

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

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EXT.LACROSSE FIELD, DAY

Searing blue sky from POV of someone laying on their back looking up. The sun is as bright as the overhead lights in an airport lavatory. Person on their back uses palm of their upstretched hand, adjusting it precisely, to block out the sun.

A lunch time lacrosse match is being played on the playing field of an elite girls school. At the fringes, girls cheer the players on.

MR.SLATTERY, thirty, good looking within the context of an all girl's school, patrols the perimeter of the field, pausing to make small talk from time to time, introducing himself to students. At the very far corner, tucked beneath a tree, he notices a sleeping student - Nina, owner of the sun blocking hand, sixteen years old, almost beautiful, but not quite - using a book as a pillow. He taps her. She opens her eyes.

MR.SLATTERY

Excuse me, but are you okay?

She pulls aside her headphones.

NINA

Fine.

He tips his head to see the book.

MR.SLATTERY

You fell asleep on top of Balzac.

NINA

I find him tiresome.

MR.SLATTERY

You often use great novelists of the 18th century as pillows?

NINA

Only the French. Fuck'em.

He takes a step back, thrown.

MR.SLATTERY

What are you listening to?

NINA

Bowie.

MR.SLATTERY

No kidding? Why?

NINA

Because he expresses my 21st century malaise and 'life after irony' ennui.

MR.SLATTERY

Bowie does?

NINA

Perfectly.

MR.SLATTERY

Bowie was the first concert I ever went to.

NINA

Honestly?

MR.SLATTERY

Me and my brother drove to New York, saw him play at the Garden.

NINA

My brother and I.

MR.SLATTERY

Pardon?

NINA

It's 'My brother and I'. You wouldn't say 'Me drove to New York' so 'Me and my brother' would be grammatically incorrect. But you know that, you're a teacher...

MR.SLATTERY

Yes...

NINA

I mean, I'm sorry, I don't mean to be a bitch. Just, my father would have a fit.

She sits upright and lights a cigarette. He looks flustered.

MR.SLATTERY

I don't think you're supposed to do that.

NINA

Small fry. We've got junkies here. Half the twelfth grade are dying of anorexia . This is the aristocracy you're dealing with.

(MORE)

NINA (CONT'D)

I wouldn't bother with the cigarettes. Anyway, go on with what you were saying about Bowie. You saw him at the Garden...that would be Madison Square Garden, not someone's back yard?

MR.SLATTERY

Put it out.

NINA

Because seeing Bowie in someone's backyard would be hard to beat.

MR.SLATTERY

Put it out.

She looks at the cat hair on his crappy suit. Feels a pang of sorrow for him. She takes a drag and puts it out.

NINA

You're the new English teacher.

MR.SLATTERY

Do I look like an English teacher?

NINA

You could pass for an avant-garde geography teacher maybe. I just happen to know that Mrs.Lamb had a nervous breakdown over the holiday. I saw her talking to herself in Shaws. They fired her and hired you.

He looks at his shoes.

NINA (CONT'D)

Don't feel bad. She was a cunt.

MR.SLATTERY

Don't say that word! What are you thinking?

NINA

No, it's okay, fine olde English word, found in Chaucer, in fact. Women are allowed to use it. Germaine Greer says so.

MR.SLATTERY

That's ridiculous. If Germaine Greer told you to jump off a bridge, would you?

NINA

Maybe, although I don't really see how that would serve the cause.

MR.SLATTERY

So, you're a feminist?

NINA

Uh, yeah, I have a vagina and I'm not retarded. This isn't Kansas you know. Where are you from?

MR.SLATTERY

Kansas.

NINA

Good. That's perfect. I'll see you in class.

But she makes no move to leave. He realizes he has been dismissed. To his greater surprise, he walks away, stealing glances behind him as she resumes napping.

INT.STAFF ROOM, LUNCHTIME

Mr.Slattery is chatting, over coffee, with Miss Bloom, an art teacher in her late fifties and his first ally at the school. She is going through a student's sketch book as he talks.

MISS BLOOM

I've been here twenty-two years.

MR.SLATTERY

Oh. You're much older than I thought.

He rushes to cover his rudeness.

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)

Sorry. Age is horribly on my mind. I'm about to turn thirty. I say, sometimes the wrong...I'm better at expressing myself through my writing.

She sounds wary.

MISS BLOOM

You write?

MR.SLATTERY

I'm finishing a novel.

MISS BLOOM

Uh-huh.

MR.SLATTERY

It's sort of an allegory about the way we've allowed bereavement and love to...It's hard to explain.

MISS BLOOM

*Uh-huh.*I'd not mention the novel writing ambitions to anyone here.

MR.SLATTERY

You think they're going to spit me out.

MISS BLOOM

I hope for your sake they spit you out. I hope they don't just hold you on their tongue and wait for you to dissolve, as they have done me.

MR.SLATTERY

You seem pretty together.

MISS BLOOM

I have more leeway than you. I'm an art teacher. No right or wrong answer with art.

MR.SLATTERY

But there's no right or wrong answer in literature either.

She laughs. It's a tinkly laugh. First he enjoys the chime like peal of it, and then he realizes it's making him nervous.

MISS BLOOM

They're going to spit you out.

He thinks on this. She stops at a page in the sketch book. An immaculately rendered sketch of a young woman giving a man head.

MR.SLATTERY

Um. Who did that?

MISS BLOOM

It's rather good, don't you think?

He grimaces. Looks at his shoes. He doesn't remember ever having purchased these shoes.

MISS BLOOM (CONT'D)

Nina. Sweet kid. One of the few students I don't feel the urge to trip with an out stretched foot as they race out of my class.

MR.SLATTERY

Ah, I used to be that kid.

MISS BLOOM

What happened?

MR.SLATTERY

I fell in love with a book.

MISS BLOOM

What book?

MR.SLATTERY

'Everything Must Go' by Leon Gross.

She laughs hard. There is a nasty edge to it now. He's feeling more than a little befuddled. She rips out the porno sketch.

MISS BLOOM

Here. This is for you.

He takes it, bemused.

MR.SLATTERY

But...

She packs up her stuff.

MISS BLOOM

Good luck.

He takes the picture and quickly folds it into his bag, feeling a criminal.

INT.CLASSROOM, AFTERNOON

Mr Slattery's name is written on the board. They are all reading copies of 'Jane Eyre'. The girls look rapt in attention, apart from Nina who sits in the back of the class, carving triangles on the desk with a pen-knife.

MR SLATTERY

So, whilst "Jane Eyre" conjures
"air" "Bertha" conjures "earth".
There is a post-Colonialist
school of thought, by the way,
that has Bertha as a black woman.

(MORE)

MR SLATTERY (CONT'D)
Can you point to a description of
her in the text that might back
up this notion?

He looks to Nina for a response. Nina looks daggers at him.

NINA
No.

He clears his throat.

The bell rings and the class snap out of their rapture and
rush out the door. He calls after them:

MR.SLATTERY
Well think on it over the weekend
and we'll try to figure it out on
Monday.

As Nina tries to leave he stops her.

MR SLATTERY
Do you ever speak in class?

NINA
I spoke.

MR.SLATTERY
One word. You were giving me a
tough time in there.

NINA
I aspire to be tough. In any
situation, I always try to
imagine what Lauren Bacall would
do.

MR SLATTERY
Lauren Bacall wouldn't be carving
her school desk with a pen knife.

NINA
Right, she'd be out of school and
fucking Humphrey Bogart.

MR.SLATTERY
No, that's not what I mean
and...you really can't talk like
that in my class.

NINA
Class is over.

MR.SLATTERY
Class is over when I say it is.
You are my student and you will
accord me the proper respect.

NINA

Okay! That sounds fun!

A part of him is thrilled that she pays him enough notice to mock him.

INT.STAFF ROOM, END OF DAY

MISS BLOOM

How'd it go?

MR.SLATTERY

It went alright. Listen, I have a question, don't laugh at me. Is it okay for the kids to smoke on school premises?

MISS BLOOM

Of course not. Who told you that?

MR.SLATTERY

A girl who was smoking.

MISS BLOOM

Right.

MR.SLATTERY

First she was asleep under a tree, then she was awake and had a lit cigarette in her mouth.

MISS BLOOM

Nina. That's Nina Gross.

MISS BLOOM (CONT'D)

Poor girl.

MR.SLATTERY

Why poor girl?

MISS BLOOM

Because she's Gross as in Gross

He looks blank.

MISS BLOOM (CONT'D)

As in Linda and Leon Gross.

MR SLATTERY

You're joking me!

MISS BLOOM

No.

MR.SLATTERY

Oh, poor kid. I had no idea they even had children.

MISS BLOOM

He never writes about them, does he?

MR.SLATTERY

She looks like her mother.

MISS BLOOM

Spitting image.

He can't help himself:

MR SLATTERY

Have you ever met him? Leon?

MISS BLOOM

Him and his new wife.

MR SLATTERY

He waited, what, a year?

MISS BLOOM

Ten months.

MR.SLATTERY

So he...so he comes to school sometimes?

MISS BLOOM

Never. He doesn't care how she does here. Seems like he doesn't care about her at all.

MR SLATTERY

I don't believe that. A great man like him? That's so sad.

What he doesn't say is he is sad both for Nina and for himself, at his diminished chance of meeting Leon.

MISS BLOOM

Yes. It's awful. She'll be free of him soon enough. She'll graduate high school and leave him behind. [beat] Let her sleep when she wants. But she's not allowed to smoke.

He nods.

INT.NINA'S HOUSE, AFTERNOON

The house is incredibly grand with an imposing white staircase. LEON GROSS, a grizzled old guy, is asleep on the sofa in the living room.

AMELIA, a strikingly slim mid thirties woman with glossily blown out hair as shiny as her black patent stilettos, is arranging flowers in the kitchen.

JOEL, her four year old son, is buzzing around her legs. Nina is opening and closing the fridge, looking for something that takes her fancy.

JOEL

Why did they kill The Jeeze?

AMELIA

The Jeeze?

Her voice is soft and sultry, as valuable an enhancement as the lips from which it tumbles.

JOEL

Yes, up on the cross. Why did they kill him?

AMELIA

Because he was a magician

NINA

That's a bad answer. He's asking you about Christ not David Blaine.

The doorbell rings. Amelia answers it and sees Asia, a teenage Naomi Campbell lookalike.

AMELIA

Hello Asia. Are you coming to dinner? Experience a little of our culture?

ASIA

No thank you. Just here to study.

Asia and Nina go silently up to Nina's room hand in hand. When they get there, Nina shuts the door tight and screams

NINA

'Experience Some of our culture'!
She converted. Nobody asked her to convert. She's a fucking shiksa for fucks sake. We never did Shabbat before she came along.

ASIA

Breathe.

NINA

No. Because the more I think
about breathing, the more I worry
I'm doing it wrong.

ASIA

You can't breathe wrong.

NINA

I can.

Cut to

INT.KITCHEN.

Amelia is polishing surfaces. Nina has Joel in her arms.

NINA

Consuela did that already.

AMELIA

And I'm doing it again.

NINA

You had your hair highlighted
again. You put streaks at the
front.

AMELIA

They're not streaks. They're
buttery chunks.

NINA

We're taking Joel out for a
milkshake.

AMELIA

Be back in forty-five minutes.

INT.DINER, AFTERNOON

The diner is a 24 hr grease spot, populated by regulars and
tired drivers passing through. Everyone is at least twenty
years older than Nina and Asia and the waitresses are
twenty years older on top of that. The girls sit up by the
counter, balancing Joel between them.

NINA

Chocolate shake and two coffees
please.

ASIA
And a side of fries.

Joel looks at Asia slyly

JOEL
You're black.

ASIA
Yes I am.

JOEL
But that doesn't make you a bad person.

ASIA
Why, thank you Joel.

Asia turns to Nina.

ASIA (CONT'D)
Are you going to ask me how it went?

NINA
How was it?

ASIA
I got the job.

NINA
Well, of course you did.

ASIA
Did I miss anything in school?
Anything incredibly fascinating?

NINA
No. Nothing. Well, the new English teacher.

ASIA
Is she a bitch?

NINA
He. And, yeah, he's kind of a bitch.

ASIA
Is he revolting?

NINA
Not that revolting. Just highly strung.

ASIA

Another one whose gonna have a nervous breakdown...

NINA

I'm working on it. Are they paying you a lot? Remember, you have to take me with you when you escape. Get me away from my father and his Shiksa whore.

Two nuns walking out of the diner whip their heads when they hear "whore".

NINA (CONT'D)

Not you.

She waits for them to get further away, then whispers:

NINA (CONT'D)

Whores.

Joel is still spellbound as they disappear. He stares at the swinging crucifixes around their necks.

JOEL

You know what I want for Hanukkah?

NINA

What?

JOEL

A Nun's necklace.

NINA

Tell Amelia. Be very certain to tell Amelia that.

The fries arrive and Asia tears through them, dipping them in an improvised dip of ketchup and mayo. Nina looks on with a combination of disgust and awe.

NINA (CONT'D)

The thing is, if I were as thin as you, I'd develop an eating disorder just for the hell of it. I mean if you're really that thin, you might as well upset your loved ones.

Joel plays with a sugar shaker.

NINA (CONT'D)

Give me a sip of your shake.

JOEL

No.

NINA

Go on.

JOEL

No thank you.

NINA

Jesus would have given me a sip
of his shake.

He hands it over instantly. Between slurps:

NINA (CONT'D)

I wasted that on a sip of
chocolate shake. You can only
invoke Christ once, maybe twice
to make a four year old do what
you want. Wasted.

Joel tugs at her leg.

JOEL

You know The Jeeze?

She hands back his shake.

NINA

Yes.

JOEL

Was his other name 'The Lamb of
God'?

NINA

Let's go. P.S: You're awful.

She takes another sip of his shake. He looks like he might
have a fit, then he calms down, narrows his eyes and says

JOEL

Amelia says you eat too much.
Amelia says you're going to be a
fatty, and then who will love
you?

Bent elbowed, he raises his arms at his sides in query.

INT.NINA'S HOUSE, EVE

The family is at the dinner table. Leon seems disconnected
from everyone. A maid hovers in the background.

JOEL

Nina told me I was awful.

AMELIA

Nina! Leon?

LEON

He's pretty awful.

AMELIA

He's your son!

LEON

That's what I said.

NINA

Asia is going to be in the new Gap campaign.

AMELIA

Using such young girls, it's immoral. When I was a model...

NINA

But you were just an underwear model, right? Cos you were too short to do high fashion.

AMELIA

I was modeling *high fashion* underwear. Hand sewn pieces from...

NINA

Nobody cares.

Leon looks up.

LEON

They don't.

He goes back to peppering his dinner.

LEON (CONT'D)

That Asia is a knockout. Phew!

AMELIA

It seems a little off to be named Asia when you're not Asian.

NINA

It is. It is really off. Where do those shvartzes get the nerve?

Leon laughs

AMELIA

I won't be mocked at my own
Shabbat with food that I cooked.

NINA

Consuela cooked it.

AMELIA

It was very nice, Consuela.

Leon pushes away his food, stands up and grumbles

LEON

I'm going to bed.

INT.SLATTERY'S APT, NIGHT.

A tiny apartment given life by a huge pile of books, vast mountains of New York Times and a huge cat.

He feeds his cat and watches Charlie Rose. He remembers the sketch in his bag, unfolds it, looks at it, looks at the bottom: it is signed Nina Gross. He flattens it out carefully and tacks it above his desk amongst his multitude of bills.

INT.NINA'S ROOM, NIGHT.

Pyjama'd, she brushes her hair at the vanity mirror at her desk. Her eye falls on a note tacked up on the mirror, something she scrawled many, many years earlier:

"DEAR DADY,

I AM MAD AT YOU. GRUMBLE GRUMBLE GRUMBLE.

YOURS HOPEFULLY

NINA"

INT.APARTMENT, NIGHT

Mr.Slattery is preparing school work for the next day, laying out clothes and trying to organize - though he is in fact just moving piles of mess from one corner of the room to another. He looks at his Casio watch. It's 1 a.m.

From under a pile of newspapers is a flashing pink light. Pulling them aside, he finds a light-up plastic ring. It stops him dead, as though he's just found out he was being bugged the whole time he was working. He backs away from the ring as if it's kryptonite. He finds a brown envelope and scoops it up like a dead mouse.

INT.CAR, NIGHT

Slattery drives a car in equal disarray to his home. When he breaks hard at a light, he puts his hand instinctively to the passenger seat. But there is no one there. Just the brown envelope.

EXT.HOUSE, NIGHT

A far nicer place than his, both vintage and expensive looking. He creeps up to the door, leaves the envelope on the Welcome mat and starts to slink away. But the door opens before he can escape.

JULIET

Dennis?

We see his grimace before he turns to face JULIET, the most self-assured 23 year old who ever lived. She is a bare footed, bare faced, bra-less beauty, sort of a funny looking beauty, a Lily Cole type, but she has total faith in it, gloriously unaware that the her youthful good looks are not a passport, but a visa. It will run out. But for now she has all the power.

MR.SLATTERY

Oh, hey.

He is so bummed about being caught. He does not want to see her.

JULIET

What are you doing?

MR.SLATTERY

I thought you might need this.

He stoops to pick up the envelope.

JULIET

What is it?

He opens the envelope.

MR.SLATTERY

Your ring. I won it for you?

JULIET

At the funfair. I wore it for the afternoon and then I took it off. Why would I need it?

MR.SLATTERY

You've come back three times to get your stuff.

(MORE)

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)

I didn't want you to have to make the trip again. That's it. That really is everything. So we agree, all the i's have been dotted now?

JULIET

What do you want? To make me feel worse? To make sure I'm not over it?

He steps forward and hands her the ring.

MR.SLATTERY

Okay. So that really should be everything. Take care of yourself, Juliet.

She looks at it in astonishment. Another ring was, for a time, promised to a different hand.

She throws the ring as far as it will go, her pretty mouth a snarl. Then she slams the door.

He just stands there and nods to himself.

EXT.CAR, NIGHT

The slam of the door behind him in the dark, he shuffles back to his car. The ring, re-activated by her throw, is flashing on and off by the wheel of his car. It's lined up perfectly. He could crush it. When he drives away, he crushes it.

INT.GROSS HOUSE, MORNING

Nina creeps into Leon and Amelia's bedroom, after making sure there's nobody in there.

She eyes the bed with distaste. She puts a gentle hand on both indents on both pillows. Then, in a swift move to Amelia's side she shakes out her pillow so the indent is gone.

The drawer is ajar and she picks through Amelia's knickers, which are little more than tiny, silken ass-trinkets.

She replaces them, and moves towards her dad's walk in closet.

Above all of her father's hanging clothes, on a top shelf she steps on tiptoe to reach, she pulls down a box of her mother's clothes. Amongst the dresses, she picks out a bra. It still has the fake rubber breast in the left cup.

She looks at the bra with it's terrible contents, carefully folds it back, and darts back to her room, shaken with horror.

INT.BOOKSHOP, SATURDAY AFTERNOON.

Nina and Leon are browsing together in an independent bookstore. She moves as if her skin shrunk in the wash, Leon as if his got all stretched from loaning it out. She follows as he critiques the books on display one by one, looking down over half moon glasses.

LEON

Hack.

He picks up a book then throws it scornfully back in place.

LEON (CONT'D)

Drug addict.

NINA

Saul Bellow is a drug addict?

LEON

He could be.

He rearranges his own books, making them more prominent on the display.

NINA

Dad, why do women buy books by men but men don't buy books by women? I mean, why do half the books by women have pink covers, or shoes on the cover, or lipstick? Yours doesn't have a blue cover.

A male student who has been following them round the store plucks up the courage to say something.

STUDENT

Excuse me...

LEON

You're excused.

The boy hangs back, crushed, as they move swiftly to the checkout. She deliberately buys a bunch of Jackie Collins and makes Leon wait with her on line.

NINA

Dad, I forgot my wallet in the car.

Leon grudgingly pulls out his credit card. The teller looks at the books then at him.

TELLER

We have an author's discount.

LEON

I don't want it.

He pays and on the way out picks up Zadie Smith's latest.

LEON (CONT'D)

Child!

NINA

You were younger than her when
you had your first book
published.

LEON

I was never young. That's why I'm
still relevant.

At this exact moment, a pretty college student, who has been following Leon with her eyes steps forward.

PRETTY COLLEGE STUDENT

Mr.Gross, I'm so sorry to intrude
but I had to say: I hope you
realise how important you are.

NINA

He realises.

LEON

Thank you SO much. That's such a
wonderful thing for an old man to
hear. If my hair weren't so
silver I'd invite you to tea.

PRETTY COLLEGE STUDENT

But your silver hair is my
favourite thing about you.

LEON

Would you care to join us then?
It's so important for me to stay
in touch with my readers.

Nina looks on in horror. Cut to:

INT.AU BON PAIN, AFTERNOON

Excruciating tea with the three of them. The student is only a few years older than Nina, but self-possessed and refined in a way that makes Nina want to punch things.

PRETTY COLLEGE STUDENT
I studied in Paris for a
semester, at the Sorbonne...

NINA
Ah, bon...

PRETTY COLLEGE STUDENT
...and it's so gratifying to see
the esteem in which they hold you
in Europe. I was there the year
you received the medal d'arts et
lettres.

LEON
Such an honour I can still barely
believe it.

NINA
Paris. I remember that. That was
the hotel with the porn on every
channel...

LEON
My daughter's going to Harvard
too.

The Student, who has barely looked at Nina, nods at him.
Nina raises her hand.

NINA
That's me. Hi. Maybe Harvard.
Maybe Brandeis.

LEON
Ugh. Full of Jews.

The student tries not to look put out by this comment.

PRETTY COLLEGE STUDENT
Didn't you go there?

NINA
He didn't finish. He was doing
drama. He was going to be an
actor. He wanted to be famous.
Very, very badly.

PRETTY COLLEGE STUDENT
But Mr.Gross, If you don't mind,
I'm confused by what you said a
moment ago since you write so
beautifully about the Jewish
experience in America.

NINA
He hates when people say that.

LEON
You know, I really don't see
myself as a Jewish writer.

PRETTY COLLEGE STUDENT
You don't?

LEON
No. I don't think many people do.

The student nods. Nina stifles a giggle.

INT.GROSS HOME, EVENING.

A young-ish male interviewer is in their home - he is just wrapping up a conversation with Leon and is still shaking with nerves.

INTERVIEWER
It's been a pleasure Mr.Gross.
I'm sure you hear this every day,
but...

LEON
Thank you very much for your
time.

In a flash Leon is back in his office. Amelia makes small talk with the interviewer, flirting a little.

AMELIA
I hope you'll excuse the mess.
Having a four year child leaves
the concept of 'house proud' out
the window.

He's still too spooked to flirt back.

INTERVIEWER
Not to mention living with an
artist.

Amelia bristles.

AMELIA
It's not that bad. I tidied
yesterday.

Joel cries off screen

JOEL
Mooooooooommy!

AMELIA
Excuse me.

INTERVIEWER

Of course.

Left alone, he loiters momentarily. Nina, who has been watching from behind a bookcase, steps out of the shadows and without a word kisses the startled writer. Leon, in turn, startles the interviewer by reappearing. Nina is unruffled.

INT.SCHOOL COPY ROOM, MONDAY LUNCHTIME

Mr.Slattery copies pages for class. Nina watches him from the doorway, the din of students echoing from the halls. Slattery look up and sees her.

MR.SLATTERY

What's up, Bacall? Have a good weekend?

She comes in with a very grave look on her face as though she's about to announce something tragic.

NINA

Mr Slattery, does it ever worry you that your name sounds like "slatternly"?

He stops copying for a second.

MR.SLATTERY

You really think that's the first thing people think of?

He looks up at her.

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)

You don't count.

He gets back to work.

NINA

But how about out in the world?

MR.SLATTERY

What makes you think this isn't my world?

She leans against the copy machine.

NINA

This isn't anyone's whole world.

(sigh)

I wish my name were Tamla.

Distracted, he repeats her sentence back.

MR.SLATTERY

You wish your name were Tamla...

NINA

Right, like Tamla Motown.

She stacks copied pages to one side for him.

Or Stevie.

MR.SLATTERY

Like Stevie Wonder.

NINA

It could be a girls name. Y'know, Stevie Nicks...

MR.SLATTERY

Sure. I dated a Stevie.

NINA

You dated?

MR.SLATTERY

Yes, I dated. I'm a young man. I date. That's what we young folk do.

NINA

I blocked it. How can I learn about Jane Eyre if I'm thinking about your love life?

MR.SLATTERY

I would have thought the two were perfect parallels.

NINA

Repuggo.

MR.SLATTERY

Repuggo? Is that Italian?

NINA

I don't know, I just made it up right now.

MR.SLATTERY

I am totally repuggo. That's the word on the street.

EXT.SIDEWALK, AFTERNOON

Nina and Asia chat as they exit school together and walk up the street, arms linked.

NINA
I'd like to be a lesbian. But one
who only holds hands.

ASIA
I'd like to be a high class
hooker who only holds hands.

NINA
That does sound classy.

ASIA
I heard that no woman gives a
good blow job until she's twenty-
seven. So I'm just going to wait.

NINA
Oh, Asia, you're so pretty,
you'll never have to give a blow
job. Only unattractive people
have to be good at sex. Why do
you think Serge Gainsbourg is
always going on about it?

Asia looks blank

NINA (CONT'D)
Serge Gainsbourg...oh, never
mind.

They part ways at the end of the street and we follow Nina home to the strains of 'Bonnie and Clyde' by Serge Gainsbourg and Brigitte Bardot.

Cut to

INT.NINA'S HOUSE, AFTERNOON

Nina undoes her blouse as though stripping the school day away and throws it on the bannister. She walks into Leon's cluttered office. He is typing and they don't acknowledge each other. Aside from his library of books, Leon also has an enormous record collection. Nina starts going through it, looking for something.

She finds what she is looking for - Serge Gainsbourg's greatest hits - and goes to leave the room with it. Leon stops her, checks what album she took, lets her go with it, but as she reaches the door calls out:

LEON
Stop stealing my culture.

NINA
Look after it better.

She leaves the room and goes to hers, where she plays the record on a vintage player. Soon enough there is a knock on her door. She opens it and Leon comes in to continue the conversation.

LEON
What do you want with it?

NINA
I find it comforting.

LEON
You can't feel nostalgic for things you never experienced in the first place.

NINA
Yes you can.

He thinks about this, nods.

LEON
You're still going to the shrink, right? I'm still paying for it, aren't I?

NINA
Yes and yes.

LEON
Good.

He goes back to work in an office so plush it smells like velvet, if velvet had a smell.

INT.MR. SLATTERY'S APARTMENT, AFTERNOON

What a shithole. Working on his novel at an old typewriter, when the phone rings.

MR.SLATTERY
Hello?

JULIET.
I left my diaphragm at your place. I'm coming over after dinner.

MR.SLATTERY
Excuse me?

JULIET

You brought me the ridiculous ring, but you didn't give me back my diaphragm.

MR.SLATTERY

And you only just noticed that?

JULIET

Yes. I haven't needed it until now.

Appalled, he drops the phone back down onto the receiver with force. It knocks over his mug of coffee. Slattery is mopping up spilled coffee from the typed pages, the newspaper and, when he sees it on the grey tabby, to whom he apologizes.

MR.SLATTERY

I'm sorry. Fuck. I was really concentrating.

He puts the mess away and sits back down to focus again, staring at the page in the typewriter, fingers hovering over the keys. He looks at the cat.

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)

That's upset me. Can you do the thing again, the pendulum thing?

On cue the cat starts to purr deeply. Slattery starts to type. But as he does he says, with the clicks:

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)

Crap. Crap. Crap.

INT.SHRINK'S OFFICE

A garden apartment with the sound of kids playing through the open sliding doors. Beside his diploma's, the shrink also has old, now banned, over the counter medicines framed in maple and glass boxes. Nina looks at them. The shrink, prematurely middle aged with his pants belted too high on his torso, looks at her.

SHRINK

You don't like being here, do you?

NINA

If I wanted to talk about myself I would go see a psychic. Or I would write a novel.

SHRINK

Your father is a novelist.

NINA
Get the fuck out.

SHRINK
Do you think your father's so
sucessfully encapsulating a
generation has made it hard to...

NINA
I don't read his books.

SHRINK
Never?

NINA
I started one. His first book he
wrote when he was twenty-five.
But it was full of sex and
jerking off. I mean there was no
story except my dad trying to
fuck blonde women.

SHRINK
You say 'your father' but it's a
character to which you refer.
It's just writing.

NINA
It's never just writing. I
thought it was disgusting.

SHRINK
Does sex disgust you?

She stares out the window.

SHRINK (CONT'D)
You don't want to talk about
yourself?

NINA
Of course I do. I just don't want
anyone to listen.

SHRINK
That makes no sense. You think we
should stop these sessions?

NINA
It makes my father feel better.

SHRINK
You care what your father thinks?

She eyes the clock on the wall. Time up.

NINA

Yes. I do.

She gets up to leave. The door closes behind her. Sitting in the waiting room she sees ZACH. He is a pale and wan teenage boy with cuts on his arms. His face is beautiful, Bambi with sleep deprivation, a baby Ian Curtis. Hard as he tries not to make eye contact, she forces him to.

NINA (CONT'D)

You cut yourself?

ZACH

Yes.

NINA

You shouldn't do that.

ZACH

Okay.

INT. MR. SLATTERY'S APARTMENT, NIGHT

Slattery opens his front door, as Juliet pushes past him.

JULIET

You smell of weed.

He nods, inhales deeply as she storms up the hallway.

MR.SLATTERY

You smell of honey, still. [beat]
Why am I not attracted to you?

She ignores him, as she rifles through the medicine cabinet in the bathroom. He arrives at the bathroom just in time to experience the pain of watching her pluck the case she needs from the top shelf.

INT.BATHROOM

Juliet opens the case before moving on.

MR.SLATTERY

What was that? Were you checking
I didn't steal your diaphragm?
That I didn't re-gift it to my
sister? Or sell it for parts?

She ignores him again, his childishness, as she sees it, beneath her.

JULIET

You're stoned.

MR.SLATTERY
I was writing.

She makes it back to the door, is about to leave.

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)
Why do you need your vintage
theme birth control all of a
sudden.

JULIET
I've been seeing a guy I met on
the tennis court.

MR.SLATTERY
A sleeping hobo?

JULIET
A fellow Harvard grad...

MR.SLATTERY
I don't want to know. Just go.

She passes him.

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)
God, you're beautiful.

She pauses, a flicker of hope. He looks her in the eyes.

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)
Why don't I want to be with you?

She leaves, slamming the door.

INT.STAFF ROOM

MISS BLOOM
Can you help me out on the 23rd?

MR.SLATTERY
With what?

MISS BLOOM
A trip to New York. To the
Guggenheim. I can't control the
She-wolves by myself.

MR.SLATTERY
It's my thirtieth birthday.

MISS BLOOM
You don't work on your day of
birth?

MR.SLATTERY

Sure, of course, I'll go if the Principal approves it. I'd love to go to New York.

MISS BLOOM

It's an over nighter, obviously.

He frowns.

MR.SLATTERY

It's my birthday.

MISS BLOOM

You said that.

MR.SLATTERY

I have to get someone to feed my cat.

MISS BLOOM

It's only a night. Just leave her some extra food. She'll be fine.

MR.SLATTERY

It doesn't really work like that.
[He thinks a moment before admitting this next part]: She prefers to be petted whilst she eats.

MISS BLOOM

Well obviously. That's perfectly understandable.

He detects the sarcasm in her voice.

MR.SLATTERY

She's been good to me.

MISS BLOOM

Do you have a lot of friends?

MR.SLATTERY

I sort of get lost in my girlfriends.

He smiles, weakly.

INT.CAFETERIA, LUNCH

Nina is following Mr.Slattery around as he does lunch duty, watching over a packed dining hall as the school chows and chats.

NINA
Willy Nelson or Johnny Cash?

MR.SLATTERY
Cash. Are you going on this art trip to The Guggenheim?

NINA
Yes. Willy Nelson, Johnny Cash or Merle Haggard?

MR.SLATTERY
Cash. You know it's an over-nighter?

NINA
I know. Nick Cave or Tom Waits?

MR.SLATTERY
Oh, that's a tough one.

NINA
It's not a tough one, it's easy. Tom Waits...

MR.SLATTERY
It's not that easy...

NINA
Tom Waits. Clash or Sex Pistols?

MR.SLATTERY
Your parents are okay with it? The Clash, of course!

NINA
Just checking. Only one of them is my parents, the other is a pain in my cunt. Favorite Clash song?

MR.SLATTERY
You can't talk like that, remember? [beat] 'Know Your Rights'.

NINA
Off 'Combat Rock'?

MR.SLATTERY
No, off 'The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan'. Yes off 'Combat Rock'.

NINA
Of course I like Bob Dylan, but you know who I really love? Joan Baez.

MR.SLATTERY

Joan Baez is a moaning old cow.

She stops in her tracks.

NINA

You hate women.

MR.SLATTERY

Says the person who peppers her conversation with the 'C' word.

NINA

Chrysanthemum.

Two eleven year olds come up to them. One of them tugs at Mr.Slattery's sleeve and he looks down. They are tiny, but wearing lipgloss and have cell phones slung around their shoulders like guns in holsters.

ELEVEN YEAR OLD

Excuse me. My friend thinks you're sexy!

They shriek with laughter and run away. Slattery looks shell-shocked.

NINA

What do you expect? You're a moderately good looking man in an all girls prep school.

MR.SLATTERY

Moderately good looking?

NINA

Yeah and you got that geek chic thing going.

MR.SLATTERY

What?!

NINA

The cardigans. The bad haircut.

MR.SLATTERY

That's a cheap haircut

NINA

You're a grown-up. Why don't you have money?

MR.SLATTERY

I'm not even thirty yet!

Not a good enough answer. She knows it. He knows it. He tries again.

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)
Because grown-ups don't have
money.

She's embarrassed.

NINA
Oh. Right.

INT.NAIL SALON

Amelia is getting a manicure as Joel waits at her feet. She eyes her nails critically.

AMELIA
I wouldn't call that lilac.
That's mauve.

The manicurist answers back in Spanish to one of her co-workers.

MANICURIST
Para mi, se ven como el mismo
color.

AMELIA
No. They aren't the same colour.
Come on. Take it off. Let's start
again.

Joel sits there bored out of his mind.

Amelia looks at her out stretched hand.

INT.SCHOOL, END OF DAY

The bell is ringing and the students are rushing in and out of the locker room to retrieve their belongings. Nina is zooming out the huge swinging doors when she passes Mr.Slattery. He nods at her and she waves at him, and something makes him turn back and grab her hand. It's the first time they've ever touched.

MR.SLATTERY
What's that on your wrist?

The whole school is swirling around them.

NINA
This? I read it in Miss Bloom's
history of art class this
afternoon.
(MORE)

NINA (CONT'D)
 This is from Vincent Van Gogh's
 suicide note. I thought it was
 amazing.

Slattery tips her wrist so he can read it. He reads aloud:

MR.SLATTERY
 "The sadness will never go away".

He lets go of her wrist and walks off.

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)
 That's retarded.

She is left standing there. He goes to his own corner,
 around the corner and just stands there. He covers his eyes
 with his hands. Gets it together. Moves to his next
 classroom.

INT.LOCKER ROOM

Asia, frustrated by her padlocked locker with a combination
 she can't remember, is kicking at it. Nina leans over her
 and clicks the padlock back and forth until it opens. Asia
 hugs her. Disturbed by the confrontation with Mr.Slattery,
 Nina gratefully shudders in her embrace. The girls in the
 locker room pause their lip-glossing to watch.

GIRL 1
 Lezzers.

Nina un-peels herself from Asia, walks up to the girl and
 ever so slowly licks her face. The girl is rooted to the
 spot with horror, then screams. Asia and Nina hurry off in
 hysterics.

INT.GROSS HOME, LEON'S OFFICE, AFTERNOON

Amelia brings Leon his scotch as he works. As she places it
 in front of him, aware he is not to be disturbed, he grabs
 at her hand and touches her perfectly painted nails.

LEON
 "When Lilac's Last In The Doorway
 Bloomed..."

She looks at him, quizzical.

LEON (CONT'D)
 It's a Walt Whitman poem.

AMELIA
 It's beautiful.

LEON

You made me remember it. Well done.

AMELIA

Thank you.

Her face morphs as she is, in a single moment, intensely grateful at being recognized for her efforts and instantly aware of how pathetic they are.

INT.STAFF ROOM, AFTERNOON

Slattery is packing up his things for the day and making to get out of there. He cringes as Miss Bloom pulls up beside him.

MISS BLOOM

So, I'm curious. What's your type?

MR.SLATTERY

In women?

MISS BLOOM

In women.

MR.SLATTERY

I like smart women. Partial to brunettes. Older woman.

MISS BLOOM

Older?

MR.SLATTERY

Older than me. But then I got older...ended up with this girl who was too young. [he stubs out the cigarette] We were engaged.

MISS BLOOM

And then?

MR.SLATTERY

And then we got...dis-engaged. It never would have worked.

MISS BLOOM

Did you try? When things got rough?

MR.SLATTERY

She tried. I didn't want to. [He has no intention of admitting this, so is surprised to hear himself] *Things never got rough.*

(MORE)

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)
As soon as I gave her the ring,
there didn't seem any point
anymore.

EXT.LACROSSE FIELD, DAY

A game is going on. Nina and Asia are skipping class,
hiding behind an oak tree at the back of the field. They
lean against it and smoke.

ASIA
You LIKE Mr.Slattery.

NINA
He's a dork.

ASIA
Yeah, and you LIKE him.

NINA
Well it's not as if there are any
other men around here to like.
What am I going to do, fantasize
about some seventeen year old
from St.Michaels? Get drunk and
let him finger me in the bathroom
of some depressing party, Fallout
Boy playing in the background?

ASIA
I didn't say you were wrong to
like him. Everyone else does. It
wouldn't have to be Fallout
Boy...

NINA
He doesn't like me. I scare him.

Asia kisses her cheek.

NINA (CONT'D)
See, you're not scared of me.
What's his problem?

ASIA
His problem is you're sixteen.

NINA
So?

ASIA
So, you're officially jailbait.

NINA
That's good, isn't it?

ASIA

That's bad. That means he could
go to jail.

NINA

You know it's such a ridiculous
thing Americans have about young
women's sexuality. That's why
they went after Monica Lewinsky
so hard. They always suspected
that little girl's lust had the
power to bring down men, bring
down the president, bring down
the free world. And then they
tried to make it come true.

ASIA

Wait. Wait...you honestly relate
to Monica?

NINA

A zaftig Jewish girl who made a
fool of herself over a powerful
older man who didn't care about
her? Fuck, yeah.

They watch the game for a moment, though both are glazed
over with their own thoughts.

ASIA

I guess it's good to know you can
make a fool of yourself and bring
down the leader of the free world
at the same time.

Nina flicks ash.

ASIA (CONT'D)

You still think about Andy?

NINA

Yes. Sometimes.

She takes a big last drag.

NINA (CONT'D)

I like Slattery. I do. There's
something oddly touching about
him. He's kinda pathetic. I get
him.

ASIA

So what if you get him? Don't you
want someone to get *you*?

Nina shrugs, brushing it off.

ASIA (CONT'D)

I get you.

Nina stubs out her cigarette and packs up her book bag.

NINA

I have to go to class. I feel bad about ditching.

ASIA

That's new. What have you got?

NINA

English.

She tries to make this sound breezy.

INT. ENGLISH CLASS, AFTERNOON

Nina peers through the pane of glass on the door. She sees the class rowdy, looking like they're enjoying themselves. Mr. Slattery is laughing. She takes a breath and slinks in. As she passes his desk, she sees his open briefcase, and inside, peeking out, one of her dad's books. She doesn't like that.

NINA

I had to go to the dentist.

They don't hear her, so she gingerly takes a seat. Mr. Slattery suddenly snaps up

MR. SLATTERY

You had to go to the dentist?

NINA

Yes.

MR. SLATTERY

Nothing wrong I hope?

NINA

I had a toothache.

The class laughs at her or they could be laughing at a private joke from before she walked in because Mr. Slattery collapses into laughter too. Nina angrily stands up and grabs the Jane Eyre of the nearest girl on the page to which she's opened it.

NINA (CONT'D)

Hilarious.

She turns to face the class.

NINA (CONT'D)
Fuck you for laughing.

MR.SLATTERY
No cursing!

NINA
And fuck you for letting them
laugh!

They laugh even harder now. She throws the book on the ground and storms out. He follows after her.

EXT.HALLWAY

In hushed tones:

MR.SLATTERY
Do you want me to send you to the
Principal's office? Because you
are driving me insane.

She takes a bottle of zoloft out of her bag, opens the bottle and dumps the pills on the hall way floor.

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)
What are you doing that for?

NINA
I already am insane so don't talk
to me about being driven insane.

She starts grinding them with her heel.

MR.SLATTERY
There are needy maniacs out there
who we can donate these pills to
if you don't want them. Some of
them are even my friends.
Imaginary, obviously, I have no
friends.

She laughs and bends to pick them up. He helps her, picks up the bottle, which is prescribed to Amelia.

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)
These aren't even yours.

She smiles meekly.

NINA
Props.

They are still on their knees when he asks

MR.SLATTERY
So, who drove you mad then?

NINA
The world.

MR.SLATTERY
The world did? The world has a
conspiracy against you?

NINA
Yes.

He stands up.

MR.SLATTERY
You must be a very important
person, then.

She pulls herself up.

He sighs.

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)
I know you know the answers to
everything...

NINA
I didn't say that.

MR.SLATTERY
...but if you don't write them
down, you're going to fail this
class.

NINA
I'll be okay. I'm going to get an
A in Philosophy.

MR.SLATTERY
Be hard not to, with your father.

Her heart sinks.

NINA
Right, my father.

He sneaks a glance through the classroom window, see the
girls amusing themselves, figures he has a few seconds
more.

MR.SLATTERY
I didn't want to say, I know you
must hear this all the time...

NINA
I do...

MR.SLATTERY
...but I'm such a huge fan of his
work. I write...myself...because
of him. He changed my life.

NINA
From what?

MR.SLATTERY
From?

NINA
This is a life saved?

It knocks the wind right out of him.

NINA (CONT'D)
You should get back to class.

MR.SLATTERY
Okay.

He has his hand on the classroom door, turns to face her
before he pulls the handle.

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)
Please don't screw this up for
me.

NINA
How could I...

MR.SLATTERY
You know what I mean. Just don't.
Please?

Something clicks in her. She laughs and walks back into
class with him. She sits down at her desk and the lesson
resumes.

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)
So to get back to the question I
posed friday: what proof are the
post-colonialist essayists using
to suggest Bertha is black? Let's
refer to the text...

INT.CLASSROOM.

Class ends with the bell. Idling, Nina stops at his desk on her way out.

NINA
I like you.

MR.SLATTERY
I'm glad.

NINA
I don't like people.

MR.SLATTERY
You gotta get over that.

NINA
Fuck, have you read my father's books or not?

MR.SLATTERY
Maybe we interpret them differently. Isn't that the joy of literature?

She cocks her head.

NINA
Would you like me to read your writing one day?

MR.SLATTERY
My novel? It's not finished. It's not even a first draft yet. But, sure. Yes. I'd like that.

He's searching her eyes. Is it something she would then show to her father if she thought it good enough? She gives nothing away.

NINA
Okay. Give it to me before we go to New York.

INT.CAFETERIA, LUNCH.

Nina and Asia are huddled together over a shared tuna casserole.

NINA
What does he mean 'Please don't screw this up for me'?

ASIA
He means he likes you too.

NINA
Disgusting!

She looks thrilled.

INT.NINA'S HOUSE, EVE

Nina walks in to find Amelia and Joel fussing over a box of books that have just been delivered: preview copies of Leon's new novel.

LEON
It's just another book for chrissakes. Seventeen before it.

AMELIA
Eighteen.

She looks excitedly at the jacket photo.

AMELIA (CONT'D)
Oh, but this is really elegant!

Joel lays on his stomach with a book open in front of him and pretends to be reading intently. As he flips the pages he occasionally shrieks "No way!" and "Oh, that was a good one!"

The only disinterested parties are Leon, who is laying on his back on the sofa, and Nina, who marches straight up to her room.

INT.COPY ROOM, LUNCHTIME

Mr.Slattery is copying pages for class when Nina pops her head round the door.

NINA
I have something to send you.
Give me your address.

MR.SLATTERY
You can't just bring it to school?

NINA
It's my father's new novel. He's very secretive. Doesn't want me to bring it here.
(MORE)

NINA (CONT'D)
Stupid I know, but...it's my
early birthday present to you.

MR.SLATTERY
Oh, wow. Of course. I understand.

He grabs a piece of paper and writes it down.

MR.SLATTERY
How did you know it was my
birthday?

NINA
I know everything.

He looks at her and realizes: he's quite scared of her.

EXT.CINEMA LOBBY,AFTERNOON

Leon and Joel are lining up to buy tickets for the new Pixar movie, standing behind scores of other parents holding the hands of their children. Leon is unashamedly reading a piece about himself in the New York Times, ignoring his son. Suddenly Joel pipes up, at maximum volume:

JOEL
From now on, I'm going to call
you 'Shitter'.

LEON
What?!

JOEL
Because whenever you drop
something you say "shit".
Sometimes you stop yourself from
saying it but I know it's what
you were going to say. So I'm
calling you 'shitter' from now
on.

LEON
Fine. Fine. Nothing I haven't
heard from The New Yorker.

He returns to his paper. The other parents are staring.
Joel waves at them.

INT.HOUSE EVENING

Joel and Leon return from the cinema, Joel repeating his favorite lines from the film.

Amelia is watching Tom Brokaw read the news. On seeing

this, Joel exclaims

JOEL

Oh God, I hate piggy eyes. He's
always ruining everything.

He bursts into tears and starts kicking the floor. Amelia
takes him out as Nina comes downstairs from her bedroom

NINA

Hey Dad. I read the piece in The
Times.

LEON

Nice piece.

NINA

Yeah, dad, except they made a
mistake. You didn't see it?

LEON

What?

She holds the paper in front of her and reads from the
story:

NINA

"Gross, father of one son"

LEON

I am the father of one son. And
one daughter. They just didn't
put that part in.

NINA

Dad...

LEON

Big deal. It's a mistake. Stupid
bastards. Come on, you know what
they're like.

Nina is holding back tears.

LEON (CONT'D)

What? Now you're going to start
crying? What are you, Joel?

NINA

Joel is four. Joel is in his room
crying over Tom Brokaw.

LEON

Tom Brokaw's in his room crying
over Tom Brokaw! Come on!

Amelia walks in.

AMELIA

What's wrong? What's going on?

LEON

The New York Times made her cry.

AMELIA

What are you talking about? What do you mean?

NINA

Forget it!

She's really crying now. He can't stand it.

LEON

Okay. Okay.

He backs slowly out of the room as though menaced by a shark.

Nina grabs her coat and her bag and storms out into the rain.

EXT.MR.SLATTERY'S DOORSTEP, EVENING

Nina rings the doorbell. She's soaking wet, holding a copy of her father's book in her hand. No answer. She rings it again. Mr.Slattery opens it, bleary eyed.

NINA

I have this for you.

MR.SLATTERY

Um, thanks.

NINA

It's raining

MR.SLATTERY

Right. Do you want to...come in?

NINA

Thank you. A vampire has to be invited in.

He looks bemused.

NINA (CONT'D)

I'm joking.

They stand in the hallway.

NINA (CONT'D)

Can I come in further?

He lets her in.

She sees the small apartment, typewriter set up, the cat staring at her.

NINA (CONT'D)
You have a cat.

MR.SLATTERY
I do.

NINA
That's kind of old lady-ish.
Isn't that what women have when
they live alone?

MR.SLATTERY
Nina, you need to learn how the
concept of conversation works.

NINA
I heard your last girlfriend was
really pretty.

MR.SLATTERY
You see, that's not how it works.

NINA
Can I look at your records?

MR.SLATTERY
No.

NINA
No, your girlfriend wasn't pretty
or no I can't look at your
records?
Ooh, look, you have the original
British 12 inch of 'White Man In
The Hammersmith Palais'. Amazing!
Where did you get this?

MR.SLATTERY
Right. Can you stop looking at my
records?

She hands him The Clash single.

NINA
Put this on.

MR.SLATTERY
No.
She sighs and puts it on herself.

NINA
It smells of weed in here. Were
you smoking weed?

She notices the typewriter has been left mid-sentence.

NINA (CONT'D)
Is that your novel?

Mr.Slattery seems to resign himself to the fact that she's
not going to leave.

MR.SLATTERY
Yes. It is.

NINA
Would you like me to read it?

She sits down at the desk. Looking into the ashtray she
finds the remnant of a joint and lights it up. The lighter
sparks a few times and just as it flares into flame she
spots, above his desk, her blowjob sketch, with her
signature. She inhales the whole joint in a few puffs. He
dives towards her, ripping it from her lips.

MR.SLATTERY
Okay, I'm driving you home now.

NINA
You are?

MR.SLATTERY
Yep. Get up.

She doesn't get up. She can hardly sit up.

NINA
How will I read your novel?

MR.SLATTERY
Here. Take it with you.

He'd do anything at this point to get her out.
Unfortunately she is wasted.

He puts her on his back and carries her to his car. He
turns on the radio and drives. 'Can't Get You Out Of My
head' by Kylie Minogue comes on and he turns it up. Nina
wakes up a bit.

NINA
Ugh, Kylie Minogue. Revolting.
Change it.

MR.SLATTERY

On the contrary. I think the song has an undercurrent of tremendous darkness.

She grimaces.

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)

What, it's not old enough for you? You know what Nina? You're too cool for school. Just because a singer is currently popular doesn't mean they're terrible. Sometimes the people are right. You believe in the people?

NINA

Of course not.

MR.SLATTERY

You're missing out.

He turns up the song even louder. They arrive at her home and he waits until the song finishes then turns down the volume.

NINA

How did you know where I live?

MR.SLATTERY

Everyone knows where you live.

Thinking she will be too stoned to remember this he tells her.

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)

When I was at college, I stood outside, hoping for a glimpse of your father.

NINA

You can come in and meet him if you want.

MR.SLATTERY

Not tonight. Out you get. Here's the manuscript. Don't lose it. Stoner.

She stares at him as though waiting to be kissed.

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)

Go on. Hop out. I've got a lot of work. So I can take that day off to come with you guys to the Guggenheim.

NINA

Have I done something wrong?

MR.SLATTERY

No you haven't. But please get out of the car. I don't like being made to feel like [he sings a snatch of Don't Stand So Close To Me by The Police] "the old man in the book by Nabokov".

She looks miserable.

NINA

You're not the first you know. Andy was older than you...he was thirty three...

MR.SLATTERY

I don't want to know. Go on, get out. I'll see you tomorrow.

She steps out. He starts to rev the engine. As he's pulling away she calls out

NINA

Mr.Slattery!

MR.SLATTERY

Yes?

NINA

It's not NA-bo-kov. The correct Russian pronunciation is Na-BOK-ov. Sting got it wrong.

MR.SLATTERY

Sting always gets it wrong.

INT.NINA'S ROOM, NIGHT

As she reads his pages, the manuscript fanned out across her chest, she smiles to herself, to the tune of the aforementioned Police song.

EXT.STREET, NIGHT

After he's let her out, Mr.Slattery drives around for a while, listening to the radio, aimless. He looks at the Leon Gross book on the seat where Nina had been. Then he pulls up to the kerb under a street light, parks and starts reading.

INT.SCHOOL

Slattery passes Nina in the hallway.

MR.SLATTERY

Nina! Nina!

Nina flushes with happiness.

NINA

Yes?

MR.SLATTERY

I loved your father's book. It kept me up all night. Please thank him from me.

Her face barely hides her disappointment.

NINA

It kept you up all night. Sounds like a quote for the jacket.

He smiles and starts to walk away. She calls after him:

NINA (CONT'D)

I don't know that I want a teacher whose been up all night.

MR.SLATTERY

You know that I...

NINA

Oh. Yeah. Okay.

He walks back to her.

MR.SLATTERY

I know you won't have had a chance to read my pages.

NINA

I have actually.

MR.SLATTERY

And?

NINA

It's a longer conversation for another time.

MR.SLATTERY

Right.

Crushed, he goes to class.

INT.NINA'S HOUSE, EVE

They are at dinner, Consuela hovering in the background. Amelia is trying to make Joel eat. Leon is reading the paper.

NINA

I hate having dinner on time, the same time every night.

LEON

What's to hate?

NINA

The certainty.

LEON

If you'd lived a writer's life, had years of struggle, years of uncertainty, not knowing where your next meal was coming from, let alone what time it was coming, you might be more appreciative.

NINA

But that's exactly what I do want.

Amelia's diamond rings sparkle in the candle light.

AMELIA

Your father struggled...

NINA

So that you wouldn't have to.

AMELIA

Exactly. So that you wouldn't have to.

NINA

No he didn't. That's not why he wanted to write, not so he could send his daughter to private school. If that was the reason, he would have been a horrible writer. It would show in his work. He did it because he loved writing.

Leon folds his paper and puts it aside.

NINA (CONT'D)

I just want to love something so much it puts my future in jeopardy.

AMELIA

That's a very stupid thing to say.

LEON

No it's not.

Amelia looks chagrined. Dinner continues in silence.

NINA

Dad, I have a new English teacher.

LEON

Mmm-hmmm.

NINA

He's a huge fan of yours.

LEON

Yeah? And?

NINA

I gave him a copy of the book. He loved it.

AMELIA

What? You did what?

NINA

I gave him 'The Trees'. He used to stand outside the house when he was at college hoping for a glimpse of you, dad.

LEON

Yeauch.

AMELIA

You gave him the book? What are you talking about? It isn't in stores yet. He could leak it.

NINA

He won't do that...

AMELIA

You'll have to get it back.

NINA

Oh, chill out.

AMELIA
Immediately. Tonight. This is
extremely serious. We'll have to
find out where he lives.

NINA
I know where he lives.

Leon looks interested.

LEON
How do you know where he lives?

NINA
I just know. Everyone at school
does.

LEON
Oh yeah?

AMELIA
We're getting it back right now.

LEON
Ah, who cares?

AMELIA
I care, Leon. And so should you.
This is your work. It isn't out
for another ten days. We don't
know this man.

NINA
I know him. He won't...

AMELIA
If you won't protect your work,
Leon, I will.

EXT.MR.SLATTERY'S, NIGHT

Amelia rings the bell. No answer. She rings it again.
Slattery comes to the door.

MR.SLATTERY
Yes? Can I help you?

He is so taken by Amelia's beauty that it takes a moment
for him to notice Nina standing behind her.

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)
Nina? Um, what's up?

AMELIA
You're the English teacher?

MR.SLATTERY
I'm Dennis Slattery.

He puts out his hand to shake hers, but she ignores it.

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)
Is there a problem?

He looks at Nina for help.

AMELIA
Wait in the car.

As soon as Nina hangs back, Amelia's tone changes.

AMELIA (CONT'D)
I'm terribly, terribly sorry to
trouble you so late at night.

MR.SLATTERY
It's okay, I wasn't doing
anything.

She peers past him and notices the cats, Charlie Rose again
playing in the background TV.

AMELIA
Well, this is very embarrassing,
but I'm afraid Nina made a
mistake. I believe she gave you a
copy of 'The Trees', my husband's
new book.

MR.SLATTERY
You're Mrs.Gross. Oh! Hello. Nice
to meet you. God, I loved it. I'm
a huge, huge fan.

He puts out his hand to shake.

AMELIA
Right, well I'm afraid I have to
get it back. It isn't available
to the public yet and Mr.Gross is
going out of his mind...

MR.SLATTERY
I thought it came from Mr.Gross
himself.

AMELIA
No. It came from his office but
he had no idea that Nina took
it...he's terribly upset. You
know how writers are. Very
protective of their work.

MR. SLATTERY

I had no idea. How embarrassing.
I feel really bad. I'll go get
it.

AMELIA

Thank you.

She flutters her eyelashes. Nina sits in the front seat of the car, her feet on the dashboard, fiddling with the radio. Slattery watches Amelia walk back to the car. She gets in and slaps Nina's hand off the dial.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

That was a very stupid thing you
did. Thankfully he is a
reasonable man. He understood and
asked me not to punish you.

NINA

Punish me? Every day with you is
punishing.

AMELIA

That's enough.

NINA

"That's enough". You think you're
Mary Poppins? You think I'm a
kid?

AMELIA

You're sixteen.

Nina eyes her slyly.

NINA

You miss it don't you?

AMELIA

What do you mean?

NINA

Had you hooked your first rich
old man by sixteen?

AMELIA

I went to convent school. I was a
virgin. Not that that's any of
your business.

NINA

I bet you had hooked 'em. I bet
the thrill is never quite the
same...the older you get. It's
not the same for them either. And
you know it.

Amelia stares at her, blinking back something. Is it the possibility of tears? Of rage? Of a smile?

NINA (CONT'D)

Your "buttery chunks" can't help you now.

Amelia pulls the car over, turns off the ignition, calmly turns to Nina and slaps her hard across the face. Nina doesn't react at all. Amelia turns her head back to the steering wheel, starts the car and they drive home in silence.

INT.NINA'S HOUSE, NIGHT.

Leon and Amelia's bedroom. The room is dark save the light from Amelia's walk in closet, the door ajar, rows of exquisite shoes visible.

Amelia approaches Leon in bed. He is snoring on his side. He opens one eye. She peels off her clothes slowly and climbs in beside him. She straddles him and thrusts her cleavage in his face.

LEON

Aw, leave off.

She shakes her head in disbelief and climbs off him.

AMELIA

Am I...just not your thing?
Sexually?

LEON

That is true. I don't know why.
Nothing specific. Just chemistry.

AMELIA

Then why did you marry me?

He smiles.

LEON

You have a very beautiful voice.

He rolls over and closes his eyes, absent mindedly patting her side with one hand, like he's trying to get a puppy to go to sleep.

She goes into her walk in closet and sits down among the array of beautiful stilettos. Sobs echo through the door. Leon sighs and goes back to sleep.

INT.NINA'S ROOM, NIGHT

Nina is laying on her back on the floor, looking at her poster of Joe Strummer. She has her headphones on full blast so that we can hear the music almost as loud as she can.

INT.SCHOOL, MORNING

Slattery and Nina pass in the crowded hallway, the bell ringing and kids rushing back and forth to class. They both stop and think about turning back but neither does.

INT.STAFF ROOM, LUNCHTIME

Mr.Slattery And Miss Bloom are lunching together.

MISS BLOOM
You look distracted.

MR.SLATTERY
I am a little distracted. Nina Gross. She just...smart kid. Head fuck, excuse my language.

MISS BLOOM
You're excused.

She takes a sip of coffee, holding it in her mouth to stop herself from saying what she says next.

MISS BLOOM (CONT'D)
You know, you must know, there are rumours. All those meetings you seem to take in the photocopying room...

He looks up sharply.

MISS BLOOM (CONT'D)
But I would never presume to ask...

MR.SLATTERY
Ask what?

She gapes a little and opts to stay silent.

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)
If what?

MISS BLOOM
Forget it. It's not my place.

But he won't let it lie.

MR.SLATTERY
You're gay, right?

MISS BLOOM
My partner and I...

MR.SLATTERY
Your girlfriend.

MISS BLOOM
My girlfriend. Yes. I'm gay.

MR.SLATTERY
And you teach at an all girls
school. Is that a problem for
you?

MISS BLOOM
I haven't actually told anyone.
It's completely unnecessary. For
those who assume such things...

He is curt

MR.SLATTERY
I have to get ready for third
period. Excuse me.

INT.COPY ROOM, LUNCHTIME

NINA
Hey.

She bounces merrily in and leans against the photocopier.
He doesn't say anything

NINA (CONT'D)
This is our room, right. This is
our assigned spot.

MR.SLATTERY
There is no assigned spot. What
would we need an assigned spot
for?

NINA
Why are you being weird?

MR.SLATTERY
I'm busy.

NINA
I'm sixteen. I'm busy.

Under his breath but loud enough for her to hear

MR.SLATTERY
You're crazy.

NINA
Do you want to know what I
thought of your book?

He can't help himself.

MR.SLATTERY
Yes. Of course.

NINA
Fuck you!

Unbeknownst to them, the principal, passing in the corridor, overhears. A short, stout forty-something, she bursts in on them and their expressions are more appropriate to people caught having sex than fighting.

PRINCIPAL
I want you both in my office.
Now.

They follow her. They both look like kids. They sit down in her spartan office, apart but side by side on wooden chairs as she faces them in her leather swivel chair.

PRINCIPAL (CONT'D)
What is going on? This is highly
inappropriate. From both of you.

She's just talking about their language but they both know there's something else under the surface.

MR.SLATTERY
It's okay.

NINA
It's not okay. He's a fucking
lousy teacher.

PRINCIPAL
Nina!

MR.SLATTERY
Principal Moore, I am so sorry.

PRINCIPAL
Can you control her, or not?

MR.SLATTERY
I don't know.

PRINCIPAL

What do you mean, you don't know?
You're the teacher, she's the
student.

He doubts this. Nina sees it in his face.

NINA

You're right. I've been very
disrespectful. God! How could I
have said that?

She shakes her head exaggeratedly.

NINA (CONT'D)

I'm so sorry, Principal Moore.
I've been going through a rough
time...

PRINCIPAL

I know, dear, and you should know
we're rooting for you.

NINA

But it's no excuse. I fully
apologize Mr.Slattery. I don't
know what got into me.

MR.SLATTERY

It's okay...

NINA

No it's not. It absolutely won't
happen again. *Never.*

This frightens him.

MR.SLATTERY

Nina...

NINA

It won't happen again. If you'll
excuse me, Principal Moore, I'm
going to the bathroom to get
myself together.

She stands up. Slattery half stands up, but Nina is already
out the door. He sits down again. It is clear the Principal
has more to say to him, although we don't hear it, as we
follow Nina outside to the other side of the closed door,
where she leans against it, catching her breath.

INT.SHRINK'S

Nina and the shrink stare at each other in silence. This
appears to be a stand off. Nina is winning.

SHRINK

Time's up.

She stands and leaves without saying a word. Outside the door, she sees Zach waiting in a chair, reading a magazine. His scars are healing. She is almost out the second door, when she turns to him.

NINA

Hey.

He puts down his magazine.

ZACH

Yes?

NINA

You wanna get out of here?

He looks momentarily nervous before the sound of the shrink moving behind the other door inspires him to answer:

ZACH

Sure.

CUT TO:

Nina and Zach hailing a cab.

CUT TO:

Inside the cab, they sit on other sides, suddenly awkward like Elaine and Benjamin at the end of *The Graduate*. Nina breaks the silence.

NINA

So. How old are you?

ZACH

Nineteen.

NINA

Wow, you look a lot younger.

ZACH

Yeah, that's my problem.

NINA

That's it? That your whole problem?

ZACH

No. I mean, I guess that's maybe part of it.

NINA

Don't get me wrong. That's actually a good problem.

ZACH

Why? What's your problem?

NINA

My mom got breast cancer and died.

ZACH

That's a good problem. I mean, not good but...

NINA

She was a really cool chick, you know?

He doesn't, but he answers very sweetly

ZACH

I know.

NINA

She was just really, really awesome.

Zach reaches over and puts his hand on hers. It is a gesture simultaneously kind and creepy. She looks at his scarred arm. Seeing her stare, he offers, by way of explanation:

ZACH

She's older than me. I love her.

NINA

And she doesn't love you?
[sarcastic] What's not to love?

She gestures at his wrists.

NINA (CONT'D)

Does it work?

He shakes his head

ZACH

She won't see me anymore.

NINA

Well, a word of advice. Grown ups want vitality and enthusiasm to feed off in their young. No interesting adult picked the sixteen year old Morrissey to hang about with.

ZACH
I'm gonna get out here.

NINA
You don't want to do something?

ZACH
This was enough.

NINA
Okay. Bye.

INT.ASIA'S PHOTO SHOOT, AFTERNOON

Nina drops by. She sees from afar Asia being primped and fussed over by a make-up artist. She wanders over to the catering table and picks up a bagel.

MEAN STYLIST
Hey! Can I help you?

NINA
No. I'm good.

MEAN STYLIST
What are you doing here? This is a fashion shoot.

NINA
I know, asshole, I was invited...

Asia sees her and comes bounding over. She falls into a hug on her and clutches her close as Nina tries to get her breath. Eventually she pulls away.

ASIA
You came!

ASIA (CONT'D)
Raphael, this is my best friend
Nina. Nina this is Raphael.

Nina stretches out her hand.

NINA
So nice to meet you.

He shakes her hand wanly and wanders away.

ASIA
What's doing?

NINA
Actually, I just met this really interesting freak.

ASIA

The only freak worth knowing this season...

NINA

Beautiful little boy...

ASIA

How old?

NINA

Nineteen.

ASIA

Nina! He's older than you. Little boy my...

NINA

He looks fourteen. Anyway. Beautiful little boy. Waiting at the shrink's when I came out. Cuts all over his arms. I mean they really stand out, this beautiful pale skin.

ASIA

You said he was beautiful already. You like him?

NINA

Oh God no. Far too mopey. But sort of fascinating. I was thinking perhaps we might adopt him.

ASIA

Does he want to be adopted?

NINA

EVERYBODY wants to be adopted. Everybody wants to believe their parents are really someone fabulous and important. We're fabulous and important.

Asia stares at her a beat too long because of course Leon Gross is fabulous and important. Nina knows what she's thinking and glosses over.

NINA (CONT'D)

Don't you think?

MEAN STYLIST

Asia, we need you.

ASIA

I'm needed.

NINA
Truly you are.

She kisses her on the mouth out of love. But for Asia we see in her eyes: hope.

INT.BLOOM HOUSE, EVENING

Amelia walks in, laden with designer shopping bags. The sound of typing echoing from Leon's office stops and he calls out

LEON
Where have you been?

She tiptoes into his office.

AMELIA
Out shopping.

LEON
Come here.

She walks towards him.

LEON (CONT'D)
Sit on my knee.

She happily complies.

LEON (CONT'D)
I've been writing more today.
It's just flowing.

AMELIA
I'm so glad, my love.

LEON
You want to hear something?

AMELIA
Always.

LEON
Always she wants to hear. Well, I think you'll like this one. It's a story about what happens to trophy wives once they get past the age of thirty-five...listen...

She interrupts.

AMELIA
Were you this cruel to her?

LEON

Sometimes. Not often. I've become far crueller since I've been with you. Or maybe it's just the ageing process. Mine and yours.

She smiles small and gets off him.

INT.GROSS HOUSE, SATURDAY MORNING

AMELIA

Nina are you coming swimming with us or not?

Nina shouts from the top of the stairs

NINA

NO! I said no already!

INT.SWIMMING POOL DRESSING ROOM

The changing room is full of girls changing after swimming. Old, be-capped ladies barely mask their irritation as clusters of teenage girls hoot and holler. Amelia is changing as Joel watches her intensely. He looks from the teenage girls to her. She looks at him as if to say "what?" He points at her.

JOEL

Why are they saggy?

Amelia hurriedly finishes changing. Her hair is still wet as she walks towards her car. They pass Mr.Slattery, who has a gym bag over his shoulder.

MR.SLATTERY

Hey!

She keeps walking.

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)

Mrs.Gross!

She turns. She doesn't register.

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)

Dennis Slattery? English teacher?

She wears an expression like he's trying to sell her something.

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)

Nina's English teacher?

AMELIA
Ah yes. The book thief.

She keeps walking.

AMELIA (CONT'D)
Do you need a ride?

He scurries to catch up with her.

MR.SLATTERY
I was going to walk. But...

AMELIA
Get in.

She secures Joel into the back of her Porsche as Slattery straps himself into the passenger seat.

MR.SLATTERY
Your hair's wet.

AMELIA
I've been swimming.

She starts to pull out of the parking lot, silent until they hit the main road.

AMELIA (CONT'D)
How old are you, Mr.Slattery?

MR.SLATTERY
Funny you should ask. I'm nearly thirty.

AMELIA
I'm thirty-five.

MR.SLATTERY
How's it going for you?

She doesn't speak until she makes her turn.

AMELIA
I used to be seventeen.

He is confused. More silence.

MR.SLATTERY
Didn't that suck!

AMELIA
No. It was wonderful.

Silence.

MR.SLATTERY

I'm over here on the right.

AMELIA

I remember.

She pulls over outside his house. She looks back at Joel who has fallen asleep.

MR.SLATTERY

It's not going to be fun to wake him.

AMELIA

Have you ever felt like your life was becoming a landslide?

MR.SLATTERY

Yes.

She just nods her head. Then she turns to face him directly for the first time and stares at him. She is weighing something up. He is nervous. Looks like she might be about to kiss him. She doesn't.

AMELIA

I made a mistake.

MR.SLATTERY

Just one?

AMELIA

A big one.

MR.SLATTERY

What did you do?

AMELIA

I got involved with someone with a big age difference. It shouldn't have happened.

Slattery looks back nervously at sleeping Joel.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

I need to be with someone my own age. I *need* to. I need to be made love to. You know the kind of sex that rearranges the chemistry of your body?

He stares at her. Then at his shoes. Then at her again.

She opens the door and lets him out.

INT.BAR, EVENING

Asia and Nina sneak in with fake ID's and a ridiculous amount of make-up. They find Zach is by himself at the bar, drinking.

NINA
That's him.

They walk over.

NINA (CONT'D)
You came.

ZACH
You tracked me down.

NINA
It wasn't hard.

He has clearly already had quite a lot to drink. The white lines on his arms are bubbling up.

ASIA
Oh my God! What is that?

ZACH
Just a reaction with the alcohol.
It happens sometimes.

NINA
That's awesome!

ZACH
It isn't.

NINA
Pretty good party trick.

She shrugs.

NINA (CONT'D)
You want us to leave you alone?

He pays for his drink.

ZACH
No.

INT.ASIA'S BEETLE

They're parked at the back of an empty lot. Asia's in the front seat, like a chauffeur. Nina and Zach are in the back.

NINA
This is Asia's car.

ZACH
It's nice.

NINA
It's her actual car that she
bought with her money. No-one
else paid for it.

ZACH
Why would they?

ASIA
I'm doing modelling right now.
It's stupid, but it will pay for
college.

ZACH
I don't think it's stupid at all.
I collect photos of models.

NINA
Oh my god, that's so sad!

ASIA
Thanks a lot!

NINA
No, but come on...

ZACH
My favourite right now is Daria
Werbowy, but historically my
favourite is Jerry Hall. She
looks like she would overwhelm
you.

At this, Nina kisses Zach hard on the mouth. His response
is dead. She takes his hand and puts it on her breast.
Nothing. Asia looks away, intently staring out at the sky.

NINA
Are you gay? That's okay you
know. But save me the wasted
time.

ZACH
You don't strike me as much of a
time waster.

ASIA
Excuse her. She has ADD. Can I
go?

ZACH
What do you have?

NINA
Attention deficit disorder. ADD
just takes less time to say.
Don't go Asia!

He turns to face Asia, flashing his Bambi eyes.

ZACH
Don't go, Asia.

Watching in the rear view mirror, she notices Zach stealing glances at Asia. Although Nina is not attracted to him, she is jealous.

NINA
I told you, right, Zach and I
have the same shrink?

ASIA
Uh-huh. I'm waiting for the day I
can afford to go too.

NINA
I gotta say, there is something
worthwhile about employing
someone whose job is to listen to
your problems.

ZACH
That something the shrink told
you?

NINA
Yes it is, actually.

ZACH
I shut it all out. I answer all
his questions but in my head, I
just hum the whole time.

NINA
And that's why you're doing so
well.

ZACH
You don't know how I'm doing. You
didn't know me before and you
don't know me now. You sure as
hell won't know me after.

ASIA
After what?

NINA
Let me out of here.

She fiddles with the door. Zach leans across, physically close to her, it's sexy, and lets her out.

NINA (CONT'D)
Do you have scars on the rest of you?

He lifts his shirt ever so slowly. Pure beautiful virgin white. She slams the door. He sits there for a while and as she walks away he climbs over the seat next to Asia. They start driving, opposite way from Nina.

INT. ZACH'S DORM ROOM.

Asia has no idea why she agreed to come here. It isn't what she wants. There are photos of models everywhere. To her horror, amongst the Marie Helvin's and Kate Moss's, Asia sees a photo of the young Amelia in her underwear at her model heyday. Then she notices it is signed. To Zach. Zach sees her notice it. He kisses her. She has her eyes open, looking at it, as she's being kissed.

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA, MORNING

MR.SLATTERY
I didn't know you ate breakfast here.

NINA
Sometimes.

MR.SLATTERY
I'm on morning duty.

NINA
What are your duties?

MR.SLATTERY
Got to make sure no-one throws food at anyone else and that no-one throws up food.

NINA
How's it going for ya?

MR.SLATTERY
You sound more and more teenage every day.

NINA
You say that. I don't know how to take it.

MR.SLATTERY

It's good. It's a good thing. It makes me happy. Because I worry about you and your brilliant mind.

NINA

You do?

MR.SLATTERY

Of course I think you are. Brilliant.

NINA

No. I mean: you worry about me?

By this she means "You think about me?" He knows it.

Beat

MR.SLATTERY

You ready for the trip to the city?

NINA

Super excited. I've not been to the Guggenheim since I was a little girl.

MR.SLATTERY

That surprises me.

NINA

Don't be surprised. I'm really a philistine.

Beat

NINA (CONT'D)

So's Leon.

NINA (CONT'D)

Where will we be staying?

MR.SLATTERY

I guess we'll stay the night in some delightful inn befitting you fine young ladies.

NINA

Again Howard Johnson's. Just like the trip to the opera last year.

He looks blank.

NINA (CONT'D)
You hadn't been invented yet.

He chooses to ignore this.

MR.SLATTERY
I saw your stepmother yesterday.
Did she say anything?

NINA
I didn't see her. Why would she
say anything?

MR.SLATTERY
She wouldn't say anything if you
didn't see her.

NINA
She talks to herself.

MR.SLATTERY
Being married to your father, she
would have to talk to herself.

NINA
What do you mean?

MR.SLATTERY
I mean, to get a word in
edgeways.

NINA
You don't know anything about my
father. You've read all his
books, right?

Slattery nods.

NINA (CONT'D)
You know nothing.

INT.LEON'S OFFICE, MORNING

Voice off screen of Amelia

AMELIA
Timothy Seifert is on the phone.

LEON
I don't know any Timothy Seifert.

Amelia walks in holding coffee for him.

AMELIA
Your daughter's psychiatrist.
We've visited him several times?

LEON
Put him through.

She walks out feeling like a secretary.

LEON (CONT'D)
Hello Mr.Seifer. Excuse me,
Seifert. What can I do you for?

He holds the phone away from him.

LEON (CONT'D)
Well that's good to hear. Uh-huh.
Uh-huh. Of course. If you think
it would help her work through
the...uh...grief.

He yells

LEON (CONT'D)
Amelia, are we free this friday
at 4.30? We're free. Good enough.

He hangs up.

INT.BOOKSTORE

Slattery browses the art section, picking up a book on the
Guggenheim collection.

INT.SLATTERY'S APT, EVE

Book in hand, he walks in to find ansaphone blinking. One
message. He presses play and hears Juliet's voice.

JULIET
I got your letter. Um...Why? Why
would I want to be friends? You
don't want to marry me. You don't
want to be my boyfriend. You
don't even want to fuck me. I'm
over this Dennis. I'm over it.
Jesus Christ, I can smell the pot
through the ansaphone. I'm over
this and I'm over you. You need
to get help. Get help, Dennis.
Look in the mirror.

He looks in the mirror, which, as it so happens, is hung
over the telephone. Eyes bloodshot. Skin sallow. He can't
tear himself away. Then he starts to sneeze. At first an
"achoo". And soon something quite uncontrollable, all the
while watching his reflection in horror and confusion.

INT.NINA'S BEDROOM, NIGHT

Leon walks in as Nina is falling asleep.

NINA
Have you ever heard of knocking?

LEON
No. Is it like dadaism?

NINA
What do you want?

LEON
If I knew the answer to that I
wouldn't have to keep writing.

NINA
(under her breath) You don't have
to keep writing.

LEON
Hmm?

NINA
You don't HAVE to keep writing.
You just keep writing the same
book anyway.

LEON
You're probably right.

NINA
Why are you being so nice?

LEON
I feel bad that I never talked
about your mother's passing.

NINA
You did talk about it. In the
novel.

LEON
But not to you.

NINA
No.

LEON
Can I...can I try to make
recompense?

NINA
No.

He nods, leaves, and closes the door. She cries herself to sleep.

INT.COACH

Bus full of girls chattering on their way from Boston to New York. Nina and Asia are near the back, sharing an ipod, one earphone per person, listening and singing aloud to 'Umbrella' by Rihanna.

ASIA AND NINA
"ella-ella-ella!"

At the head of the bus, Slattery allows himself a small smile. Now and then he locks eyes with Nina.

INT. LEON AND AMELIA'S BEDROOM, DAY

Amelia is in her walk in closet.

AMELIA
It's time. Leon let's go.

LEON
Why are you getting all worried about what to wear? You think he cares?

AMELIA
Patent heels or maryjanes?

LEON
What are we going in to talk about your foot fetish? Or are we going in to talk about Nina?

AMELIA
Useless fucking Nina!

She straightens herself.

AMELIA (CONT'D)
We're going in to talk about Nina.

INT.SHRINK'S

They are seated on a cosy couch, too cosy. Leon looks ridiculous sunk down into the cushions. He tries to rearrange himself.

LEON
Wonderful business, psychiatry.
What's the great Tolstoy quote?
(MORE)

LEON (CONT'D)

"I Sit on a man's back, choking him and making him carry me and yet assure myself and others that I am very very sorry for him and wish to lighten his load by all means possible. Except by getting off his back".

SHRINK

I'll take your word for it. If ever there were anyone's word to take.

LEON

Good.

SHRINK

Have you had therapy Mr.Gross?

LEON

Fourty years of it.

SHRINK

So you had therapy when Mrs Gross passed away.

Amelia shifts uncomfortably.

LEON

No. No. I white knuckled it.

He looks at his hands.

SHRINK

Well, Nina seems to be white knuckling it, as you say, and she isn't doing quite as well as I'd like. She's not opening up to me. Of course it could be I'm the wrong person.

LEON

Of course.

SHRINK

But I felt before we came to that conclusion it would be worth my time talking to you.

AMELIA

About her.

SHRINK

No. That would, obviously, breach the doctor/patient confidentiality agreement. About you. Both of you.

Amelia shifts again.

CUT TO:

Amelia emerges from the office teary eyed. Leon follows behind, his face red with rage. On the way out they see Zach in the waiting room. He looks horrified when he sees her with Leon. Zach opens his mouth as if to talk to her. She brushes past him. Leon stares at him, his pale, cut arms. When they get outside he whispers

LEON
Poor little freak.

INT. OUTER NEW YORK COFFEE SHOP, LUNCH TIME.

The girls are spread out, so it's hard for the two teachers to keep an eye on all of them. Slattery looks incredibly nervous.

INT.GUGGENHEIM

As the groups of girls descend the curling ramp of the museum, Nina hangs back so that she is always looking over the balcony one floor at Slattery's head. He senses he is being looked at. He keeps looking at the painting in front of him. Finally, he has to look up. She does not look away. Calls down to him, so everyone hears and he blushes:

NINA
Happy birthday.

EXT.GUGGENHEIM

Nina is outside smoking. She waits for the rest of the girls to emerge. Asia sees how Nina looks at Slattery and she can't bear it. She has to loudly dress her down in front of him.

ASIA
Your tits look bigger. Are you stuffing your bra?

Nina doesn't answer, just stubs out her cigarette and slowly moves her gaze from him to her. Asia instantly looks ashamed.

INT.HOWARD JOHNSON'S

Nina and Asia pick a room together. Dressing for bed, Nina looks at herself in the mirror as though psyching herself up.

Asia falls asleep with her arms around Nina.

ASIA
I love you.

NINA
I love you too.

But when Asia is asleep, she creeps out from under her arms and out into the hall, picking up her ipod on the way. She opens the door of Mr.Slattery's room.

He is half asleep and wakes with a start.

MR.SLATTERY
What are you doing?

NINA
I can't sleep.

MR.SLATTERY
Well, I can.

She climbs onto the bed. He is under the covers, she over them.

NINA
Listen.

He is pretty much frozen with fear. She puts one ear piece in his ear and one in hers and they listen to Steely Dan. He enjoys it then takes it out. Setting himself up he says

MR.SLATTERY
This isn't going to help you get to sleep.

NINA
You got any pot?

MR.SLATTERY
No!

NINA
I think you do.

MR.SLATTERY
I think you need to go back to your room.

NINA
I think, you need to not celebrate your thirtieth birthday alone.

MR.SLATTERY
How did you know?

NINA
I know everything.

He blinks.

MR.SLATTERY
It's not a big deal.

NINA
Okay.

MR.SLATTERY
I've never been so afraid in my
life.

She puts her hand on his.

NINA
What are you afraid of?

MR.SLATTERY
That I'll never...

NINA
I mean, I know thirty is the
oldest you've ever been.

She opens the bedside drawer, pulls out a bible and a half
smoked joint. She lights it up. Takes a drag.

NINA (CONT'D)
I'll stay with you tonight so you
don't get scared.

MR.SLATTERY
NO.

She looks at him, straight in the eyes.

NINA
I've nothing much to offer.

She waits a beat. He is so freaked out by her, he can
barely hear properly, let alone speak.

NINA (CONT'D)
There's nothing much to take.

She smiles.

NINA (CONT'D)
But I absolutely love you.

He grimaces. She touches his hand.

NINA (CONT'D)
With eyes completely open. But
nervous all the same.

With her words, he is just floored by her. And as she gets what she wants, as he moves towards her with a kiss, he comes into sharp focus. Too sharp. To her own surprise, and to his horror, she does not respond as he kisses her on the mouth.

She pulls away and kisses him on the cheek.

MR.SLATTERY
I'm so sorry. I'm confused. I'm
so sorry I did that. What you
said...

NINA
Forget it.

MR.SLATTERY
Okay.

She hops out of bed, goes back to her room, without looking over her shoulder.

INT.NINA'S HOTEL ROOM

Nina falls asleep in Asia's arms.

INT.SLATTERY'S HOTEL ROOM

He is up all night.

INT.NINA'S HOTEL ROOM

When she and Asia wake up, Nina is rolled towards the wall. Asia is spooning her. Without turning to face Asia the first words out of her mouth are

NINA
Did you make out with Zach after
I left?

Silence.

ASIA
Yes.

NINA
Was it fun?

ASIA
No. It was sad.

Asia starts to cry.

ASIA (CONT'D)
Don't be mad, Nina. The whole
time I wished...I wished that he
was...

She turns to face Asia.

NINA
Shhh. Shhh, don't say it. You
don't need to say it.

She strokes her hair.

NINA (CONT'D)
I love you as much as I can love
you. And beyond that, there will
be someone, someone very soon,
who...

ASIA
Let's just go back to sleep.

NINA
Okay, baby. Okay.

INT.SLATTERY'S APT.

He walks in, blood drained from face, and all but falls into the "arms" of his cat at the door. He picks her up and holds her tight to him. Almost immediately he starts sneezing. He holds her away from him, aghast, searching her whiskered face for clues. In his peripheral vision, he sees, stacked in the corner, his vinyl collection. Something makes him put down the cat, walk to the records, and start flicking through. He flicks and flicks until he gets to one (we don't see yet what it is).

He puts it on the turntable. First we hear the needle in the grooves. Then we hear the start of the song, no words yet. He picks up the needle, moves it forward, a look of fear in his eyes. Then we hear it:

"I've nothing much to offer/There's nothing much to take/I absolutely love you/With eyes completely open/But nervous all the same"....

It's exactly what Nina said to him in the hotel room.

We see the album cover in his hand: 'Absolute Beginners' by David Bowie.

He has to laugh out loud.

MR.SLATTERY
Little bitch!

He sneezes.

INT.DOCTOR'S OFFICE

Slattery is slumped at the doctor's desk as the doctor goes over a set of results.

MR.SLATTERY
How, all of a sudden is it possible to be allergic to the cat that I've had for twelve years? It doesn't make sense.

DOCTOR
Well, the only sense it, it's just to do with ageing. Happens sometimes as you get older.

He can't quite take this in.

MR.SLATTERY
As my cat is ageing?

DOCTOR
No [confused by his confusion].
You. As you age.

MR.SLATTERY
What can I do about it?

DOCTOR
I can give you these pills to get you through as best as possible. But, honestly, I'd start looking for a good home for her. I love 'em, I'd take her myself if we didn't already have three.

MR.SLATTERY
I can't give her away.

DOCTOR
You don't want her if you can't, you know, engage with her.

INT. COFFEE SHOP, LUNCHTIME

Stricken, Slattery pops a pill from his prescription whilst he waits for his coffee to be handed over. Amelia is at the back. They see each other. Amelia has clearly been crying.

He doesn't want to see her but she wants to talk to him. She walks towards him as he swallows his pill, and clutches his arms as if she's going to faint. Just managing not to gag, he is polite as he can be but very much wants to get away, especially when he hears her opening line.

AMELIA

How was the New York trip?

MR.SLATTERY

[nervous...what has she heard?]
It was good.

AMELIA

I fucked that kid up.

MR.SLATTERY

[relieved it's not about him] I
don't think she's that fucked up.
I really don't. And if she is, it
isn't because of you.

AMELIA

You don't understand.

MR.SLATTERY

I don't understand.

He sneezes.

AMELIA

Go, now.

MR.SLATTERY

Okay.

The paper coffee cup is handed to him and he backs away. She is alone. Camera pans down and we see that Joel clings silently to her knee, calm for the first time. She closes her eyes, momentarily soothed. Then the din of the coffee shop comes back to her, and she gulps back tears.

INT.MR SLATTERY'S APT, LATE NIGHT

He is sadly posting a notice on a cat web forum, with the offender curled adoringly in his lap, as his eyes burn:

LOVING HOME WANTED FOR WORLD'S BEST CAT

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM, LATE NIGHT

Nina, hair in braids, in cherry print pyjamas, on her princess phone, laying on the floor of her bedroom. As young as she's ever looked.

Slattery's phone rings as he looks sadly at his cat notice.

NINA
Mr.Slattery? It's Nina.

MR.SLATTERY
It's late.

In every sense.

NINA
I know. Are you working on your
book?

He looks at the forum page and lies, such tenderness for
her, so eager to say "yes" to anything she wants.

MR.SLATTERY
Yes.

NINA
Mr.Slattery. The version I've
read...as it stands...is not
good.

Knife. Through. His. Heart.

MR.SLATTERY
Not good?

NINA
No. It's quite bad.

MR.SLATTERY
Why?

NINA
It's shallow, and rather
unfocused.

MR.SLATTERY
No. Why? Why are you telling me
this now?

NINA
Because you asked me and...

MR.SLATTERY
It's not because of the kiss?

NINA
...and, I'm ready to tell you
now. It just reads as insane. Do
you know what the definition of
insanity is?

MR.SLATTERY

I think so.

NINA

It's the inability to connect to another human being and the inability to love another human being. Have you loved another human? Not fallen in love, but loved them? They're different, Mr.Slattery. From the book, it seems as if you never have. I don't mean to be unkind.

He is silent.

NINA (CONT'D)

Have you ever lost someone close to you?

MR.SLATTERY

Not in my immediate family...

NINA

That's not what bereavement feels like either. I don't know why you wrote about it.

She puts the phone to her chest a moment as a tear rolls down her cheek. The other end of the wire, he knows that tear is there and he wants so badly to hold her, it erases his own hurt. Instead he says:

MR.SLATTERY

Juliet thought I was a brilliant writer.

Nina sucks back her tears, wipes her face with her sleeve.

NINA

With all due respect, Mr.Slattery, Juliet is only twenty-three. What the fuck does she know?

He smiles. He has to. She's so mad. And so lost. And so lovely.

MR.SLATTERY

Thank you for reading it.

A thought occurs...

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)

You'll definitely not show it to your father?

NINA
Why would I do that? I don't tell
him anything.

He never would have met him, anyway.

MR.SLATTERY
Okay.

NINA
Okay, Mr.Slattery. Good night.

MR.SLATTERY
Night....

He hangs up the receiver gently before finishing his
sentence:

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)
...love.

INT.SLATTERY'S APT.

An incredibly kind looking middle aged woman coaxes the cat
into a carrier case as Slattery watches from the edge of
the doorway.

KIND WOMAN
There you are my angel, off to
your new house. Daddy can visit
any time he likes.

MR.SLATTERY
I can't bear it. I just have to
walk away.

KIND WOMAN
But...

He calls from the other room:

MR.SLATTERY
Please just take her.

INT.SLATTERY'S APT.

He drinks a glass of whisky as he dangles a scratched cat
toy from his other hand. Something crosses his face. He
puts down the toy, and the drink. He goes to his desk
drawer and rummages to the bottom. And there, beneath his
college thesis, he finds his first edition, original and
well thumbed copy of 'Everything Must Go' by Leon Gross.

EXT, GROSS HOME, LUNCH TIME

Slattery walks up the winding path, step in front of step, letting his eyes close from time to time as though meditating on what he's about to do, 'Everything Must Go' in hand. He stands on the doorstep for a very long time before ringing the bell. No-one answers and he is about to walk away when Leon opens the door looking as though he's been awakened.

MR.SLATTERY

Mr.Gross?

He sees the book in his hand and eyes the stranger warily.

LEON

Yes?

MR.SLATTERY

I'm Nina's teacher.

LEON

Uh-huh.

MR.SLATTERY

Have I woken you?

LEON

Yes you did.

MR.SLATTERY

I'm very sorry.

LEON

You don't sound very sorry.

MR.SLATTERY

Well, I'm quite sorry. May I come in?

LEON

You may.

He leads him through the grand entrance and opulent living room in to his office. Slattery has dreamed of seeing this since he was a teenager. He looks like he's in Disney world. Leon's computer is on and this he eyes as though it were kryptonite.

MR.SLATTERY

Oh my God. Were you writing?

LEON

Yes. I'm a writer.

Slattery tries to compose himself.

MR.SLATTERY

I'm the one she gave the book to.

No response.

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)

It was a great book.

LEON

The New Yorker doesn't seem to think so.

MR.SLATTERY

The New Yorker can go fuck itself.

Nerves. But it makes Leon smile.

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)

You write every day?

LEON

As I said, I'm a writer. This is a good time to do it. My wife is out with my son and my daughter is out with her anger. I assume that's what you've come to talk about.

MR.SLATTERY

Actually, she's in Philosophy right now. At which she excels. Unlike English. She could be brilliant at it. But the shadow, I imagine, is very hard to escape. So she doesn't try at all.

He notices, on the shelves, Leon's dozens of books, printed in every conceivable language. His facade collapses.

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)

I used to stand outside your house when I was in college, hoping to see you. You're the last great American writer.

LEON

Oh dear. What will happen when I die?

MR.SLATTERY

I don't know. I don't know. I've wondered that. I jerked off to your first novel.

Nerves again. He wants to kick himself.

LEON

I don't know how to take that.

He frowns.

LEON (CONT'D)

Perhaps we'd better sit down.

He motions to the couch which is really more of a love seat. They sit uncomfortably close as though one is a teenager summoning up the courage to make a move on the other. Silence and twiddled thumbs as Leon waits for Slattery to speak.

MR.SLATTERY

Do you think an artist has to be a good person? I mean do you think it matters that James Brown was a wife beater?

LEON

An artist creates their own moral universe.

MR.SLATTERY

But what if you're not an artist? What if you're just an ordinary person?

LEON

Are you an ordinary person? You don't seem like one.

MR.SLATTERY

And if I'm not an ordinary person? And our two worlds collide? And your ambiguous moral universe over-laps with mine? Say I was connected to your daughter?

LEON

You are sleeping with my daughter?

MR.SLATTERY

God no! No! She's a young girl! I'm an old man.

Leon raises his bushy eyebrows. The camera sees Leon's age, the pores in his skin, his grey whiskers, his shaking hands. And it picks up Slattery's vibrance in a way it hasn't before.

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)
No. I said "connected". Your
second book, 'Reckonings',
weirdly enough it kind of
parallels my feelings. When I say
"connected", I speak, of course,
of love.

LEON
Of course.

MR.SLATTERY
I don't know what to do. Can you
help me?

LEON
This is a most unusual request,
you understand?

MR.SLATTERY
I understand.

LEON
Are you drunk?

MR.SLATTERY
Yes, yes I am.

LEON
Are you a drunkard?

MR.SLATTERY
No sir, not at all. I'm actually
a stoner. My girlfriend thinks
so.

Leon raises his eyebrows.

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)
My ex-girlfriend. [awkward beat]
Sign my book?

Leon signs without looking at it.

LEON
Mr.Slattery, I understand you are
enamoured of my work. Did you
ever want to be a writer?

Slattery looks at the signature.

MR.SLATTERY
Wow. Scribbly.

He looks up.

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)

Yes. I write. I am a writer. I wrote a book. Your daughter thinks it's bad. So I'm going to stop now. I wouldn't want to be anything other than a great writer. But I would also like to be a good person.

LEON

Not all of them are like me.

MR.SLATTERY

You know what you are?

LEON

I've read the books. Sometimes, when I can't sleep, I creep down here and read them translated into French.

Slattery nods, as though taking tea with a vicar.

LEON (CONT'D)

In French and Spanish. In Spanish I'm really quite sympathetic.

MR.SLATTERY

Nina's very gifted.

LEON

She's troubled. It's different. These qualities are easily confused in our culture.

MR.SLATTERY

She is not so troubled. And she is very gifted. She's extraordinarily compassionate. But you read that as troubled?

LEON

She makes her life harder than it need be.

MR.SLATTERY

Sir, her life has not been easy.

LEON

I went through it too.

MR.SLATTERY

You wrote through it. All she could do was live through it.

LEON

That was my wife.

MR.SLATTERY

That was her *mother*. God, what's wrong with you?

A key is heard in the door. It is Nina home early from school. Slattery, bounces up off the sofa gets and makes his way out as fast as possible, turning abruptly like a negligent party guest.

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)

Uh, yeah: thanks for having me.

NINA

What are you doing here?

MR.SLATTERY

I was just leaving.

He is out the door in a trice. Nina storms into her father's office, where he sits looking a little dazed.

NINA

What did he want?

Leon lies.

LEON

He thinks you're very gifted. He wants you to apply for the creative writing program at Yale. He says, in fact, you can go anywhere you want.

NINA

Really?

She sinks down into the place Slattery just vacated.

LEON

Yes. Really. I'm very proud of you.

A thought crosses her mind.

NINA

Dad. He was drunk. I could smell it.

LEON

So what are ya gonna do?

He holds his arms out to her, pulls her onto his lap and they hug.

INT.SLATTERY'S

He goes into his bedroom and flops onto the bed in his clothes. The cat litter tray makes him squeeze his eyes to keep from crying. But that's not what he's really crying about.

INT.LEON'S BEDROOM, NIGHT.

Amelia lays beside Leon, staring at the ceiling.

AMELIA
I've got to go.

LEON
I know.

AMELIA
I'm taking Joel.

He nods.

AMELIA (CONT'D)
You'll let me go?

He nods. They kiss.

AMELIA (CONT'D)
Sleep tight.

When she wakes up the next morning the bed is empty. He is already in his study. The door is closed. She goes and stands next to it with a cup of coffee and listens to the clacking of his typewriter. She lays a hand on the door, and decides to leave him be. Unbeknownst to her it is in fact Nina behind the door clacking away. Then she notices the car and Joel are gone. She runs back to the room.

AMELIA (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

NINA
I'm...

AMELIA
Where's Joel?

NINA
Dad took him out for breakfast.

AMELIA
Where did they go?

NINA
Where do they always go?

AMELIA
WHERE do they always go?!

NINA
The Ritz downtown.

INT.RESTAURANT

Joel and Leon being seated by fawning maitre di

WAITER
Pour l'enfant. Du poissons? Du
haricot vert?

JOEL (YELLS)
I want sausages!

Amelia jumps into her car, her hair wet and races there.
She walks in to find them paying the check. She's huffing
and puffing.

AMELIA
What's going on?

LEON
We had breakfast. And I explained
the situation.

Joel is snuggled against him.

JOEL
Daddy's an asshole.

AMELIA
No he's not. He's insecure and he
married too soon. He never got
over his first and greatest love.
Nor should he.

JOEL
He's an asshole. He said so.

She gives up.

AMELIA
Then it must be true.

INT.AU BON PAIN, AFTERNOON

The scene of their excruciating tea with Harvard girl. Now
it is just Nina and Leon, silent, comfortable.

NINA
Daddy, did you have a muse?

LEON
Your mother. For a time.

NINA
What happened?

LEON
I grew to love her. You don't write about people you love. As Muriel Spark said "Love is not the opposite of hate. The opposite of hate is indifference."

NINA
Where did she write that?

LEON
Oh, no she said it. To me.

NINA
Oh.

Pause.

NINA (CONT'D)
That's bullshit.

LEON
Well, it is and it isn't.

NINA
How? How can it be both?

LEON
Because life is full of grey areas.

She stares intently at her croissant.

NINA
Well, it is and it isn't.

LEON
Are you having an affair with your English teacher?

Girlish outrage.

NINA
No!

He is non-plussed.

LEON
But you thought about it.

NINA

No! I mean, no. For a minute there, perhaps. Yes I did. I think about him. But I'm not going to do anything.

LEON

He seems to care about you very much. Besides...you're going to be seventeen in two weeks. He's not old enough to be your father.

NINA

When you told me what he said, that I was good enough to apply for that writing program...

LEON

But I could have told you that...

NINA

But it doesn't mean anything from you.

Irony not lost on them.

LEON

I see.

NINA

You do?

LEON

Sort of.

NINA

I mean...you're my dad. And besides...your novels, dad, they're just not my kind of thing.

She looks up nervously from where she has been ripping a napkin to shreds.

NINA (CONT'D)

Is that okay?

LEON

Of course it's okay.

Silent tea drinking as each reflects on what has been said.

LEON (CONT'D)

So what about this Slattery? He's got himself pretty fucked up over you. You have to let old men down gently.

NINA
Don't worry, dad. He's a
gentleman. I'll figure it out.

LEON
You could always just graduate
and see where it goes.

She raises her eyebrows. He raises them back.

LEON (CONT'D)
Life is
very...fucking...sad...and you
have seen more than most your
age. If he would distract you
from that, for a long time, or a
little while, then he's okay by
me.

It's the closest Leon will ever come to talking about his
wife's death.

INT.SCHOOL, MORNING

Nina walks trepidously into the photocopying room. Slattery
looks up, a mess.

NINA
Mr. Slattery. Would it be
possible for you to meet me on
the lacrosse field tonight, at
9pm?

Terrified, he chokes out the answer.

MR.SLATTERY
Yes.

EXT.LACROSSE FIELD, NIGHT.

Slattery and Nina are laying side by side on the lacrosse
field at night. Stars in the sky. Moon bountiful and
bright. He has his head on Leon Gross' novel.

NINA
My father says it's okay. You and
me.

MR.SLATTERY
But it's not okay. Not with me.
It's totally inappropriate. It's
wrong. I would never do it and
it's driving me crazy.

She kisses him. She isn't scared this time. He's terrified.

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)

I don't know what you want from me?

NINA

Really? You really don't know? It's easy. I wanted to be admired. By someone I admire.

MR.SLATTERY

But it doesn't make sense...I'm nothing. I'm a shitty English teacher in a shitty all girl's prep school and I wrote half a book you think is shit. You have your father...

NINA

It's not the same. For you, but not for me. The other half of the book may come out brilliant, anyway. Old Juliet might be right about your talent.

He sits upright.

MR.SLATTERY

I admire you. I mean, you want me to tell you you're pretty? You're pretty. You didn't have to try and sleep with me for that.

NINA

Did I try and sleep with you?

MR.SLATTERY

I don't know. I think so. I'm not sure.

NINA

I think that I did.

MR.SLATTERY

Yeah. You did.

NINA

Did you want to?

MR.SLATTERY

Yeah. I did. Does that make me a bad person?

NINA

I'm not sure.

Breath.

NINA (CONT'D)

Mr.Slattery, I think you should try and smoke less pot. I think it's screwing up any writing skill you do have. I think it's why your book is so unfocused.

MR.SLATTERY

I know.

NINA

I think that you're a really good teacher.

He laser focuses on her.

MR.SLATTERY

You do?

He seems excited by this, as if he'd never thought of it before.

NINA

Yeah. You're good at it. Not just with the popular ones. You see us all. That's all I was waiting for. Was to be seen. Not every teacher is like that. You've been a gift. Why? Don't you like teaching?

MR.SLATTERY

Yeah. I do. But it's not what I meant to be.

NINA

I don't think we get to pick what it is that we're good at. The teacher you replaced, by the way, was awful.

MR.SLATTERY

I like teaching. That's weird. I never thought of it before you said it.

A thought clouds his face.

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)

And...you know I really *don't* like teenage girls. Juliet was twenty-three.

NINA

You said.

MR.SLATTERY

And she was all wrong for me.

NINA

Not many women would be right for you. If I leave when I graduate and never come back to you, will you get over it?

He laughs. Not mean. Just feeling utterly ridiculous, out on a lacrosse field with a sixteen year old girl, baring his soul.

MR.SLATTERY

I'd like to think so.

NINA

Good. I want you to. I want you to be happy.

She rolls over onto her stomach. He looks at the Hebrew tattoo he had asked about before.

MR.SLATTERY

It's for your mother, you said? What does it say?

NINA

It isn't for my mother. It's to piss off my father. I did it after she died but it doesn't say anything. I mean, it may say something. I just wanted someone to put needles in me. I found the writing on the back of a box of stale matzoh.

He puts his hand on her back.

MR.SLATTERY

This has been declared kosher.

He looks at her.

MR.SLATTERY (CONT'D)

Come here to me.

She snuggles up against him. He puts his arm around her, totally true in affection, lack of sleaze and real friendship, whatever else becomes of them. He holds Leon's book in other hand and starts to read the back copy.

NINA

I have a secret.

MR.SLATTERY

Mmm-hmm.

NINA
 You know Andy? The older guy I
 told you about? I never slept
 with him. I got scared.

They stare at the moon.

MR.SLATTERY
 I have a secret.

NINA
 Yes.

MR.SLATTERY
 Your father's new book...it
 wasn't that good. Not as bad as
 mine. But it wasn't good.

NINA
 It wasn't?

MR.SLATTERY
 No.

She smiles.

NINA
 You're not just saying that?

He shakes his head.

MR.SLATTERY
 But, you know, when I met him,
 when I finally met him, I liked
 him. I thought he would
 disappoint me, that he would have
 to. The old man surprised me.

NINA
 He's really not a bad guy.

Slattery puts the book aside, takes a deep breath and says

MR.SLATTERY
 You know what's great about your
 father?

Without missing a beat...

NINA
 Yes.

She draws her hand around in front of her and blocks out
 the moon with her palm. Screen falls dark.

THE END