

"I'm sorry," I said.

"Maybe I'll tell you sometime, Curly," she said. "You'd get a big kick out of it."

I thought about the two men in the nylon jackets shaking hands in the dark parking lot, and I decided they wouldn't care if I was doing it to Bonnie or to Phyllis, or if they did they wouldn't find out until I was in Florida and had a car. And then Gainsborough could explain it to them, along with why he hadn't gotten his rent or his utilities. And maybe they'd rough him up before they went home.

"You're a nice-looking man," Bonnie said. "A lot of men are fat, but you're not. You've got arms like a wheelchair athlete."

I liked that. It made me feel good. It made me feel reckless, as if I had killed a deer myself and had a lot of ideas to show to the world.

"I broke one dish," Phyllis said when Bonnie and I were back in the living room. "You probably heard me break it. I found some Magic Glue in the drawer, though, and it's better now than ever. Gainsborough'll never know."

While we were gone, Phyllis had cleaned up almost everything and put away all the dishes. But now she had on

her camouflage coat and looked like she was ready to leave. We were all standing in the little living room, filling it, it seemed to me, right up to the walls. I had on my bathrobe and felt like asking them to stay over. I felt like I could grow to like Phyllis better in a matter of time, and maybe we would eat some of the deer for Thanksgiving. Outside, snow was all over everything. It was too early for snow. It felt like the beginning of a bad winter.

"Can't I get you girls to stay over tonight?" I said and smiled hopefully.

"No can do, Curly," Phyllis said. They were at the door. Through the three glass portals I could see the buck lying outside in the grass with snow melting in its insides. Bonnie and Phyllis had their guns back over their shoulders. Bonnie seemed genuinely sorry to be leaving.

"You should see his arms," she was saying and winked at me a last time. She had on her lumberjack's jacket and her orange cushion fastened to her belt loops. "He doesn't look strong. But he is strong. Oh my God! You should see his arms," she said.

I stood in the door and watched them. They had the deer by the horns and were pulling him off down the road toward their car.

"You be careful, Lloyd," Phyllis said. Bonnie smiled over her shoulder.

"I certainly will," I said. "You can count on me."

I closed the door, then went and stood in the little picture window watching them walk down the road to the fence, sledding the deer through the snow, making a swath behind them. I watched them drag the deer under Gainsborough's fence, and laugh when they stood by the car, then haul it up into the trunk and tie down the lid with string. The deer's head stuck out the crack to pass inspection. They stood up then and looked at me in the window and waved, each of them big wide waves. Phyllis in her camouflage and Bonnie in her lumberjack's jacket. And I waved back from inside. Then they got in the car, a new red Pontiac, and drove away.

I stayed around in the living room most of the afternoon, wishing I had a television, watching it snow, and being glad that Phyllis had cleaned up everything so that when I cleared out I wouldn't have to do that myself. I thought about how much I would've liked one of those deer steaks.

It began to seem after a while like a wonderful idea to leave, just call a town cab, take it all the way in to the train station, get on for Florida and forget about everything, about Tina on her way to Phoenix with a guy who only knew about greyhounds and nothing else.

But when I went to the dinette to have a look at my ticket in my wallet, there was nothing but some change and some matchbooks, and I realized it was only the beginning of bad luck.

GOODBYE, SHIRLEY TEMPLE

by

Joseph Mitchell

I've been going to Madame Visaggi's Third Avenue spaghetti house off and on since speakeasy days, and I know all the old customers. Madame Visaggi calls them "the regulars." Peggy is one. She is an Irish girl, around thirty-five, who works in the office of a wholesale butcher on First Avenue. She is in Madame Visaggi's practically every night. Most often she is full of brandy when she leaves, but her apartment is only a few blocks away, in Tudor City, and she always gets home all right. The butcher is her uncle and doesn't say anything if she shows up late for work. Peggy is an attractive girl despite a large birthmark on her left cheek, which makes her self-conscious. When she comes in, usually between five-thirty and six, she is always tense. She says, "I got the inside shakes." Then she sits in one of the booths across from the bar, orders a brandy, and opens an afternoon newspaper. By the time she has finished with the newspaper, she has had two or three drinks and has conquered her self-consciousness. Then she doesn't mind if one of the other regulars comes over and sits in the booth with her. She knows many bitter Irish stories, she uses profanity that is fierce and imaginative, and people like to listen to her. All the regulars are familiar with the fact that Eddie, the bartender, has been in love with her for several years. Eddie has an interest in the restaurant. He is big, cheerful, and dumb. He is always begging Peggy not to drink so much and asking her to go out with him. Once Madame Visaggi sat down with Peggy and said, "Say, Peggy, sweetheart, what's the matter you don't like Eddie? He's such a nice boy." Peggy snorted and said, "The back of my hand to Eddie." Then she laughed and said, "Oh, Eddie's O.K."

Another one of the regulars is Mike Hill. He works in an office around the corner, on Lexington, and usually drops in for a couple of drinks before going down to Grand Central to get his train. Each Wednesday night his wife comes into town, and they have dinner in Madame Visaggi's and go to the theatre. One Wednesday night they brought their little girl in to show her to Madame Visaggi. Mrs. Hill said she had been shopping most of the afternoon, and she looked tired, but the little girl was full of life. She appeared to be about five and she had curls. Madame Visaggi lifted her up, kissed her on both cheeks, and sat her on the bar. "Hello, Shirley Temple," she said. Eddie took a little white horse off the neck of a whiskey bottle and gave it to the child. Then Madame Visaggi told Eddie to take a bottle of champagne out of the refrigerator. "On the house," she said. She turned to Mrs. Hill and said, "We'll have dinner together tonight. Special. On the house." They had martinis at the bar and then

they went into the dining room in the rear. At the door, Madame Visaggi turned and said, "Send in a bottle of ginger ale for Shirley Temple, Eddie."

In a little while the child came back into the bar. "Hello, young lady," said an old man standing at the bar. "Hello," said the child. The old man said, "How do you like this place?" The child said, "I like it," and the people along the bar laughed. This pleased the child. She said, "I have a riddle. Do you know Boo?" The old man thought a moment, and then asked. "Boo who?" "Please don't cry," the child said. Then she laughed and ran back into the dining room. In a minute or two she was back again. This time she walked along the row of booths, looking into each. I was sitting in one of the middle booths with Peggy and a girl named Estelle, a friend of Peggy's. The child looked at us and smiled. Peggy said, "Hello there." "Hello," said the child. She started to leave, and then Peggy asked, "What's your name?" The child said, "My name is Margaret." "Why, that's my name, too," Peggy said. Estelle lifted the child into the booth and put an arm around her. The child stared across the table at Peggy and said, "What's that on your face?"

Peggy hesitated a moment. Then she said, "It's something God put there, Margaret."

"Won't it come off?" the child asked.

Estelle interrupted. "Do you go to school?" she asked.

"No," said the child. She looked at Peggy again and said, "Why did God put it there?"

"Because I was a bad girl," Peggy said.

"What did you do?"

Peggy asked Estelle for a cigarette. While Peggy was lighting it, the child gazed at her.

"What did you do?" she asked again.

"I shot off my father's head and cut out his heart and ate it," Peggy said.

"When?"

Estelle interrupted again.

"How old are you, sweetheart?" she asked.

"Five and a half," said the child.

She looked at Peggy and said, "Can I touch it?"

Peggy said, "Sure." She bent over and the child touched her left cheek. Then Madame Visaggi came out of the dining room, looking for the child. She picked her up. "You've got to come eat your soup, so you'll be a big girl," she said.

"Goodbye," the child said to Peggy.

"Goodbye, Shirley Temple," Peggy said.

Everything was quiet in the booth for a few minutes. I was afraid to say anything. Then Estelle asked Peggy to go with her to a movie at Loew's Lexington.

"It'll do you good," Estelle said.

"The hell with it," Peggy said.

A game of Indian dice started at the bar, and Estelle and I went over and got in it. Peggy said she wasn't interested. There were six in the game, playing for drinks.

The second time the dice went down the bar, I glanced at Peggy, thinking I would ask her if she wanted a drink; Mike Hill's little girl was back again. She was standing just outside Peggy's booth. I saw Peggy lean over and speak to her. The child stared at Peggy, fascinated. When Peggy stopped talking, the child walked backward a few steps, retreating. Then she turned and ran headlong into the dining room. It was a long dice game with two ties, and we played one-tie-all-tie. I got stuck. I paid for the round, and Estelle and I went back and sat down with Peggy.

"I see the kid came back to see you," I said.

Peggy laughed.

"I sent Shirley Temple back to her mamma," she said.

Every twenty minutes or so, Estelle and I would go over to the bar and shake for drinks with the others. Every time we came back to the booth, we brought Peggy a brandy. We tried to get her to talk, but she wouldn't pay any attention to us. She was morose and silent.

At ten o'clock, Mrs. Hill came out of the dining room with Madame Visaggi. "Thanks for everything," Mrs. Hill said. "It was a wonderful dinner, and thank you so much for the champagne." "No, no, no," said Madame Visaggi. "It was nothing." Then Mike came out. He had the little girl in his arms. She looked sleepy now. They said good night to Eddie and started for the door. When they approached the booth in which we were sitting, the little girl began to kick and scream hysterically. Mike sat her down on a bar stool and said, "What in the world is the matter, baby doll?" The child continued to scream. "She's all tired out and nervous," Mrs. Hill said. "The day was too much for her. Here, let me take her." Suddenly Peggy said, "Damn it to hell." She got up abruptly and hurried toward the door. We thought she was going out of the restaurant and I got up to follow her, but at the front end of the bar she turned left and went into the ladies' room. As soon as Peggy was out of sight, the child calmed down. "She should've been in bed hours ago," Mrs. Hill said. Then they said thanks and goodbye to Madame Visaggi all over again, and left.

After a while another dice game began. While we were shaking, Peggy returned. She didn't go back to the booth. She came and stood next to me and put her elbows on the bar. I could see that she had been crying. Eddie automatically poured her a brandy.

"How's it, Peggy?" he asked.

Peggy didn't answer. She drank the brandy. Then she said, "You want to take me home, Eddie?"

"You kidding?" Eddie asked.

"No," Peggy said.

"You drunk?"

"I certainly am not," Peggy said.

"Look," Eddie said, "I'm not supposed to knock off until midnight, but I'll ask Madame to put one of the waiters behind the bar."

"O.K., Eddie," Peggy said.

ON THE WAGON

by

Joseph Mitchell

It had been six weeks, but Mike couldn't get used to it. "A month and a half," he said, "and I've just got started. Sooner or later I'll get used to it. I got to get used to it."

Half past five was quitting time in the office, and that was the hardest part of the day. He would walk it off. He would leave as if in a hurry to get home, and then walk eighteen blocks to his furnished room. He would wash up and go over to a diner on Third Avenue. While he ate, he would try to look preoccupied. Mike was embarrassed by his loneliness; he didn't want anybody, not even a counterman in a diner, to guess that he was lonesome. Like many lonesome people, he felt there was something shameful about it. Some nights after dinner he couldn't force himself to go back to his furnished room, and he would go for a ride on the Third Avenue "L." It would please him to see the four enormous, beautifully polished copper kettles in the windows of Ruppert's brewery, and it would please him to smell the wet hops, a lovely smell that blew into the car as it rattled past. He would get off the "L" at the Hanover Square station, light a cigarette, and walk back and forth on the cement plaza in front of the Cotton Exchange. He found it comforting to walk there in the dark and listen to the whistles of the tugs in the East River. The best job he ever had had been in a coffee warehouse a block from Hanover Square. That had been four years ago, and since then he had lost three other jobs, all because of drinking. After a while he would leave the plaza and get back on the "L." And all the way uptown he would stare down into the street, watching for the cheerful, flickering neons over the entrances of barrooms. "Six weeks on the wagon," he would say. "Six weeks and not even a beer!" Whenever the "L" got on his nerves, he would get out and walk until he was so tired he could sleep. Sometimes, walking at night, he saw things that made him feel better because they took his mind off himself -- a street fight, an automobile wreck, a boat unloading dripping bushels of mackerel at a Fulton Market pier. He seldom stopped to look at such things, however; his purpose in walking was to tire himself out.

The hardest part of the day for Mike, certainly, was the moment he put on his coat and hat and left the wholesale drug company where, for three weeks, he had been assistant bookkeeper. But lunchtime was almost as bad. The others in the office, even Miss O'Brien, the fussy file clerk, ate across the street in the bar and grill, but he always went up the street to the coffeepot. After work, Mr. Schmidt, the bookkeeper, and Clancy, the head shipping clerk, would go across the street for beers. Once Mr. Schmidt, getting into

his coat, turned to Mike and said, "I never see you across the street, Thompson. Why don't you drop in and have a beer with me and Clancy?" Mike said, "My liver isn't all it should be," and Mr. Schmidt had said, "That's tough. Take care of yourself." There was nothing wrong with Mike's liver. Mike loathed the coffeepot, but he was afraid to go across the street. He would make up his mind to have lunch in the bar and grill with the others and then he would get to thinking, and he would say to himself, "I better go up to the coffeepot. Like Betty said, unless I stay on the wagon I'll never be able to hold down a job. I'm thirty-nine and I'm not getting any younger. I had an awful time getting this job and I got to hold on to it."

He dreaded Sunday. The Sunday which marked the beginning of his seventh week on the wagon was cold and clear. He spent the afternoon in his furnished room, reading a newspaper. Late in the day he pulled his chair to the window and sat there. Acres of tenement roofs stretched out beneath his window; on one roof a pigeon-keeper was waving a bamboo pole and frightening his birds aloft. Each time they were driven off their coop the birds flew into the air, wheeled around, and settled immediately a couple of roofs away on chimneys decorated with the yellow-paint signs of the New York Frame & Picture Co. They perched on the chimneys a few tentative moments and then flew back to their coop and were driven aloft again. Mike was amused by the game. After a while the pigeon-keeper locked the birds in their coop, took a paper bag out of his pocket, and tossed some corn into each pen. Then he left the roof, and Mike felt deserted. While he sat at the window, leaning forward, with his elbows on the sill, it became dark and he began to feel bad. He had slept little the night before. A hot bath had done no good and aspirin had made him even more shaky. He had been too jittery and too lonesome to sleep. Staring out over the dark roofs, he tried to get control of himself, but it was no use. He began to cry. He took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. His eyes were strained by sleeplessness and the tears made them smart. Mike had got so he talked to himself. "I cry as easy as an old maid in the dark at a movie," he said. "I got to hold on to myself somehow." He walked up and down in the shabby room. When he could bear it no longer he stretched out on the bed, face downward. After a while he sat up. He reached into a pocket of his coat, which hung on the back of a chair, and got his cigarettes. He sat on the edge of the bed, smoking in the dark. When he had finished the cigarette he put on his coat, got his hat, and felt in the dark for the doorknob. He didn't want to turn on the light and see, on the bureau, the photograph of Betty. As he walked downstairs, Mike thought, "I can't blame her much for leaving me. I can't blame anybody but myself." On the street he felt that people looked away when they saw his strained face.

He walked down the street, hunting for a new place to eat. For six weeks he had eaten in places that did not sell liquor -- diners, coffeepots, cafeterias, and chow-mein

joints. He was hungry. After he had sent the weekly money order to Betty Saturday afternoon and paid the rent on the furnished room, he had fourteen dollars left. In the old days he had spent twice that on a Saturday night, making a round of barrooms, and had thought nothing of it. "I'm sick of the junky grub in those cafeterias," he said. "I'm going someplace and get a decent meal." He stared into the neon-lit window of a bar and grill. There was a row of booths parallel with the bar. The place was not crowded. He could eat in peace. Mike went in. He ordered a steak. An old man and a young man were standing at the bar, hunched over beers. The old man was quiet, but the young man hummed a song. He would hum a few moments, absentmindedly, and then he would break out into a verse.

"'Oh,'" he sang, "'the wheel flew off the hearse, and the coffin rolled out in the road. The widow got out of her carriage and she said --'"

The bartender came out of the kitchen and gave the young man a stern look; he quit singing in the middle of the verse.

"Don't look at me like that," the young man said, frowning at the bartender. "I know I'm a nuisance. I know I'm a no-good bum. No good to myself, no good to nobody. Day I was born, I wish they'd dropped me in a tub, like I was a cat. Let me have a beer. 'Oh, the wheel flew off the hearse, and the coffin rolled out in the road.' What's the matter with you? Did you have a stroke? Let's have that beer."

"Keep your pants on," said the bartender.

"None of your lip," said the young man. "Let's have that beer."

"I think he wants a beer," said the old man, not looking up.

The bartender took the empty glass and went reluctantly to the spigot.

"I never saw a man could drink so much beer," he said angrily. "It ain't human."

"I drink so much beer," said the young man, winking at his companion, "because I'm afraid if I was to drink whiskey, it would make me drunk. They say whiskey makes you drunk. I sure wouldn't want that to happen to me."

The old man snickered.

Eating his steak and potatoes, Mike felt at ease. The atmosphere of the barroom, the bickering of the men at the bar, the beer smell comforted him. It was a small barroom, a neighborhood joint. Over the bar was a poster advertising a Monster Bingo Party at the Catholic church around the corner. When he had finished his coffee, Mike got up and walked over to the bar and stood there. The bartender was out in the kitchen. Mike stood at the bar, one foot on the rail, with his right hand in a pocket of his trousers. He rubbed coins together in his pocket and his palm was sweating. Suddenly he realized he hadn't left a tip for the waitress. He went back to the table and put fifteen cents beside his coffee cup. Then the bartender came out and Mike handed him his check and a dollar bill. "Eighty-fi' cents," said the bartender,

ringing up Mike's bill. He gave Mike his change and Mike put on his overcoat and started for the door. He glanced at the clock on the wall; it was eight-thirty. He remembered the furnished room with the unshaded electric light hanging from the middle of the splotched ceiling and his heart sank, and he thought, "I just can't stand it any longer." At the door he paused. He turned and walked over to the cigarette machine. "Six weeks," Mike thought, "and not even a beer." Opening the package of cigarettes, he walked back to the bar. The bartender came and stood in front of him.

"What'll it be?" he asked.

Mike stared nervously at the bottles behind the bar and noticed a blue Bromo-Seltzer bottle, upended in its rack.

"Fix me a Bromo," Mike said.

The bartender mixed the Bromo in two beer glasses. Mike drank the violently bubbly mixture.

"Good for what ails you," the bartender said, smiling. The young man looked at Mike.

"You got a hangover, too?" he asked.

"Well, not exactly," Mike said.

"I got a hangover would kill a horse, damn near," said the young man.

"Hell," said the old man, "You don't know what a hangover is."

The young man grunted.

"Once I had a job in a liquor store," said the old man. "Some mornings I'd come in with a hangover and I'd have to stand there all day with thousands of bottles of the stuff staring me in the face. I'd have to say, 'Yes, sir, that's an A-1 grade of Scotch. Best we have in stock,' when just to look at it made me rock back on my heels. It was worse than a bartender with a hangover, because he can sneak a drink to brace himself, but I worked in that store six months and I never saw a cork pulled out of a bottle."

"Geez," said the young man.

"Talk about a hangover," said the old man, hunched over his beer. "You don't know what a hangover is."

Mike laughed. He thought, "A beer or two won't hurt me. A couple of beers, and I'll go home. I'll have a couple of beers and maybe I can get some sleep. I got to get some sleep. A man can't live without sleep." The bartender saw Mike looking at the rack of bottles behind the bar.

"You want something?" he asked.

Mike heard himself say, "A beer."

The bartender spanked the foam off the beer with his black paddle. Then he held the glass under the spigot an instant longer. He set the glass in front of Mike and Mike put a dime on the wet bar.

"First in six weeks," said Mike. "I been on the wagon six weeks now."

The bartender did not seem impressed.

"It don't hurt nobody to leave the stuff alone for a while," he said. "Once I was on the wagon eight months."

"Yeah?" said Mike.

"Yeah," said the bartender. "I was in a hospital."
They both laughed.

"St. Vincent's," said the bartender. "Auto accident."

Mike took a deep drink of the beer. In a little while the old man and the young man finished their beers and walked toward the door. "Pleasant dreams," the bartender called out, and took their glasses away. Left alone, Mike suddenly felt desolate. He finished his beer and lit a cigarette. He had made up his mind to leave when two women came in and sat down on bar stools at the end of the bar, next to the cigarette machine. They knew the bartender. "How's it, Tommy?" said one. "Never better," said the bartender. "What'll it be, two Manhattans?" "How'd you guess?" asked the woman, smiling. Mike felt cheerful again. When he had finished with the women, the bartender looked at Mike's empty glass.

"Fill her up?" he asked.

"Fill her up," said Mike.

A man came in with a *Daily News*. He stood at the bar and looked through a comic strip in the back of the paper. He did not order, but the bartender automatically placed a bottle of rye, a whiskey glass, and a glass of water on the bar in front of him. When he finished the comic strip, the man laughed.

"Hey, Tommy," he called to the bartender, "don't miss Moon Mullins. Kayo certainly pulled a fast one on Lord Plushbottom."

Mike smiled. On his way home he would pick up the *News* and see what had happened to Lord Plushbottom. He would get a *News* and a *Mirror* and read himself to sleep. His glass was empty again.

"I tell you," he said to the bartender, "let's have a rye this time. Beer chaser."

"O.K.," said the bartender. "Rye and a small beer."

He placed the bottle of rye in front of Mike.

"It looks the same," said Mike, filling his glass.

THE KIND OLD BLONDE

by

Joseph Mitchell

I was in Shine's, an Irish restaurant near the Pennsylvania Station, eating bluefish. A man and a woman came in and took the table opposite mine. While they were getting settled at the table, the man told the waiter they had just come in from the Belmont track. The waiter seemed pleased to see them. The man was bald and red-faced and substantial. He looked like a contractor, or maybe he had something to do with the horses. The woman was a big, sound, well-dressed blonde. She might have been the co-leader of a Tammany club, or an old vaudeville actress who had saved her money or perhaps married well. The waiter passed out menus and the man began to study his at once, but the woman ordered an Old-Fashioned before she opened hers. The man kept running a finger under his stiff blue collar and twisting his head from side to side. When the waiter placed the cocktail in front of the woman, the man looked at it sullenly.

"That's the only way I know to get ten cents for a little piece of orange peel," he said, staring at the cocktail. "Same amount of whiskey you get in a quarter drink. They stick in a strip of orange peel and charge you thirty-fi' cents."

"I like it," said the blonde.

"Rather take mine straight," he said.

She was considering clams and planked shad. He said he thought he would have some spaghetti. He spoke without enthusiasm.

"I'm going to have another cocktail before I order," she said.

"Go right ahead," said the man.

The way he said it made her look up from her menu. She closed it and looked at him.

"You not drinking, Jim?"

"No."

"That why you been so gloomy all day?"

"I guess so. I'm sorry."

"Is there something wrong, Jim?"

"I don't know. I haven't had a drink for three days. I went up to see my doctor, Doctor Phillips. I got orders to lay off the stuff. He told me I been digging my grave with cigars and booze. I been worried. It worried me."

The waiter came and the woman told him she wanted another cocktail and a dozen clams. She reached in her handbag and took out her cigarettes. The man held a match for her. She took a deep breath; then she let the smoke out through her nostrils.

"Had a friend used to like spaghetti," said the blonde, settling her fat elbows on the tablecloth. "I bet he weighed

three hundred pounds. Big as a horse. He was a handicapper. Used to kill a quart a day, and in the summer he'd take ten, fifteen beers at one sitting."

The man grunted.

"He was an Eytalian fellow, name of Al," said the blonde, "but he never drank wine. One fall he got shooting pains. Doctor told him he better lay off the booze. He wasn't no good after that; had to quit operating. He was up to my place for dinner one night and I told him, 'Al,' I said, 'your system's like a machine. It's got to have erl to operate. You taking the erl away and it's killing you.' I was right. Year and a half later I was to his funeral. Been here now if he'd a gone ahead and drank with some moderation. In my humble opinion he was murdered by the doctor."

"I guess it was a shock to his heart," said the man.

"What I told him," said the blonde. "I said to him, 'Al, it's a strain on your heart. Your heart can't stand it.'"

"How old a man was he?"

"He was fifty-some-odd, Jim. He was about your age, Jim. He thought he'd live to be ninety if he gave up the booze. He said all the men in his family lived to hit ninety. Poor old Al. In a year and a half he was dead and gone. Died broke. Left hardly enough to take care of the funeral."

They were silent for a little while, and then the man sat up in his chair.

"Well, it just goes to show," he said.

The waiter brought the woman's second cocktail and the plate of clams. She looked at them critically.

"If you don't mind," she said to the waiter, "these clams are mighty small. I'd like to have the cherrystones. If you don't mind."

The waiter picked up the plate of littlenecks.

"Jim, please," she said to the man. "If I was you, I'd have a drink."

When the waiter was about six steps from the kitchen the man called him back.

"I want a drink of rye," he said. "Let me have a drink of rye."

"You want soda or ginger ale?"

"Rye and plain water," said the man.

When the waiter brought the cherrystones, the blonde looked at them and said, "Now, that's more like it." She picked up the little fork and went to work on the clams. The man poured the rye into the plain water and stirred it. Drinking it, he took his time.

"Tell you what," he said to the blonde, "I think I'll change my mind. Think I'll have some shad roe and bacon. Before you know it the season for shad roe will be over and gone."

She had a cherrystone halfway to her mouth.

"Personally, Jim, I always liked the shad better than the roe," she said, smiling at him. "You feel better now, don't you, darling?"