

**MAN UNDER**

by

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FIRST DRAFT  
Registered WGAw

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FADE IN:

A MAP OF THE NEW YORK CITY SUBWAY SYSTEM.

Black DOTS that represent the stations, along with their names, speckle the train routes: blue, red, green, yellow, purple, and brown LINES.

Interwoven in some places, separating in others.

FOLLOW the lines through the five boroughs of the city: Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, and the Bronx.

We MOVE over the Bronx, heading NORTH, off the map, to...

ESTABLISHING: EXT. YONKERS PUBLIC LIBRARY - DAY

An impressive structure in this decidedly unimpressive city north of Manhattan. The neighborhoods here range from middle class to ghetto.

INT. OFFICE, YONKERS PUBLIC LIBRARY - DAY

CLOSE on a PLAQUE. It reads, "MIRIAM LOWE, HEAD LIBRARIAN."

PULL BACK on Miriam, at her desk, wearing reading glasses, engrossed in the latest issue of Progressive Librarian.

In her late 40s, Miriam is fastidious, but in a pleasant way. Her physical attractiveness is buried beneath a passive disregard for the superficial.

Other magazines and journals are neatly lined up in front of her: Library Quarterly, Library Philosophy and Practice, and Journal of Library Sciences.

The only personal items on her desk are framed PHOTOS of a young BOY and a slightly older GIRL.

There is a soft KNOCK on the door. Miriam looks up and smiles when she sees perky librarian PHOEBE, 30s.

PHOEBE

The elementary school class is here. They're so cute.

Miriam looks at her watch.

Phoebe leaves and Miriam neatens her desk, stacking her reading materials perfectly. She organizes her pencil cup full of identical pens, in a precise fan.

INT. YONKERS PUBLIC LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

Miriam walks like a queen through her castle, quickly glancing at her well-trained employees:

--Three LIBRARIANS at the front desk, checking out books.

--JUNIOR LIBRARIANS in the stacks, restocking books from wooden carts.

--Two LIBRARIANS attending to PATRONS at the HELP DESK.

It's a tight ship. We may or may not notice that all the librarians happen to be very attractive women.

INT. CHILDREN'S READING ROOM - LATER

Miriam reads animatedly to a class of SECOND GRADERS from Shel Silverstein's, Where the Sidewalk Ends.

They sit on cushions, staring at Miriam with blank faces.

MIRIAM

(smiling)

I think we have time for one more.  
This is one of my favorites. It's  
called "Colors."

(beat)

'My skin is kind of sort of  
brownish pinkish yellowish white.  
My eyes are greyish blueish green,  
but I'm told they look orange in  
the night. My hair is reddish  
blondish brown, but it's silver  
when it's wet. And all the colors  
I am inside have not been invented  
yet.'

Miriam closes the book, trying to ignore the bored faces.

MIRIAM

Isn't it wonderful the way he uses  
words? Language can be so  
beautiful. It can take you to  
places you've never been, make you  
think about new things...

Miriam notices the TEACHER, in back, gesturing at her watch.

MIRIAM

Well, we're out of time. Have a  
great day and thank you so much for  
coming.

The kids JUMP UP and run for the exit. Miriam's smile fades as the room empties.

INT. HALLWAY, YONKERS PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

CLOSE on the face of a pretty GIRL, 16, whose expression is one of absolute disgust. We are looking UP at her.

PULL BACK to see what, or rather, who she is looking at...

WALLY LOWE, 14, a geeky freshman, down on one knee, as if proposing. Bizarrely chivalrous and confident. We recognize him from the photos on Miriam's desk.

WALLY

...Our breath shall intermix, our  
bosoms bound,/And our veins beat  
together; and our lips/With other  
eloquence than words, eclipse/The  
soul that burns between them...

The girl starts to walk away.

WALLY

So I guess this means you won't go  
on a date with me?

She turns back.

GIRL

Are you retarded?

And she's gone. Wally rises from his kneeling position, opens a notebook, and wearily CROSSES OFF a name from a list.

As he gets his bearings, he sees a group of senior BOYS heading right for him. Wally rolls his eyes.

SENIOR #1

(to Wally)

Fag.

WALLY

That's Wallace to you.

SENIOR #2

Girl.

SENIOR #3

Girly fag.

Senior #2 then PUSHES Wally, hard, sending him to the floor. His books scattering around him. But instead of scared, Wally looks bored.

WALLY.

Doesn't it get old? I got it. You hate me. Move on.

They stare at him.

WALLY

Fall in love. You'll be much nicer people.

SENIOR #1

You're a fucking freak.

As they walk away...

WALLY

And you're going to community college! If you're lucky!

But the seniors are already out of range. With a long sigh, Wally gets up and gathers his books.

INT. GYM, YONKERS PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL - SAME

A muscular, good-looking BOY, in shorts and a T-shirt, flirts with a gorgeous blonde GIRL with legs up to her neck during a game of VOLLEYBALL.

PAN ACROSS the gym to the benched players and STOP on...

JOY LOWE, 17, a junior, STARING at the muscular boy. He JUMPS to smash the ball and his shirt rises, revealing a set of six-pack ABS. A small bubble of DROOL forms on Joy's lip.

We recognize her as well from the photos on Miriam's desk. Joy is not quite as geeky as her brother, but it's close. She could be pretty, but didn't inherit the gene to care.

Joy focuses on this boy like a hormone-fueled stealth missile. Invisible, but unwavering in its course.

She snaps out of her trance when she hears her name...

GYM TEACHER (O.S.)

Lowe, you're in! Lowe...!

OBNOXIOUS GIRLS  
(coughing under their  
breath)  
Loser. Loser.

Joy gets off the bench and drags herself into the game. Then she gives the obnoxious girls THE FINGER. Times two.

INT. BASEMENT - SAME

CLOSE on the blank face of SHERMAN LOWE, mid 50s. But he looks fifteen years older.

Sherman sits in a worn La-Z-Boy in this wood-paneled basement, staring into space. Firmly entrenched in a deep depression.

Worn TRADE MYSTERY NOVELS are strewn on the floor.

He reaches into a zip-lock bag on his lap and pops two OXYCONTIN. Crunching them like candy.

Then he turns his head and stares at a PADLOCKED DOOR.

INT. NEWSTAND - LATER

Joy hides in a dark corner of a newsstand. As we get closer, we see what she's reading...Purve. A porn magazine for women with a ripped, naked man on the cover.

The torn, plastic wrapping is on the floor under her feet.

Suddenly, the male OWNER spots Joy and rushes towards her, GRABS the magazine out of her hands.

OWNER  
Get out! How many times do we have  
to go through this?!

JOY  
Can't I just buy it? I mean, you  
can't sell this copy now...

OWNER  
You're underage! Out!

JOY  
(whining)  
Come on, dude, just this once!

He stares daggers at her. She stares back, then starts to slink out.

OWNER  
Get a boyfriend!

He has touched a nerve.

JOY  
Thanks for rubbing it in, douche  
bag!

EXT. HOUSE, YONKERS - EARLY FRIDAY EVENING

A small, middle class home. The lawn is overgrown and the house is in desperate need of a paint job.

However, there is one thing that is pristine: An overdecorated, hand-painted SIGN hanging next to the door that reads, "The Lowes."

We MOVE through the door...

INT. LIVING ROOM, THE LOWES' HOUSE - SAME

...into the living room.

One wall is floor to ceiling SHELVES, overstuffed with a massive collection of BOOKS. Varied and numerous. They include worn, old paperbacks, hardcovers, best sellers, etc.

A closer look at a few of the titles:

A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, The Good Earth, Free to Be You and Me, Jane Eyre, War and Peace, The Giving Tree, and everything ever published by Judy Blume and Dorothy Parker.

Strewn around the functional, ugly furniture are dozens of homemade NEEDLEPOINT PILLOWS.

Most depict pithy sayings like, "Home is where the heart is," "Daddy's the boss but Mommy's the decision maker," and "Dog is God spelled backwards."

The rest of the pillows are embroidered with portraits of DOGS. Rather, the same dog. A black mutt.

The room is empty and shrouded in silence.

INT. BEDROOM - SAME

Miriam sits alone at a desk in the master bedroom, staring at a glowing computer screen.

PHOTOS of the same black mutt on the pillows sit on a shelf next to her. According to a custom-made picture frame, this is THE MUFFIN.

She has obviously passed away, as the area is a SHRINE, strewn with pictures, favorite chew toys, and a small urn.

Other shelves around the desk are impeccably organized with books on the library sciences, literary criticism, and classic literature.

CLOSE on computer screen: Miriam is trolling auctions on Ebay for RARE BOOKS she obviously can't afford.

At the moment, she closely watches the closing of an auction for a pristine first edition of Henry James', The Turn of the Screw. It sells for \$6,000.

INT. BEDROOM - SAME

In another bedroom, which we assume is Joy's by the canopy bed and floral wallpaper, CLOSE on a pair of writhing FEET at the end of the bed, sticking out of the sheets.

As we hear MOANING for a good minute, we LINGER over shelves of NON-FICTION BOOKS: history, politics, self-help, biographies.

Finally, the feet fall limp.

INT. BEDROOM - SAME

PAN OVER rows of poetry BOOKS: Tennyson, Rossetti, Browning, Shelley, Cummings, Plath, Sexton, Dickenson, Eliot.

PULL BACK on Wally WALKING around his room, reading from Shelley. His delivery is passionate, emotional, as if performing for an audience.

The room's decor is pure BOY. A cowboy motif throughout. As if nothing has changed since Wally was six.

As he reads from the same poem as earlier...

WALLY

...and the wells/Which boil under  
our being's inmost cells,/The  
fountains of our deepest life,  
shall be/Confused in Passion's  
golden purity...

...PAN UNDER the bed, where we see BOXES stuffed to the gills with random OBJECTS:

Baseball cards, rubber balls, women's scarves, hats, packages of dried fruit, postcards, office supplies, wind-up toys, make up, stickers, T-shirts.

INT. BASEMENT - SAME

Sherman sits on a folding chair at a card table, stuffing an envelope with CASH. He seals it, then affixes two stamps.

The envelope is pre-addressed with a computer label. Its destination somewhere in STATEN ISLAND. But there is no return address.

Beside this are extra supplies: a stack of empty, identically labelled envelopes and books of stamps.

INT. LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - LATER

Miriam, in a housedress and slippers, shuffles downstairs through the living room into the kitchen. Carrying a book.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Miriam READS as she mixes ground beef with a box of Hamburger Helper. Frozen green beans cook in a pot of boiling water.

At home, her perfectionism is limited to certain things. Cooking not being one of them.

INT. KITCHEN/BOTTOM OF STAIRCASE - LATER

Miriam shuffles out of the kitchen, where the table is now set, and stops at the bottom of the stairs. She YELLS upstairs and down to the basement.

MIRIAM

Okay!

INT. KITCHEN - MINUTES LATER

The Lowes sit at the table, eating: Hamburger Helper, overcooked string beans, and Diet Rite cola.

They all read while they eat:

Miriam is engrossed in Nabokov, Sherman reads one of his mystery novels, Joy underlines passages from the new Bob Woodward book, and Wally reads Dickens, for school.

The silence is almost unbearable until...

WALLY

I got an 'A' on my math test.

He looks around the table. No one responds.

WALLY  
Joy, how was your day?

JOY  
(not looking up)  
Sucked.

WALLY  
Shocking.  
(to Miriam)  
Mom?

MIRIAM  
What?

WALLY  
How was your day?

MIRIAM  
(going off)  
You should have seen these second  
graders I had today. They looked  
drugged. The public schools just  
keep deteriorating because this  
damn city is so corrupt. It kills  
me you two are getting a subpar  
education. It's completely  
unacceptable.

WALLY  
(raising his eyebrows)  
Okay.

Then the three of them stare at Sherman, with his head buried  
in his plate. He remains silent.

WALLY  
Dad, say something. I haven't  
heard you speak in like, two weeks.

MIRIAM  
(to Wally)  
Honey, it's not like two weeks.  
It's two weeks. Period.

Sherman lifts his head.

SHERMAN  
Something.

MIRIAM

God damn it, Sherman! You're a  
piece of furniture.

SHERMAN

Yeah? What kind?

MIRIAM

A rotting sofa.

Sherman nods, as if in agreement, then goes back to his food.

Wally, fed up, STANDS.

WALLY

I'd like to return to the land of  
the living.

(to Miriam)

May I be excused?

MIRIAM

You don't need my permission.

Wally exits and STOMPS upstairs to his room.

JOY

(looking at her watch)

In seven hours it'll be Friday.

Yey.

It's now official. Joy NEVER smiles.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Miriam brushes her teeth with an electric toothbrush. She carefully cleans each tooth, front and back.

The timer goes off. She goes one final round and spits.

INT. BATHROOM, BASEMENT - SAME

Sherman brushes his teeth with an old toothbrush. The bristles are flat. He does a quick once over and spits.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER

Miriam is in bed, alone, reading. She eventually puts down her book and blows a kiss to a photo of The Muffin.

Then she turns out the light, settling in under the blanket.

INT. BASEMENT - SAME

Sherman throws the pillows off a tattered couch and pulls out the BED. The sheets are already on it.

He tosses a pillow and a blanket on top, turns out the lights, and gets in. The pull-out squeaks under his weight.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - EARLY FRIDAY EVENING

Wally emerges from his room and sees Miriam walking down the stairs in her housedress, vinyl slippers, carrying a purse.

WALLY

(to Miriam)

*That's what you're wearing?*

MIRIAM

(turning around)

Yeah, so?

WALLY

We're going out in public.

MIRIAM

And that's a problem because...?

WALLY

(shaking his head)

We're hopeless.

EXT. DRIVEWAY, THE LOWES' HOUSE - EARLY FRIDAY EVENING

The family sits in their Toyota Corolla in the driveway. Miriam is in the driver's seat. Wally is next to her.

Sherman and Joy sit in the back.

JOY

What's the point of this?

WALLY

To see a movie. Like people do on Friday nights.

JOY

I don't want to.

MIRIAM

Me neither.

Sherman raises a finger in agreement.

WALLY

(profoundly annoyed)

Then why did you any of you even  
get in the car?

JOY

Because you made us.

WALLY

Mom, start the engine. We're  
going.

Miriam reluctantly turns the key in the ignition.

EXT. MOVIE THEATER - LATER

Wally stands on line for tickets. The run-down theater  
hasn't changed since it was built in the Seventies.

ANGLE ON COROLLA

Inside, Miriam, Joy, and Sherman sit in silence.

Miriam looks at Joy, then starts the engine.

JOY

You're really going to leave him  
here?

MIRIAM

We'll pick him up later. He'll be  
fine. He's always fine.

(beat)

Want me to drop you off somewhere?

JOY

The mall.

MIRIAM

You hate the mall.

ANGLE ON WALLY

He has just bought four tickets, then turns to find his  
family: the Toyota is DRIVING out of the parking lot.

Hurt, but not surprised, he looks down, shaking his head.

INT. MALL - LATER

Joy wanders around, passing Foot Locker, The Limited, and  
Forever 21.

The crowd is mostly packs of roaming teenagers. Joy stares at male faces as she passes. Cruising.

EXT. PARKING LOT, YONKERS PUBLIC LIBRARY - SAME

The Toyota is parked in the lot. We see Sherman through the window. His head scrunched against the window. Sleeping.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - SAME

Wally sits alone in the theater, watching a romantic comedy, munching on popcorn.

He glances stoically at the couples and families all around him. Then looks back at the screen and can't help but LAUGH at the film.

INT. YONKERS PUBLIC LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

Miriam walks through the library, open late on Fridays. It's practically empty.

She pauses when she notices that the few patrons there are mostly ELDERLY.

She quickly heads into the STACKS, finds an empty corner, and sits on the floor. Hiding.

As her eyes tear up, her breathing becomes progressively heavy. She's hyperventilating. Having a PANIC ATTACK.

EXT. STOOP, THE LOWES' HOUSE - SATURDAY MORNING

A large, black TRUNK hits the top step with a loud THUD. Above it is the FED EX MAN, ringing the doorbell.

After a moment, Miriam, in a robe, opens the door.

FED EX MAN  
Delivery for a Miriam Lowe?

Miriam looks down at the trunk, then back up at the FED EX man. Puzzled.

An electronic note pad appears under her face and she signs.

FED EX MAN  
Have a nice day.

And he's headed back to his truck. Miriam watches him for a moment, then examines the trunk...

The return address is a STORAGE FACILITY in Queens.

She tries to lift it, but it's too heavy. Miriam opens the screen door and yells in...

MIRIAM

Wally!

INT. LIVING ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Wally and Miriam carry the trunk inside and carefully put it down. Joy ambles in, wondering what's going on.

JOY

What is that?

MIRIAM

I'm not sure, but I think it's my camp trunk. From when I was a kid.

WALLY

So why'd it just...appear?

MIRIAM

I have no idea.

Wally is already ripping off the many layers of shipping tape covering the locks.

Joy and Miriam watch as Wally opens the trunk. His eyes light up...

WALLY

Oh my fucking God.

MIRIAM

Wallace. *Language.*

It's filled with fashionable, vintage CLOTHES and ACCESSORIES from the 60s and 70s.

MIRIAM

These were my mother's clothes. I always wondered what happened to this stuff. I guess it got lost.

Wally lifts out a patterned wrap dress...

WALLY

Diane Von Furstenberg....!

...a mod leather coat...

WALLY

Yves Saint Laurent....!

JOY  
(to Miriam)  
You were related to her?

MIRIAM  
So I was told.

JOY  
Maybe you were adopted.

MIRIAM  
It's entirely possible.

Meanwhile, Wally is beside himself, pulling out the vintage pieces and carefully laying them on the sofa:

Shift dresses, mini skirts, caftans, chunky sweaters, crochet tops, patent leather flats, handbags, scarves, hats, etc.

WALLY  
These are in pristine condition.  
Do you have any idea what these are worth? Dior, Pucci, Balenciaga, Roger Vivier!

JOY  
I have no idea what you're talking about.

MIRIAM  
(to Wally)  
Sweetheart, I don't care if you're gay. Just please tell me already. You're my son and I'll love you no matter what.

WALLY  
Mom, I'm not gay! Women love clothes and I love women. Do the math!

JOY  
You're a biological mutation.

Joy and Miriam rummage through the clothes. Joy puts on a hat, while Miriam parades around with one of the handbags.

MIRIAM  
This is kind of cool.

Joy and Miriam look at each other for a beat. Then both RIP OFF their clothes to play dress up like little kids.

Wally joins in, pulling pieces for each of them, urging them to try on outfits...

QUICK CUTS:

--Joy shows off an Hermes scarf tied around her head.

--Miriam parades around in a chic 70s caftan.

--Joy models a crochet vest over a Pucci dress.

As Wally pulls another outfit for Joy, Miriam pauses, watching her children having a great time.

MIRIAM  
(to herself)  
We should do this more.

INT. KITCHEN - SUNDAY MORNING

Miriam, vacant, sits at the table, drinking coffee.

Joy and Wally straggle in.

MIRIAM  
Morning.

WALLY  
Morning.

JOY  
Yeah. That.

They each pour themselves a cup of coffee and sit at the table. They both take it black.

MIRIAM  
I had the most disturbing dream last night. Your father was wearing one of the dresses from the trunk. And heels...

WALLY  
Ugh, with those hairy legs. That's disgusting.

JOY  
Was he carrying a purse?

Wally, then Miriam, burst out LAUGHING at the image. The mood has suddenly lightened.

There is now a spark of inspiration in Miriam's eye.

MIRIAM

Where is your father?

JOY

In the basement. Where he lives.

MIRIAM

Honey, that was rhetorical.

(to Wally)

Can you get him up here, please?

Wally rises with his mug, heads towards the basement door.

JOY

(whining)

Why? Can't he stay down there for a while? At least until I've had my coffee?

We hear THUMP, THUMP, THUMP as Sherman plods upstairs. He emerges with Wally behind him.

SHERMAN

What?

MIRIAM

(to the family)

I have an announcement. I've decided we're taking a day trip into Manhattan. I want to visit the Rose Reading Room at the public library. They've just revamped their research databases. And I think it'd be good for all of us to get out of this landfill they call a city.

JOY

Because Friday night was so successful.

WALLY

I'm in.

Miriam stares daggers at Joy.

JOY

Okay. Whatever.

Silence from Sherman. They all look at him.

SHERMAN

Have a nice time.

MIRIAM

(firmly)

Sherman, this is a *family* outing.  
And even though you're barely a  
member, you're still a Lowe,  
whether you like it or not.

Sherman closes his eyes in an attempt to shut out the world.  
Miriam removes a box of Aunt Jemima mix from a cabinet.

MIRIAM

Everyone sit. We're having  
pancakes.

INT. HALLWAY - LATER

Wally walks down the hall, holding items from the trunk.

WALLY

Time to get dressed, people!

He hands the Diane Von Furstenberg wrap dress and patent leather flats to Miriam in her room. Then he gives a shift dress, a chunky knit cardigan, and a Dior bag to Joy.

WALLY

(to Joy)

Wear those plain black flats you  
have. And when you're done come  
downstairs and we'll accessorize  
further.

(louder)

Oh, and both of you, don't forget  
to blow dry your hair!

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

Joy and Miriam, now in their assigned outfits, look  
incredibly stylish. Mother and daughter stare at each other.

JOY

Who are you?

MIRIAM

Who are you?

Wally looks dorky but cool in a slightly too small suit with  
a handkerchief in the jacket pocket and Converse sneakers.

As Wally hands Miriam the Yves Saint Laurent coat and Joy an  
Ali McGraw in Love Story knit hat, Sherman enters in a  
rumpled, dated suit.

JOY

Jesus, Dad. Where'd you get that?  
The Men's Warehouse?

SHERMAN

Yes. Twelve years ago. On sale.

JOY

(looking at Miriam)  
We are so, so sad.

WALLY

But not as sad as usual.

MIRIAM

I, for one, think we look  
fantastic.

Wally smiles at her.

EXT. BUS STOP, YONKERS - LATER

A BUS with MANHATTAN EXPRESS on its placard closes its doors and pulls away.

We see the Lowes inside, each in a window seat. All of them are reading.

EXT. YONKERS - LATER

The bus drives through a lower middle class neighborhood, then into a ghetto.

EXT. MAJOR DEEGAN EXPRESSWAY - LATER

The bus drives through the Bronx, passing Yankee Stadium.

EXT. BRONX - LATER

It crosses a bridge and enters Harlem at 138th Street.

EXT. HARLEM - LATER

The bus turns onto Fifth Avenue and heads downtown.

INT. BUS - LATER

CLOSE on WALLY, JOY, and MIRIAM as the scenery changes from upper Harlem to the grand apartments along Fifth Avenue. On the other side is leafy Central Park.

As the bus passes Bergdorf Goodman and Tiffany's, it's apparent they've entered another world.

Sherman is fast asleep in his seat.

INT. ROSE READING ROOM, NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY - LATER

CLOSE on a vivid, blue sky and puffy clouds.

PULL BACK on Miriam, Joy, Wally, and Sherman. They stand in this magnificent room, the length of two city blocks, LOOKING UP at the sky mural on the fifty two foot ceiling.

Rows of tall windows line the walls, letting in shafts of light that illuminate the room. Long, oak tables with bronze lamps are filled with PEOPLE. Overlaid with a soothing hush.

This is Mecca for Miriam. She's in awe.

MIRIAM

(whispering)

Absolutely no speaking above a whisper. I'm going to talk shop.

WALLY

(whispering)

I'm checking out the Shelley collection in room 319.

Wally leaves the room as Miriam heads for the main RESEARCH DESK. Sherman, bored, sits down.

JOY

(whispering to herself)

I'm going to look for cock.

Joy strolls down the central aisle, scanning male FACES.

EXT. NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY - LATER

The Lowes exit the library, walking down the steps, flanked by the famous stone lions. Onto Fifth Avenue.

SHERMAN

Well, that made my year.

Miriam walks uptown and the rest of the family follows. Navigating through the Sunday crowds, they don't see a woman walking towards them...

Beautiful, late 20s, Brooklyn hipster type. A manual 35mm Leica hangs around her neck. This is HELENA HOUSEMAN.

Helena stares at the Lowes as she passes them in SLOW MOTION. She and Wally make eye contact.

BACK TO REAL TIME

Then she stops, pauses, and turns back. Helena hurries towards Wally and taps him on the shoulder.

HELENA

Excuse me?

Wally turns. Miriam sees this and stops with Joy, who has to pull Sherman back.

HELENA

Hi. I'm a photographer and I was wondering if I could take a picture of you and your family?

WALLY

Right here?

Helena nods. She seems guarded, mysterious, even.

JOY

Why?

HELENA

Because you're the most interesting people I've seen in a long time.

JOY

As in...freaks?

HELENA

(ignoring Joy)

Is it okay?

It's not every day that complete strangers want to take their picture. Especially a woman this...alluring.

WALLY

Definitely.

Joy shrugs.

MIRIAM

(flattered)

Why not?

SHERMAN

Not on your life.

MIRIAM

(to Wally and Joy)

Who wants to have their picture  
taken?

Wally and Miriam RAISE their hands. Joy gives a sarcastic  
thumbs up.

MIRIAM

(to Sherman)

You're outvoted.

Sherman closes his eyes, hangs his head.

HELENA

Okay, then.

Helena leads the Lowes off to the side.

HELENA

(to Wally and Joy)

Can you guys stand in front of your  
parents? In two rows?

They quickly arrange themselves. Helena now stands a few  
feet away, puts the camera to her eye, and focuses.

HELENA

That's great. Just be yourselves.  
I mean, don't smile if you don't  
want to.

Wally and Miriam do smile, while Sherman and Joy look  
completely deadpan, like they always do. CLICK.

HELENA

Cool. Just a few more.

CLICK. CLICK. CLICK. Helena lowers the camera and takes a  
NOTEBOOK out of her bag.

She SCRIBBLES something in it. Then she hands Miriam a piece  
of PAPER and pen.

HELENA

Would you be willing to sign a  
release form? If the picture turns  
out well and I want to use it in a  
show or whatever, it says you won't  
sue me.

WALLY  
(quickly)  
We would never sue you.

SHERMAN  
Don't sign anything.

MIRIAM  
Hush. Let me read it.

Miriam skims the release form and SIGNS it, hands it back.

HELENA  
Thank you...  
(reading signature)  
...Mrs. Lowe. Have a nice Sunday.

As she starts to leave...

WALLY  
Wait! What's your name?

HELENA  
(turning back)  
Helena.

And then she's gone, swallowed up in the crowd. Wally is frozen, in awe.

WALLY  
That was the most beautiful woman I've ever seen.

INT. AN UNDETERMINED PLACE

CLOSE on black words on a white surface...

*"For me the subject of the picture is always more important than the picture. And more complicated." - Diane Arbus*

INT. DARKROOM - NIGHT

Helena is in a large darkroom, developing film in her underwear.

INT. BEDROOM, LOFT - LATER

The Diane Arbus quote is painted large on one of the walls.

A view of the BROOKLYN BRIDGE is seen from large windows.

Camera equipment is strewn on the floor.

REJECTION LETTERS cover another wall:

From galleries in multiple states, grant organizations, the International Center of Photography, and in the middle, separated from the others...

One from The Museum of Modern Art.

Helena lies on the bed in the center of the room. Flipping through the NOTEBOOK we saw her scribble in before.

We catch glimpses of small PROOF PRINTS taped to each page, with NOTES written around them.

HELENA  
(flipping)  
Shit...shit...total  
shit...shit...complete shit...

She stops on the last entry: the photo she took of the Lowes. CLOSE on the picture as Helena stares at it:

Sherman, Miriam, Wally, and Joy look at us in black and white with their varied expressions in their chic clothes. Sherman sticks out--he looks like a homeless person.

The image is strange, haunting, transformative. Fixing a moment in time on film now lost to life's fleeting nature.

INSERT CARD: **TWO MONTHS LATER**

INT. YONKERS PUBLIC LIBRARY - MORNING

CLOSE on a piece of an OBITUARY in The New York Times:  
"...is survived by parents, Marvin and Ariel..."

PULL BACK on Phoebe, the librarian, reading it behind the large front desk. Other LIBRARIANS are helping PATRONS.

Phoebe walks over to Miriam, alphabetizing payroll envelopes.

PHOEBE  
You have to see this, Mir. It's so sad.

Miriam gives her attractive employee more than a quick glance, then hands Phoebe her PAYCHECK.

Miriam reads the obit and her face GOES WHITE. We can't see the PHOTO that accompanies it.

MIRIAM  
Oh my God.

PHOEBE

What?

MIRIAM

I've met her.

INT. PHOTO GALLERIES, MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, MANHATTAN - SAME  
MOVE through the sterile, white rooms of MoMA'S photography  
wing. Famous, iconic IMAGES by August Sander, Lee  
Friedlander, Walker Evans hang on the walls.

A DOOR tucked in the back reads, "DEPARTMENT OF PHOTOGRAPHY."

INT. OFFICES, PHOTOGRAPHY DEPARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

ENTER the sleek, modern offices. All light wood, clean  
lines, zero clutter.

Adjacent to it is the HASSELBLAD PHOTOGRAPHY STUDY CENTER,  
already busy with RESEARCHERS and STUDENTS.

Through a series of hushed hallways we STOP on an open door  
with a modern font etched into frosted glass.

It reads, "NATHAN LUND. HEAD CURATOR."

INT. OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

NATHAN LUND, 39, British, dashing, sips his morning latte at  
his desk.

Behind him are large windows that look out onto 53rd Street.  
In front of the desk are two modern chairs and behind them, a  
long LIGHT BOX covered with slides.

On the opposite wall is a large, black and white framed  
PHOTOGRAPH of a woman on a city street, alone, in the dark:

Cindy Sherman's, Untitled Film Still #54, 1980. From the  
department's vast collection.

Nathan's male ASSISTANT, early 20s, enters with a stack of  
newspapers and art periodicals.

He places them on the desk but holds up The New York Times.

ASSISTANT

(pointing)

Remember her?

NATHAN  
(glancing)  
Can't say that I do.

ASSISTANT  
We...well, you...rejected her  
portfolio about three months ago.

Nathan now looks at the paper more carefully.

NATHAN  
And this is relevant because...?

ASSISTANT  
(awkwardly)  
If you don't mind me saying...since  
she's...dead...I thought her work  
was brilliant.

Nathan looks at him.

ASSISTANT  
And she never picked up her  
portfolio.

INT. KITCHEN, THE LOWES' HOUSE - NIGHT

The Lowes eat dinner. They all have books near their plates, but are more focused on the OBITUARY being passed around.

Now we get a clear view of it in Joy's hands: *it's Helena's.*

JOY  
Maybe we were so depressing she  
decided she couldn't live anymore.

Wally, practically in tears, GRABS the paper out of her hand.

WALLY  
She was murdered trying to take a  
picture! The guy had a gun! Did  
you even read this?!

MIRIAM  
And did you notice where?

Wally looks back at the obit again.

WALLY  
The Canal Street subway station...?

He looks up at Sherman, staring at him.

SHERMAN

What?!

WALLY

(unhinged)

That...place...

Sherman puts down his napkin and leaves, descending into the basement.

Miriam, Joy, and Wally watch him, but say nothing. Miriam takes Wally's hand, holds it.

WALLY

She was so young and beautiful  
and...it's just so tragic. It's  
almost...romantic...

Joy rolls her eyes.

MIRIAM

Sweetheart, there's nothing  
romantic about death. Ever.

INT. APARTMENT, CENTRAL PARK WEST, MANHATTAN - NIGHT

A palatial apartment on a high floor overlooking Central Park. All the mirrors are covered. GUESTS, elegantly dressed in black, sit shiva in the living room.

The DOORBELL rings and a MAID opens the door. More wealthy GUESTS arriving to pay their respects. A few younger boho types stand in the back of the group.

As the guests enter the living room, we hear snippets of conversation in hushed tones...

GUEST #1 (O.S.)

We're so sorry...

GUEST #2 (O.S.)

She was so talented...

GUEST #3 (O.S.)

...such a waste...

INT. HALLWAYS - CONTINUOUS

The maid now walks through a series of hallways. We hear Tchaikovsky's, "Swan Lake" getting louder.

She quietly opens a door to find...

INT. STUDIO - SAME

A girl, in a leotard, tights, and toe shoes DANCING in this enormous ballet studio. Mirrors and a ballet bar stretch the length of one wall.

This is COCO HOUSEMAN, 14, the spitting image of her older sister.

She seems to be a professional, as demonstrated by her perfect point work, high leg extensions, and her exquisite pirouette turns...

She does TEN in a row. A spectacular thing to watch.

The maid looks at Coco with a mournful expression, then gently closes the door, unseen.

INT. DEPARTMENT OF PHOTOGRAPHY, MOMA - DAY

Nathan and his group of CURATORS and ASSISTANTS, arms crossed and holding MoMA coffee cups, stare at a group of PHOTOGRAPHS, pinned to the opposite wall in neat rows.

Nathan PACES, thinking.

CURATOR #1

She's a cross between Arbus and William Klein.

CURATOR #2

Exactly. Street portraiture but more deliberate and formal.

CURATOR #3

And with more studied emotion.

CURATOR #4

Gorgeous work.

CURATOR #2

The subjects are more varied than Klein, I think.

CURATOR #1

(to Nathan)

Now, why haven't we seen this before?

Nathan stops pacing and makes eye contact with his assistant.

NATHAN

Well, because...

He can't quite form the words.

NATHAN'S ASSISTANT  
(jumping in)  
Because he passed on it three  
months ago.

NATHAN  
Yes, thank you.

Everyone looks at him.

NATHAN  
Oh, bloody hell! I was wrong,  
okay? It's happened once or twice.  
You know how many portfolios pass  
through here. Anyway, the  
situation has been rectified...  
(more adamantly)  
Helena Houseman was a genius. An  
absolute genius. Find her family  
and get all the work she left.  
Everything.

Nathan's assistant smiles to himself.

INT. CAFETERIA, YONKERS PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Wally sits at a table, eating lunch and reading The New York Times. Joy sits at the other end, eating as well, reading The Partly Cloudy Patriot by Sarah Vowell.

It's just the two of them.

Normal high school socializing and chaos goes on around them. They are not a part of it.

Suddenly, someone from somewhere THROWS an open container of CHOCOLATE PUDDING at them and it SPLATS in front of Joy.

Joy whips around, yelling to no one in particular...

JOY  
What are you, like, five?!

WALLY  
Just ignore them. They're idiots.

Still reading, Wally STOPS on something, his eyes going wide.

WALLY  
Look at this...

JOY

No. I hate that Maureen Dowd chick. She's smug.

He jumps up and shoves the paper in front of Joy.

CLOSE on article: the headline reads, "Slain Photographer to Have Posthumous Show at MoMA."

WALLY

You know how huge this is? Helena's work has barely had any exposure and now she gets a solo show at MoMA?! It has one of the most important collections of photography in the world!

JOY

I guess dying's the way to go if you're a struggling artist.

WALLY

Take that back! Take it back!

JOY

Fine. Whatever.

Wally pulls out his cell phone and dials.

JOY

Who're you calling?

WALLY

Mom. We're going to the opening. You can wear Grandma's Pucci dress. And I have to get a new suit.

INT. BROOKS BROTHERS, WESTCHESTER MALL - DAY

Wally wanders around the suit department. A large messenger bag slung around his shoulder.

The store is relatively empty. A SALESMAN sees him.

SALESMAN

Can I help you, young man?

WALLY

Just looking, thanks.

Wally waits for the salesman to walk away, then quickly hones in on a rack of SEERSUCKER SUITS.

Wally finds his size and removes TWO. He looks around, then heads for the dressing room.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - MINUTES LATER

He stares into the full-length mirror, wearing one of the suits. He looks like a sophisticated young man of the world.

Wally then kneels down and peeks out from underneath the door. He scans the room, which appears empty.

Then he quickly opens his messenger bag and removes a small, fine SAW BLADE. He takes the jacket from the second suit and finds the white, plastic SECURITY TAG.

Wally quickly and expertly saws off the top of the CONE on one half. He carefully removes a spring and a shim from inside the tag, then shakes out the ball bearings.

The halves easily come apart and he shoves the jacket into his messenger bag. Then he starts working on the pants.

INT. BROOKS BROTHERS - MOMENTS LATER

Wally walks out of the dressing room, empty-handed. The same salesman approaches him.

SALESMAN

Anything work out for you?

WALLY

I tried a suit but the fit wasn't right. I left it in the room.

SALESMAN

Better luck next time.

Wally nods, then watches as the salesman enters the dressing room. He unclenches his fist and dumps the four halves of the broken SECURITY TAGS into a sale bin of ties.

Then ambles out of the store.

EXT. 53RD STREET, MANHATTAN - **THREE MONTHS LATER**

The Lowes walk up 53rd Street towards MoMA at night. Miriam and Joy are dressed to the nines in clothing from the trunk.

Wally looks fantastic in his new suit. And Sherman looks like he's from Yonkers.

Joy catches up with Wally.

JOY

Where'd you get the duds, stud?

WALLY

(quickly)

Salvation Army.

JOY

Looks new to me.

He throws her a look and walks faster. As they approach the museum, they see CROWDS forming outside and then...

MIRIAM

Holy mother of God.

WALLY

Is that us?

They are looking at the PHOTO that Helena took of them. Blown up HUGE and in all the front windows of the museum. It's the image that was chosen to advertise the exhibit.

The Lowes stare at it, in shock.

JOY

Shit! We've been outed.

MIRIAM

*Language.*

WALLY

No. Our...exoticism is being celebrated.

SHERMAN

I'm going home.

He starts to leave but Miriam GRABS his arm, in a vice grip.

They stare at each other. It's a showdown. Inevitably, Sherman takes a long, depressed breath and Miriam lets go of his arm. She wins.

Back to the PHOTO...

WALLY

We do look pretty damn good.

(beat)

Well, most of us.

JOY

You can see my zit.

MIRIAM

I should blow dry my hair every day.

The picture does portray them as cool and stylish. Except for Sherman, of course. But his homeless look somehow works in the image as a counterpoint to the rest of the family.

Wally turns and notices that some of the PEOPLE standing outside, smoking, recognize them. Heads turn.

INT. GALLERIES, MUSEUM OF MODERN ART - CONTINUOUS

The Lowes enter the crowded exhibit. Hundreds of well-dressed, sophisticated NEW YORKERS mingle and drink wine. Some nibble on gourmet finger food.

Helena's photographs, now blown up large and framed, are powerful. Confrontational. Portraying a wide range of the human condition.

MIRIAM

Remember everyone. Best behavior.

Wally immediately takes off to look at the work. Joy scans faces and after a few rejects, HONES IN on Nathan, working the crowd. Very handsome in his custom-made suit.

He recognizes the Lowes and makes a beeline for them.

NATHAN

(offering his hand to  
Miriam)

I'm Nathan Lund. I curated the show. So glad you could come.

MIRIAM

(shaking)

It's nice to meet you. It looks amazing.

From JOY'S POV:

Cue MUSIC. Nathan is bathed in a heavenly, golden LIGHT.

It's instant infatuation. He's older, worldly, and gorgeous.

BACK TO REALITY...

NATHAN

The portrait of your family is one of Helena's strongest.

(MORE)

NATHAN (cont'd)  
You're her defining image. As I'm  
sure you saw out front.

MIRIAM  
We did.  
(beat)  
Oh, how rude of me. This is my  
daughter Joy and my husband  
Sherman. My son Wally's here  
somewhere.

Nathan smiles at them.

NATHAN  
A pleasure to meet you both.

Joy can't speak and Sherman has no desire to.

NATHAN  
I'd like to show you around  
personally, if you don't mind?

MIRIAM  
That would be lovely.

Joy NODS. And nods. And nods.

INT. GALLERY - LATER

Nathan, Miriam, Joy, and Sherman stand in a group with four  
other GUESTS. In the middle of introductions...

NATHAN  
...this is Christopher Bray, one of  
the Photography Department's major  
donors and last, but certainly not  
least, Bea Schaffer. Manhattan's  
most esteemed book editor. Knopf  
is very lucky to have her.

BEA  
(to the Lowes)  
It's a pleasure. This must be so  
exciting for you.

As Joy keeps her gaze fixed on Nathan, Miriam stares at BEA,  
mid 30s, stunning, in a black Jil Sander suit and heels.

Miriam vaguely notices another attractive WOMAN, mid 20s,  
lurking behind Bea.

MIRIAM  
Um...yeah...yes, it is. Very  
surreal, actually.

BEA  
Are you from the city?

MIRIAM  
No. We live in...  
(beat)  
...Westchester.

BEA  
God, I love it there. My family  
used to have a house in Bedford  
where we kept our horses.

MIRIAM  
(covering her white lie)  
It is...lovely...

Sherman, meanwhile, skulks away as he pops two OxyContin,  
heading towards the BAR. No one notices.

INT. GALLERIES - LATER

Coco Houseman enters the exhibit, alone, in a Marc Jacobs  
dress and flats. She looks older than her age.

She walks around, looking at the photographs, and finds  
herself next to Wally, who examines a PHOTO of a WOMAN, 50s,  
standing in a park with her preening CAT, on a leash.

Coco stares at the image, then turns and sees Wally,  
examining his face.

COCO  
You're in the photo...in the  
window...

Wally turns and lays eyes on Coco. This beautiful, sad girl.  
It's love at first sight.

WALLY  
(proudly)  
I am.

COCO  
I'm Coco.

WALLY  
As in Chanel.

COCO  
So you're gay.

WALLY

Oh, no. I love women.

COCO

Oh.

(beat)

I'm Helena's younger sister.

Wally considers Coco for a moment.

WALLY

I'm so sorry for your loss. She was very talented...and very beautiful.

COCO

I know.

WALLY

She looked just like you.

Coco doesn't respond. She's in no mood to be hit on.

WALLY

I'm so rude...I'm Wallace Lowe. But people call me Wally. It's an honor.

He lifts her right hand and gently KISSES the top of it. Coco stares at him, not sure if he's a lunatic or a god.

WALLY

Are you here with your parents? They must be so proud. I mean, sad of course, but proud too.

She looks away.

COCO

No. They're in Fiji or somewhere. They couldn't handle this.

(beat)

They can't handle much.

WALLY

I'm sorry.

COCO

She was my best friend.

INT. GALLERIES - LATER

Joy STALKS Nathan around the galleries. Every time he stops to talk with someone, she hides behind GUESTS, peeking out to watch him.

Now Nathan looks up from his conversation and sees Joy. She's hard to miss in her brightly-colored Pucci dress. Her eyes go wide with embarrassment.

Busted, she scurries away as Nathan looks amused.

ANGLE ON MIRIAM

Now on her third glass of red wine, she checks out the crowd. Especially the women. And especially Bea, who stands in a corner, surrounded by a group of similarly chic women.

ANGLE ON SHERMAN

He sits in a corner, drinking. Wasted.

ANGLE ON JOY

She stands in one of the galleries, eavesdropping...

GUEST #1

...can you imagine what these pieces are going for?

GUEST #2

I heard the smaller ones start at ten thousand...

GUEST #3

If only I'd gotten in before she died. I read she had a few pieces in some gallery in Tribeca a few years ago.

GUEST #1

A friend of a friend told me that her plastic surgeon's daughter went to school with her. Dalton.

Bored, Joy moves to a different room. She spots Wally stuffing all his available pockets with exhibit BROCHURES.

INT. ENTRANCE TO EXHIBIT - LATER

The Lowes now all find themselves in the same place. Miriam looks like she's died and gone to heaven.

MIRIAM

This is incredible! These people...!

WALLY

They're all so attractive.

JOY

*It's smoking in here.*

Sherman sways from the combo of booze and pills.

SHERMAN

(slurring loudly)

I want my pajamas!

Miriam, Wally, and Joy cringe in embarrassment.

The surrounding GUESTS turn, hearing this, and recognize the Lowes. They instantly become the CENTER OF ATTENTION.

Everyone starts CHATTING them up, ignoring Sherman. Wally, Joy, and Miriam LOVE IT. They're eating it up.

OVERHEAD SHOT. Four people from Yonkers in the center of a large, buzzing circle of the creme de la creme of Manhattan.

INT. BUS, MOVING - LATER

The Lowes sit in the otherwise empty bus, going home. Again, they each have their own window seat.

ANGLE ON WALLY

He can barely contain himself as he stares at a cocktail napkin with Coco's PHONE NUMBER written on it. He fiddles with a few swizzle sticks he swiped from the bar.

ANGLE ON JOY

As she stares out the window...

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joy and Nathan FALL TOGETHER onto a plush bed, both naked, in a cheesy, choreographed way. Like bad porn.

Nathan stares into Joy's eyes.

NATHAN

You are so bloody beautiful.

They kiss, passionately, and then Nathan begins to work his way down her body. CLOSE on Joy's ecstatic FACE.

BACK TO BUS

Joy wears the same ecstatic face as in her FANTASY.

ANGLE ON MIRIAM

Topsy, she looks up at the ceiling, beaming...

FLASHBACK: INT. MOMA GALLERY - NIGHT

Miriam and Bea are deep in conversation as GUESTS mingle around them. The woman we saw earlier, lurking behind Bea, is still there in the background.

MIRIAM

...of course you have the expected demand for Nicholas Sparks and James Patterson, but I do see a lot of people reading the literary fiction...

BEA

I can't tell you how good it is to hear that. Most of the publishing industry isn't looking for the next Coetzee. They want Tuesdays with Morrie...

MIRIAM

I know. It seems like a miracle that any good literary fiction is published at all. God, what you do must be so thrilling.

BEA

It's pretty great. I've worked with Didion. How much better does it get, right? I also love Joyce, Faulkner...

MIRIAM

(interrupting)  
I love Joyce! And Austen and Bronte and I'm addicted to Fredric Jameson...

BEA

(interrupting)  
Oh my God! I wrote my thesis on Marxist criticism!  
(MORE)

BEA (cont'd)  
I know The Political Unconscious by  
heart! We have to get together!

Bea reaches into her clutch and pulls out her BUSINESS CARD.

In SLOW MOTION, she hands it to Miriam, who stares at it.  
Then Miriam looks up at Bea, with a kind of awe.

BACK TO THE BUS

Miriam is still looking up, beaming.

ANGLE ON SHERMAN

Passed out. Snoring.

INT. PATHMARK, YONKERS - LATE MORNING

A week later, Miriam pushes a shopping cart down the aisles of this grungy supermarket. She throws items in her cart, then checks them off her list.

INT. CASH REGISTER, PATHMARK - LATER

As Miriam is rung up by a CASHIER, she plucks COUPONS out of a plastic pouch, impeccably organized in categories.

Cardboard dividers separate them into TYPE of food item, then in descending order of AMOUNT and EXPIRATION DATE.

CASHIER  
(to Miriam)  
You're in luck. It's double coupon week.

MIRIAM  
It's not luck, actually. I only shop during double coupon week.

CASHIER  
Oh. Smart.

The cashier finishes up and hands Miriam the receipt.

CASHIER  
You've saved forty three dollars.

Miriam nods, satisfied, and pushes her cart out of the store.

EXT. PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Miriam finishes loading the trunk of the Corolla. As she closes it and walks to the driver's door, we see a lone bumper sticker on the back...

"PAY YOUR TAXES. ENDLESS WAR ISN'T CHEAP."

INT. TOYOTA COROLLA - CONTINUOUS

Miriam sits in the driver's seat, about to turn the key in the ignition. But she stops and looks around.

At all the beater cars in the lot, at all the unhappy, struggling PEOPLE doing their errands. Her face falls.

INT. LIVING ROOM, THE LOWES' HOUSE - SAME

Sherman, in his bathrobe, picks up the day's MAIL from the floor near the mail slot.

He quickly flips through it and pulls out an envelope: it's from the State of New York WORKER'S COMPENSATION office. Sherman's weekly disability check.

He carries the envelope with him back towards the basement and spots a BROCHURE from the exhibit on a side table.

Sherman picks it up and looks at the photograph on the front, staring at the image of himself.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

He now stands in the downstairs bathroom, staring at his reflection in the mirror. He wears the exact expression as in the picture: he looks like shit.

INT. LOFT BUILDING, TRIBECA - NIGHT

Nathan prepares a meal for one in his gourmet KITCHEN. It looks out into the rest of this enormous loft:

Modern furniture compliments modern ART and PHOTOGRAPHS showcased on the large walls.

The ultimate, high-end bachelor pad.

Nathan carries his dinner on fine china to the living room, where a place mat and glass of wine sit on the coffee table.

He turns on the plasma TV and eats as he watches the nightly news on the BBC.

INT. BAR, MANHATTAN - NIGHT

Bea and the woman we saw lurking in the background at the MoMA opening, sit in this upscale, intimate bar.

It takes a while to notice that all the patrons are women.

This woman, like Bea, is stylishly dressed, but even more so. She's a fashion victim. And trying to push back tears.

FASHION VICTIM

...but I don't understand...we have so much fun and...

BEA

(interrupting)

That's just it. Fun only goes so far. There's no substance to our relationship, Sadie.

(beat)

The only thing you read is US Weekly. You hate art, independent movies, the symphony...you've never read one book I've edited.

SADIE

What's your point?

BEA

You're young.

SADIE

My age never bothered you before.

BEA

I know. But over time...

(trying to be delicate)

...I've realized you're...a bit superficial. Look, I get it. You work at W. Your whole life is about the surface.

SADIE

That's not fair!

BEA

So you're not completely obsessed with shoes and bags and...?

SADIE

(interrupting)

Like you haven't benefitted.

BEA

Of course I have. You don't think I love the discounts and free clothes? Who wouldn't?

(beat)

But I'm more than that.

(MORE)

BEA (cont'd)  
I'm not just a Chloe skirt and  
sweater with a tongue.

Sadie begins to weep. Bea takes her hand.

BEA  
Sadie, we're just different.  
You're a beautiful woman and I know  
you'll find the right person.

SADIE  
But I want you. I love you.

Bea doesn't respond. She looks away.

SADIE  
You don't love me, do you?

Bea remains still. Sadie gets up, devastated.

SADIE  
I have to go. I can't look at you  
anymore.

BEA  
I'm so sorry...

SADIE  
And for the record, I'm not just a  
pair of Jimmy Choo ankle boots and  
a Fendi Spy bag!

Bea watches Sadie leave, then downs her vodka rocks.

A few WOMEN in the bar stare at her. She's single again.

INT. DANCE STUDIO - NIGHT

Coco DANCES. Like her life depends on it. She pirouettes and doesn't stop. Turning and turning and turning...

INT. YONKERS PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Wally stands in the hallway, handing out the BROCHURES from the exhibit like they're leaflets. Or trying to.

WALLY  
(to a passing girl)  
Brochure?  
(to a guy)  
Brochure?  
(to another girl)  
Brochure?

He has a taker. She looks at it, then DROPS IT on the floor as she walks away.

WALLY  
(to a guy)  
Brochure?

PAN down the hall. The floor is covered with them.

INT. HALLWAY, YONKERS PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL - SAME

Joy exits a classroom and heads for her locker. Suddenly, the hot abs guy from gym class earlier approaches her.

He holds up one of the brochures.

HOT GUY  
Hey...this is you, right?

Joy looks utterly shocked. He's actually TALKING to her.

JOY  
Uh, yeah.

HOT GUY  
So your picture's in a museum?

JOY  
Yeah.

HOT GUY  
(smiling at her)  
Cool.

She stares at him as he walks away. A SMIRK slowly spreads across her face. A monumental event.

She does a dorky round-the-world DANCE MOVE with her arms, her head moving in the opposite direction.

EXT. YONKERS PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL - MINUTES LATER

The back doors to the school FLY OPEN as the bell RINGS. Joy emerges with her knapsack. She's out of there.

INT. BUS, MOVING - LATER

Joy sits on the bus, heading into Manhattan.

EXT./INT. MOMA, MANHATTAN - LATER

Joy enters the museum and checks her bag at COAT CHECK.

## INT. PHOTOGRAPHY GALLERY - CONTINUOUS

She stands in the exhibit, in front of the Lowes' photo. The gallery is full of ART STUDENTS.

Suddenly, there's a TAP on her shoulder and she turns around. It's Nathan. Joy is so caught off guard she lets out a SCREAM. The art students stare at her.

NATHAN

Am I that scary?

JOY

(stammering)

No...I...it was...just...I didn't  
know you...were...

NATHAN

I apologize. So you've come to  
look at yourself, I gather?

Joy tries very hard to hide her nervousness. She's sweating through her clothes.

JOY

Yeah. And ditch school.

NATHAN

Ah. I remember it well.

Joy sort of nods and then, an awkward silence.

NATHAN

Okay, well. I was just popping out  
for a spot of coffee.

(beat)

Would you care to join me?

JOY

A spot of...? Um, sure.

NATHAN

Shall we?

He gestures for her to walk ahead. As soon as he can't see her face, Joy yells a SILENT, "Oh my God!"

## INT. FRONT DESK, YONKERS PUBLIC LIBRARY - SAME

Miriam, now at work, is being treated like a minor celebrity.

She signs an AUTOGRAPH for Phoebe on a poster for the exhibit. There is a stack of them that someone ordered from MoMA's gift shop.

PHOEBE

Mir, this is so exciting!

MIRIAM

It's just a photography show.

Another LIBRARIAN places a poster in front of Miriam to sign.

LIBRARIAN

No, it's not. Your family's going to become part of the permanent collection at MoMA!

MIRIAM

(signing)

Please. You make it sound like we're moving in.

But secretly, Miriam loves the attention. Posters are also tacked up everywhere around the library. And it's a lot busier than we've previously seen.

After she finishes signing, Miriam walks towards her office.

INT. MIRIAM'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

She removes something from her purse: Bea's business card.

She looks at it, then the phone, then shoves it back in her bag. She can't.

EXT. MANHATTAN STREET - CONTINUOUS

Nathan and Joy walk. She still can't believe he's right beside her.

NATHAN

How does it feel to see your face enlarged to the size of a melon on the wall of a museum?

JOY

Really weird.

NATHAN

Yes, I would think so. Now, your mother said you live in Westchester?

JOY

Technically. But not the rich part. We live in Yonkers.

NATHAN

Can't say I've ever been.

JOY

And you never should. It's a pit.

Nathan now notices she is dressed like her normal geeky self. Though her brand of geek could be considered fashionable in some parts of downtown New York and Brooklyn.

NATHAN

You're in high school, correct?

JOY

A junior. It sucks.

NATHAN

Why?

JOY

Well...I have no friends.

NATHAN

I find that hard to believe.

JOY

Why?

NATHAN

You seem like a very interesting person. And smart.

JOY

How would you know that?

NATHAN

I guess you could say I'm intuitive.

JOY

Smart and interesting don't cut it in the halls of public school these days. You need cool and pretty. Even dumb and pretty work.

NATHAN

I see. You don't play the popularity game.

JOY  
Can't. Don't have the goods.

They approach a NEWSTAND and Nathan stops, looks at Joy.

NATHAN  
Well, I think you're quite pretty.

Joy suddenly feels like she can't breathe. *Did he really just say that?*

Nathan, meanwhile, purchases stacks of NEWSPAPERS and MAGAZINES.

NATHAN  
I thought you might like to see all the coverage the show is getting. Helena has become a cult figure, literally overnight.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET, YONKERS - LATER

As Wally walks home from school, he takes out his cell phone and the NAPKIN with Coco's number on it.

He pauses, takes a breath, then dials. It's ringing.

INTERCUT: EXT. THE DALTON SCHOOL, MANHATTAN - SAME

Coco stands outside the gates of this tony private school. Smoking an American Spirit.

She's by herself, away from groups of STUDENTS flirting, talking on the phone, making plans.

Coco looks at the caller ID on her ringing phone.

COCO  
(answering)  
Hello?

WALLY (O.S.)  
(through phone)  
Coco?

COCO  
Who is this?

BACK TO WALLY

He nervously paces on the sidewalk.

WALLY  
(into phone)  
It's Wally Lowe? From your  
sister's photo exhibit?

Silence.

WALLY  
You gave me your number?

COCO (O.S.)  
Yeah. I remember.

WALLY  
I really enjoyed meeting you. How  
are you?

COCO (O.S.)  
In a depression. At least that's  
what my therapist said.

WALLY  
Did he give you anything?

COCO (O.S.)  
You mean drugs?

WALLY  
Yeah. Anti-depressants. I mean,  
of course you're depressed. Anyone  
would be in your situation. It's  
circumstantial.

COCO (O.S.)  
I self-medicate.

WALLY  
With what?

COCO (O.S.)  
That's personal.

WALLY  
Oh, right. Sure.  
(beat)  
I was thinking maybe...I could come  
into the city this weekend? On  
Saturday. If you want company.

Another silence. Wally waits on pins and needles.

COCO (O.S.)  
Sure.

WALLY

Great. That's great.

COCO (O.S.)

Text me and I'll text you back my address.

WALLY

I'll do it right now.

She hangs up. Wally grins, elated, and heads home.

INT. CAFE, MANHATTAN - SAME

Joy and Nathan sit in this upscale cafe, drinking lattes. Issues of New York Magazine, Vogue, Vanity Fair, The New York Observer and other publications are strewn on the table.

All are open to articles about Helena and her work. And most of them include the PHOTO of the Lowes.

Joy looks overwhelmed. But she's starting to seem more comfortable with Nathan.

NATHAN

You're famous.

JOY

This is crazy! Wally and my mother are going to die.

NATHAN

Speaking of which...did your mother name you Joy Lowe on purpose?

JOY

(rolling her eyes)

Totally. She thought it was funny. Word play and all that. She's a librarian.

NATHAN

And your father?

JOY

I'm going to pass on that one.

NATHAN

Fair enough. I've been meaning to ask one of you this...what was Helena like, when you met her?

JOY

I don't know but my brother had a hard on for her.

(beat)

She seemed okay, I guess. Kind of guarded. Her camera was cool, though.

NATHAN

Yes, a Leica. Some of the world's most famous photographers have used that camera.

(beat)

One of my favorite photographers once said that the camera has a power to it. That it has some slight magic, which does something to everyone around you.

JOY

I could use some magic.

NATHAN

I think you've already gotten some.

They lock eyes for a split second.

JOY

Are you single?

Nathan nods.

NATHAN

Are you?

Joy nods.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET, YONKERS - CONTINUOUS

Wally approaches his house and FREEZES. Does a double-take:

Sherman is MOWING THE LAWN in his robe.

Wally runs towards him, YELLING over the motor.

WALLY

Dad! Dad!

Sherman can't hear him, engrossed in his task. Wally stands in front of the mower.

WALLY

Dad!

Sherman now sees him, turns it off.

SHERMAN

What?

WALLY

What are you doing?

SHERMAN

What does it look like I'm doing?

WALLY

You're not in the basement.

Sherman gives his son a "duh" look.

WALLY

You had a psychotic break, didn't you? I mean, another one?

SHERMAN

You're in my way.

Sherman turns the mower back on and pushes it. Wally jumps out of the path.

Suddenly, a female NEIGHBOR, 70s, passes the house on her daily power walk. She wears two pound weights on her wrists.

She SCREAMS something at them, over the loud noise.

WALLY AND SHERMAN

What?!

She's still screaming. Profoundly annoyed, Sherman turns off the mower.

NEIGHBOR

...it's about god damned time!  
Your lawn always looks like shit!

Sherman gives the woman the FINGER. She FLIPS the bird back.

INT. KITCHEN, THE LOWES' HOUSE - NIGHT

The Lowes are eating take-out pizza for dinner. No books.

MIRIAM

(proudly)

I signed my first autograph today.

WALLY

I met Helena's younger sister at the opening and I'm seeing her this weekend in the city.

JOY

A boy talked to me in school.

SHERMAN

I mowed the lawn.

Dead silence. Miriam and Joy stare at him like he just admitted he had murdered someone. Wally keeps eating.

MIRIAM

Excuse me? I didn't see any mowed lawn.

SHERMAN

You didn't look.

Miriam and Joy glance at each other, then JUMP and RUN...

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

...into the living room. They part the curtains and indeed see that the lawn is freshly mowed.

Two SPRINKLERS are on, one on each side of the property.

MIRIAM

(yelling into the kitchen)  
The sprinklers weren't on when I got home!

SHERMAN (O.S.)

They're on a timer.

MIRIAM

How do I know you didn't hire someone?

Wally appears.

WALLY

I saw it with my own eyes. He mowed it.

MIRIAM

Do you think he had...?

WALLY  
(interrupting)  
No. That was my first question.  
I actually think he did something  
productive.

They look at each other, astounded and confused.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Miriam tosses and turns in bed. She can't sleep. She looks at the clock. It's 3:15 in the morning.

Miriam gets out of bed, puts on her robe.

INT. LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Miriam pads downstairs to fix herself a snack. She stops when she sees Sherman, at the kitchen table, eating cereal.

She watches him intensely. With a hint of longing for the other Sherman. The Sherman who used to be her husband.

Then she heads back upstairs to bed.

EXT. BUS STOP, YONKERS - LATE MORNING

Wally approaches the bus stop, carrying his messenger bag, and sees Joy, already sitting there.

JOY  
What are you doing here?

WALLY  
What are you doing here?

JOY  
(quickly)  
I'm doing research at the Museum of  
the City of New York for a paper.

Wally looks at Joy, not sure he believes her.

WALLY  
(boasting)  
I'm seeing Coco Houseman.

JOY  
Goody for you.

INT. HALLWAY, MANHATTAN - LATER

Wally gets off an elevator and sees only two doors. He approaches one and rings the doorbell.

As he waits, he notices the marble floor, the fresh flowers in a crystal vase, the antique table.

The door opens and Wally is greeted by the maid.

WALLY

(taken aback)

Hi. I'm here to see Coco.

MAID

Your name, please?

WALLY

Wally. Lowe.

INT. THE HOUSEMAN'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Wally enters and is BLOWN AWAY by the size and scope of the apartment. He's never been around this kind of wealth.

WALLY

This is incredible.

The maid smiles at him.

MAID

This way, Mr. Lowe.

WALLY

Please, call me Wally.

She leads him down a long hallway. At the end, the maid gestures to a closed door.

He BOWS to her, Asian style. She's not Asian.

WALLY

Thank you so much.

MAID

No, thank you, Wally.

He slowly opens the door and enters.

INT. COCO'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

He finds Coco lying on her bed, listening to Billie Holiday. The shades are closed in the semi-darkened room.

The walls are covered with ballet posters, pairs of used, hanging TOE SHOES and...

Helena's PHOTOS, framed. Some of them are her work and some are FAMILY PICTURES. Photos of Coco as a kid, Coco and Helena together, Coco and her friends.

WALLY

Hi, Coco.

She turns.

COCO

You came.

WALLY

Of course. I said I would.

(beat)

Your apartment is amazing. I can't believe you live here.

COCO

I hate it.

WALLY

Why?

COCO

It's a tomb.

Wally looks down.

WALLY

Where are your parents?

COCO

I don't know.

An awkward silence.

WALLY

Your maid seems very nice.

COCO

I love Josephine. She raised me.

Wally looks around the room.

WALLY

You dance?

COCO

Since I was eight.

WALLY

I've always wanted to go to the  
ballet.

COCO

I did the summer course at ABT.  
And out of that I got picked for  
the school.

WALLY

So you dance full time?

COCO

No, I didn't accept. Just wanted  
to see if I could get in. I didn't  
want to spend the rest of my life  
eating lettuce and vomiting at  
will.

WALLY

(nodding)

A wise choice.

Wally opens his messenger bag and takes out a BOOK, opens it.

WALLY

I brought poetry. If you'd like to  
hear some.

COCO

Uh, sure.

WALLY

I'll read from my favorite poem by  
Shelley. Do you know his work?

COCO

A little.

WALLY

I love Shelley because he was a  
rebel. He got kicked out of  
Oxford. Also because he was a  
passionately erotic idealist. His  
work is all about a remorseless  
quest. In his world, Eros always  
wins, desire never fails, and life  
is always confronted.

(beat)

My kind of guy.

Coco sits up a little.

EXT. BOATHOUSE RESTAURANT, CENTRAL PARK - SAME

Nathan and Joy have lunch, overlooking the lake, strewn with PEOPLE in rowboats. She's not sure if this is a date.

JOY

Have you ever done this boat thing?

NATHAN

Uh, yes, I have. Once.

JOY

With a woman?

NATHAN

(smiling)

Well, my male chums aren't really into being wined and dined.

JOY

(embarrassed)

Right.

NATHAN

May I inquire about something I've brought up before?

JOY

Sure.

NATHAN

Your father.

Joy looks away.

INT. COCO'S BEDROOM - LATER

Wally sits in a chair, reading to Coco, who now lies on her stomach, facing him.

This is from the same poem he practiced out loud in his room.

WALLY

...In one another's substance  
finding food,/Like flames too pure  
and light and unimbued/To nourish  
their bright lives with baser  
pray,/Which point to Heaven and  
cannot pass away;/One hope with two  
wills, one will beneath/Two  
overshadowing minds, one life, one  
death,/One Heaven, one Hell, one  
immortality,/And one  
annihilation...

Wally pauses, then closes the book. He looks up at Coco, still staring at him. She's never met anyone like him.

His heart is racing. Silence, then...

COCO

Want to go to a party tonight?

Wally nods, effusively.

WALLY

I just have to call my mom.

EXT. BOATHOUSE RESTAURANT, CENTRAL PARK - CONTINUOUS

Nathan proceeds with caution as Joy fiddles with her straw.

NATHAN

You'd still rather not?

A pause.

NATHAN

That bad?

Joy steels herself.

JOY

My father worked for the New York  
Transit System for thirty years.  
He drove subway trains. About  
three and a half years ago, he had  
a 12-9.

NATHAN

What's that?

JOY

It's code for 'Man Under.' A kid jumped onto the tracks. Committed suicide.

NATHAN

Jesus.

JOY

And my father had a breakdown or whatever you call it. He's been living in our basement ever since.

NATHAN

I'm so sorry. I had no idea.

Joy sips from her Diet Coke. She's surprised how good it feels to finally say these words.

JOY

When that kid died, my father did too. And he brought all of us down with him. We've been trying to get up ever since.

(beat)

In some weird way, I think Helena's photo is helping. Maybe.

(beat)

I don't know.

Joy looks down, trying to hide her teary eyes. After an awkward silence...

NATHAN

(motioning for the check)

I know just the thing.

INT. SAKS FIFTH AVENUE - LATER

Joy sits on a high stool, getting her MAKEUP done at the Stila counter. She stares straight ahead, freaked out, as the SALESWOMAN applies eye liner. Nathan looks on.

INT. SAKS FIFTH AVENUE - LATER

Now on another floor, Nathan helps Joy pick out clothing.

EXT. DRESSING ROOM - LATER

Joy walks out in her new outfit: \$200 jeans, a cashmere sweater, and very hip, knee-high boots.

She looks fantastic. Nathan is well pleased.

NATHAN  
You look smashing.

JOY  
I'm not your Eliza Doolittle, you know.

NATHAN  
I know that. I just thought a bit of retail therapy would do you some good. I like buying things for people. It makes me happy.

She looks at him, not sure how to take this.

JOY  
Why are you being so nice to me?

NATHAN  
(taken aback)  
Well, because...you're real. A breath of fresh air, if you will. It's very rare to find that in a person. Especially in New York.

INT. LOFT, DOWNTWON MANHATTAN - NIGHT

Coco and Wally, wide-eyed, enter this crowded loft party full of KIDS on the private school circuit.

There's a distinct sophistication here. Age these kids thirty years and this could be a country club.

SMOKE hangs in the air: cigarette, clove, and pot. The alcohol is top-shelf scotch, bourbon, and vodka. No keg or wine in a box.

As Coco and Wally move through the party, everyone LOOKS AT THEM. Some people nod, say hi, or just stare.

She, the elusive sister of the culture's newest cult figure, and he, a subject in the hottest exhibit in the city.

Coco pushes her way to the BAR, with Wally in tow.

COCO  
(to Wally)  
What do you want?

WALLY  
What are you having?

COCO

Grey goose martini, dirty, three  
olives.

WALLY

The same.

Now Wally looks around. An older preppy GUY, but definitely  
in high school, approaches.

PREPPY GUY

You're Wally Lowe.

WALLY

How do you know that?

PREPPY GUY

Dude, you're famous.

WALLY

(baffled)

Really?

PREPPY GUY

Are you with Coco?

WALLY

Uh...yeah.

PREPPY GUY

(sipping his scotch)

Cool. Let's hang later.

(gesturing)

We're over on the couches.

The preppy guy disappears in the crowd. Coco turns and hands  
Wally his drink. She holds up her glass in a TOAST.

COCO

To Helena.

WALLY

To Helena.

They clink and drink. Wally's first martini ever. After it  
slides down his throat, he chokes a little, then smiles.

WALLY

That's really good.

COCO

The key is the olive juice. You  
have to take it dirty.

WALLY

I fully agree.

Coco removes an open pack of American Spirits from her purse. She holds it out in front of him.

WALLY

I don't...sure.

He takes a cigarette, she puts one in her mouth, and lights them both. Wally takes a deep draw, and begins HACKING.

COCO

Too deep.

WALLY

(still coughing)

Yeah, I got that. What are these?

COCO

American Spirits. They use only organic tobacco. Like the Native Americans did.

INT. LOFT - LATER

Coco and Wally now sit on the couches with the preppy guy and his FRIENDS. All smoking and drinking.

With his third martini in one hand and a cigarette in the other, Wally blends right in. DRUNK and rattling on. Coco is silent.

WALLY

I say fuck it, let's all leave this fucked up country. Move to Canada or Australia!

PREPPY GUY

I veto Canada. Socialized medicine sucks. Australia is awesome but you know what's even better?

WALLY

What?

PREPPY GUY

New Zealand. Most gorgeous fucking place.

WALLY

And how cool is Peter Jackson?

PREPPY GUY

We should get the whole fucking  
island of Manhattan to move there.

WALLY

Let's go! Coco, are you in?

She raises her martini glass in response. Wally, drunk off his ass, STANDS on the couch. As if talking to the entire party, the entire world for that matter...

WALLY

In the perfect words of e.e. cummings...who knows if the moon's a balloon, coming out of a keen city in the sky--filled with pretty people? And if you and I should get into it, if they should take me and take you into their balloon, why then we'd go up higher with all the pretty people than houses and steeples and clouds: go sailing away and away and sailing into a keen city which nobody's ever visited, where always it's Spring and everyone's in love and flowers pick themselves.

Silence, then everyone breaks out into APPLAUSE. Wally looks at Coco, who smiles, and holds up his drink in a toast.

WALLY

These, these are my people!

INT. BASEMENT, THE LOWES' HOUSE - SAME

Sherman sits in his La-Z-Boy, staring at a KEY. After a few moments, he gets up and goes to the PADLOCKED DOOR we saw near the beginning.

Then he opens the lock and slowly, the door:

An elaborate TRAIN SET on the floor runs through miniature towns, parks, suburbs. Train memorabilia line the walls.

Everything is covered in a thick layer of DUST.

Sherman takes it all in. Then grabs a cloth from a worktable and lovingly DUSTS the trains, the tracks, the small buildings and toy people in the fake park.

As he works, he begins to CRY. Softly at first. Finally, he flips a SWITCH and the train starts to move around the tracks. Now he's SOBBING. It's hard to watch.

PULL BACK on the room, back into the basement, where Miriam stands, watching. As she slowly walks towards her husband, Sherman turns, sees her. He hides his face.

MIRIAM  
Sherman. It's okay...

SHERMAN  
Don't! Go away!

MIRIAM  
Sherman, I think we should...

SHERMAN  
(screaming)  
Leave me alone! Leave me alone!

Almost in tears herself, Miriam backs away, upstairs.

INT. MIRIAM'S OFFICE - MONDAY MORNING

Miriam is at her desk, staring at Bea's business card.

She takes a breath, then picks up the phone and dials. A WOMAN answers after the first ring.

WOMAN (O.S.)  
Bea Schaffer's office.

MIRIAM  
(into phone)  
Hi, I'm calling for Bea. It's  
Miriam Lowe. We met at Helena  
Houseman's opening at MoMA?

WOMAN (O.S)  
Please hold.

NPR comes on in place of hold music. Miriam nervously rearranges her pens in the holder. After a few moments...

BEA (O.S.)  
Miriam! I'm so glad you called.

MIRIAM  
I would have sooner but...work has  
been crazy.

BEA (O.S.)

Want to come in for lunch? My Wednesday just cancelled. I know this great new place.

MIRIAM

Yes...I, uh, just have to check my schedule...

Miriam holds the phone away from her ear and RUSTLES some papers on her desk.

MIRIAM

(into phone)

Wednesday would be great.

BEA (O.S.)

Meet me at my office around 12:30 and I'll show you around first.

MIRIAM

It's a date. I mean, I'll be there.

BEA (O.S.)

Looking forward to it.

Bea hangs up. Miriam can barely contain her excitement.

INT. CLASSROOM, YONKERS PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL ~ DAY

Science class has just been dismissed and Wally gathers his books. He's on cloud nine. Loving life.

The pretty girl who rejected Wally at the beginning approaches him.

GIRL

Hey.

WALLY

(confused)

Hey.

GIRL

You want to have lunch today?

WALLY

With you? I mean, with me?

GIRL

(smiling)

Yeah.

Wally suddenly understands he has unwittingly climbed the high school food chain.

WALLY

Why? You think I'm retarded.

GIRL

(backpedaling)

No....no....I didn't mean it....I was just....totally PMSing that day.

WALLY

Well, I can't. I'm seeing someone.

She watches as he saunters out of the room. Sweet revenge.

INT. LIVING ROOM, COCO'S APARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON

Coco and Wally each lie on a sofa in this enormous, formal room, staring at the ceiling.

WALLY

Does she still have a room here?  
The one she grew up in?

COCO

No. When she left she wanted everything gone.

WALLY

Why?

COCO

Because this wasn't her home anymore.

(beat)

Helena was the one who got out.

WALLY

From where?

COCO

(sadly)

Here. From....this. She was free. And she was able to express herself. On her own terms.

After a pause...

WALLY

Have you been to her apartment since...?

COCO

No.

WALLY

Why not?

COCO

I...can't.

WALLY

Maybe it would be good for you to be with her things. It could help you feel close to her. I'll go with you, if you want.

Coco stands and looks at Wally for a moment.

COCO

I have to pee.

She leaves the room. Wally stands and strolls around this lavish room full of expensive paintings and antiques.

Amongst a grouping of crystal collectibles on a table, he spots a small SILVER BOX, engraved with an "H."

Wally picks it up, opens it. It's lined with blue velvet. He looks around to see if anyone is around, then quickly shoves it in his bag on the floor.

INT. HALLWAY, INDUSTRIAL LOFT BUILDING, BROOKLYN - LATER

Coco opens a metal door and she and Wally enter.

INT. LOFT - CONTINUOUS

Coco tries the lights but the electricity has been shut off. She turns on a FLASHLIGHT she brought and shines it around:

This is Helena's loft. It looks untouched.

WALLY

Are you okay?

COCO

I don't know.

(beat)

I'm going to look around.

WALLY

Want me to go with you?

COCO

No.

Coco heads in one direction and Wally in another.

In the dark, he stumbles into Helena's bedroom, divided from the rest of the loft by Japanese screens.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Wally takes in the view. Then removes MATCHES he brought from his bag and lights the CANDLES scattered around.

He looks around at the open walk-in closet, the stacks of books, magazines, the boxes full of stuff, the quote painted on one wall, the letters covering the other.

Then he notices a door. Helena's darkroom.

INT. DARKROOM - CONTINUOUS

He enters and sets a candle on a table. It's strangely empty, except for the enlarger, sinks, chemicals, etc.

Then he notices a stack of PRINTS stacked on the floor. He picks them up and flips through them. They're rejects: too light, too dark, too flat, etc.

Some of them he recognizes from the show, but others are new:

PHOTOS of people on the fringes of New York society. The oddities. The outsiders. People like his family.

Wally looks away for a moment, then puts the photos down, and exits the darkroom...

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

...to find Coco there, taking down Helena's rejection letters. One by one.

WALLY

Want any help?

COCO

Okay.

Wally goes to her and begins removing thumbtacks from the wall, carefully placing each letter into a neat pile.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER

Coco and Wally sit on Helena's bed, SMOKING a joint. Wally coughs a lot. His first time.

Coco clutches the rejection letters to her chest, looking around the room with sadness, fear, reverence.

Wally offer her the joint.

COCO

No, I'm good.

He rests it on the edge of the night stand, then looks at Coco. Wally slowly leans in towards her. He is very close to her lips when she TURNS AWAY.

COCO

I can't right now.

WALLY

(embarrassed)

I'm sorry...I shouldn't have...

Very stoned, Wally stares out the window at the lights of the city and the Brooklyn Bridge.

EXT. BUS STOP, NEAR YONKERS LIBRARY - DAY

Miriam boards the MANHATTAN EXPRESS to meet Bea for lunch. She wears one of the dresses from the trunk and carries the Dior bag.

As the doors shut behind her...

EXT. BUS STOP - SAME

Sherman waits at the bus stop near the Lowes' house, on a bench, reading one of his mystery paperbacks and holding an envelope. He pops two OxyContin.

Another MANHATTAN EXPRESS bus arrives and Sherman gets on.

EXT. FIFTH AVENUE AND 59TH STREET, MANHATTAN - LATER

Miriam gets off the bus and heads towards the subway.

Not a minute later, another bus stops and Sherman steps off. He stands on the sidewalk, looking around. But doesn't see his wife, who crosses the street behind him.

EXT. FIFTH AVENUE - LATER

As Sherman walks downtown, he spots a MAILBOX on 57th Street.

He goes to it and as he opens the slot, we see what he is mailing: it's one of his pre-labelled Staten Island ENVELOPES we saw previously. Full of cash.

EXT. MOMA - LATER

Sherman stands outside the museum, staring at the large image in the window of himself and his family.

A MAN in a suit, carrying a briefcase, passes, then stops and turns around. He points to the photograph.

BRIEFCASE MAN

(to Sherman)

Are you...him?

SHERMAN

Um...yeah?

INT. WAITING AREA, RANDOM HOUSE - LATER

Miriam sits in the waiting area of the Knopf Publishing Group, fidgeting. Ground zero of the publishing world.

Cardboard reproductions of prestigious Knopf BOOKS line the walls. By authors such as John Cheever, Bill Clinton, Toni Morrison, John Updike, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

Copies of NEW RELEASES are stacked on the coffee table instead of magazines.

As Miriam skims a copy of Nora Ephron's, I Feel Bad About My Neck, a pretty WOMAN, early 20s, appears.

YOUNG WOMAN

Are you Miriam?

MIRIAM

(looking up)

Yes.

YOUNG WOMAN

I'm Alexandra, Bea's assistant?  
I'll take you back.

Miriam stands to follow her.

ALEXANDRA

I love your bag. Is that vintage?

Miriam smiles and nods.

INT. OFFICES, KNOPF PUBLISHING GROUP - CONTINUOUS

Miriam is speechless as she follows Alexandra through the maze of hallways. She tries to get a glimpse of the various offices as she passes by. This is where the magic happens.

Alexandra leads Miriam to the CORNER OFFICE.

ALEXANDRA

Would you like something to drink?

MIRIAM

No, thanks.

INT. BEA'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Miriam scans the enormous office, with windows on two walls, modern furniture, and most of all...BOOKS. Everywhere.

In glass-enclosed shelves, piled on the floor, stacked on windowsills.

Bea looks up from her desk, covered with MANUSCRIPTS, and sees Miriam, mesmerized.

BEA

I know, isn't it great! I broke through the glass ceiling. Come in, come in!

Miriam enters. She can't stop looking around.

MIRIAM

This is amazing. I can't believe you work here.

BEA

It loses its glamor when you've been editing for thirty-six hours straight and can't see anymore. But I'm not complaining.

Miriam notices something in one of the glass-enclosed cabinets and walks towards it.

MIRIAM

(in awe)

Are those...?

She studies shelves full of FIRST EDITIONS. Bea joins her.

BEA

It's only a small part of my collection. The rest are at home.

Miriam sees a first edition of The Turn of the Screw, amongst others.

MIRIAM

This went for six thousand on Ebay.

BEA

Sounds about right. You collect?

MIRIAM

Unfortunately, no. It's a very expensive hobby.

BEA

Indeed. Where do you think my bonuses go?

Bea looks at Miriam with a strange intensity.

BEA

It's really good to see you again.

MIRIAM

You too.

INT. RESTAURANT - LATER

Miriam and Bea are engrossed in conversation in this trendy lunch spot.

BEA

...there I was, right out of Vassar, and I'm getting coffee for Toni Morrison. I was in heaven!

MIRIAM

So you didn't go to grad school?

BEA

(shaking her head)

My thesis advisor said it was pointless. She hooked me up with a friend of hers at Random House. And fifteen years later, here I am.

MIRIAM

That's exactly why I want my kids to get into a top college.

(MORE)

MIRIAM (cont'd)

I'm sure they could get a good education at a state university, but they won't make the connections like at a Vassar or Brown.

BEA

So true. It's all about who you know.

(beat)

Where'd you go?

MIRIAM

University of Michigan. I got my masters there as well.

Bea smiles at Miriam, looking into her eyes. Miriam meets her gaze. Something is happening.

BEA

Have you ever thought about writing a book yourself?

MIRIAM

Oh, no.

BEA

Why not?

Miriam ponders this for the first time.

MIRIAM

Um...I don't know. I guess it never occurred to me. There's never been time and when my husband stopped working...

She doesn't finish her thought.

BEA

Do you have a good marriage?

MIRIAM

No. We're two strangers living under the same roof.

BEA

Is it too personal if I ask why you just don't get a divorce?

MIRIAM

Good question. I don't know. I think somewhere in the back of my head I thought things would eventually get better.

(MORE)

MIRIAM (cont'd)  
(shaking her head)  
Stupid.

BEA  
No, it's not. I've been there.  
Not married but...hoping that other  
person would come back to me. The  
woman I met and fell in love with.

Miriam pauses upon learning of Bea's sexual preference.

MIRIAM  
(nodding)  
Yeah.

She looks at Bea, not realizing she's blushing.

INT. CANAL STREET/LAFAYETTE STREET SUBWAY STATION - SAME

Sherman stands on the platform of the subway station where his career ended. And his life.

He watches TRAINS come in and out. He watches PEOPLE waiting, going about their day.

As another train approaches, Sherman leans in and gets a look at the DRIVER in the front car. Then closes his eyes, backing away. It's still painfully difficult.

He walks down the platform and STOPS when he sees...

A weathered, but still intact SHRINE to Helena. On the spot where she was killed:

Photos of her, candles that have long gone out, wilted flowers, notes from strangers.

Sherman squats down to get a closer look, carefully examining the items. His hand SHAKES as he picks up one of the notes:

*"You will live on in our hearts and your photographs. Thank you for giving us so much beauty in such an ugly world."*

Sherman puts the note down, haunted. Such an unbelievable coincidence. So much death in one place.

He adds his paperback to the shrine. His meager offering.

As he's about to stand, someone TAPS him on the shoulder. Sherman turns and sees a MAN, late 50s, in a New York Transit System uniform.

Sherman's old supervisor. He has a heavy Bronx accent.

SUPERVISOR

Sherman?

Sherman stands.

SHERMAN

Howard.

HOWARD

Long time.

SHERMAN

Yeah.

HOWARD

What are you doing here?

Sherman shrugs.

HOWARD

You look awful.

SHERMAN

Thanks.

HOWARD

Let's talk. I'll buy you a cup of coffee.

SHERMAN

Can't.

HOWARD

Why? You have someplace you have to be?

SHERMAN

No, but I have to...

HOWARD

(interrupting)

I won't take no for an answer.

INT. GREEK DINER - LATER

Sherman and Howard sit in a booth. Howard drinks his coffee. Sherman's is cold.

HOWARD

It's been what, three years? More?

SHERMAN

Something like that.

HOWARD

It's time you got back in the saddle.

SHERMAN

Says who?

HOWARD

You know, most guys who have 12-9's take time off, but they eventually come back.

SHERMAN

Do most of them end up in a lock down ward?

A pause.

HOWARD

And it's your fault he jumped, right?

SHERMAN

I'm not going there with you.

HOWARD

Yeah? Who else are you going to go there with?

SHERMAN

(standing)

I have a bus to catch.

HOWARD

The job is always there, Sherman. If you want it. We don't leave our own behind.

SHERMAN

(raising his voice)

Yeah? Then where have you been for the past three years?

Sherman leaves, SLAMMING the door behind him.

INT./EXT. CLASSROOM, YONKERS PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL ~ DAY

English class is over. Joy shoves her "A" paper into her knapsack and walks out. She FREEZES when she sees...

Nathan, outside the door. Waiting for her. Smiling. Joy can't hide her happiness, and shock, to see him.

Every GIRL who passes stares at Nathan. And Joy.

JOY

What are you doing here?!

NATHAN

You always come to my world. So I thought I'd come to yours.

Joy's face lights up.

JOY

This is like...illegal. I'm seventeen, you know?

NATHAN

Yes, I'm fully aware. Is it illegal to take you to lunch?

JOY

(with a sparkle in her eye)

I know just the place. But I'm afraid they don't have lattes.

INT. CAFETERIA, YONKERS PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL - LATER

Joy and Wally sit at their usual table, eating lunch. Except now, Nathan eats with them. Slumming, big time.

He drinks his pint of milk from the carton and picks at his mystery meat, amused.

NATHAN

It's god awful. You eat this every day?

JOY

I warned you. Pitsville.

There is a distinct buzzing in the cafeteria. All eyes are on them for once.

WALLY

I bet no one hurls a pudding bomb at us today.

NATHAN

People throw food at you?

JOY

They're all savages.

NATHAN

Apparently.

(looking around)

So where's the popular crowd?

JOY

All over. Like a rash.

(pointing)

See that table over there? All those girls with perfect hair and anorexic arms?

NATHAN

They seem quite ordinary.

WALLY

They are. They just don't know it.

A group of obnoxious GIRLS hover around Joy and Wally's table. Drooling over Nathan. What she's been waiting for...

JOY

(loudly, to Nathan)

See? This is what I mean. *Skank*.

NATHAN

(playing along)

Oh, *these* are the ones spreading herpes.

WALLY

(loudly)

Yes, that's definitely them.

(pointing)

See the sore on her lip? And I heard that one has chlamydia.

The girls, mortified, hurry away. Joy CACKLES, rubbing her hands together like a mad scientist.

INT. YONKERS PUBLIC LIBRARY - DAY

Miriam, at work, enters the children's section with a stack of BOOKS and sees two children, a BOY and a GIRL, reading at a small table. She STOPS and watches them. Then...

FLASHBACK: INT. YONKERS PUBLIC LIBRARY - LATE AFTERNOON

A younger Miriam enters the children's section, carrying a PBS tote bag. Ready to go home and sees...

Joy and Wally, 9 and 6, respectively, sitting at a small table, reading after school. Waiting for their mother.

Joy reads Blubber by Judy Blume and Wally reads Where the Sidewalk Ends. Both advanced readers for their age.

Miriam watches them with pure love. Her precious children.

BACK TO MIRIAM IN THE PRESENT

She approaches the young boy and girl and SITS with them in a tiny chair at the tiny table. Inquires what they're reading, engaging yet another generation in the wonder of books.

INT. KITCHEN, COCO'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A large group of TEENAGERS are hanging out in Coco's enormous kitchen. Sitting on the counters, standing. Drinking, smoking, flirting, etc.

Coco talks with a cute GUY while sipping a martini. She glances up when she sees Wally enter. He looks taken aback.

Coco excuses herself and goes to him.

COCO

Hey.

WALLY

Hey. I...uh...thought we were just going to hang out. Alone.

COCO

These are just people from school. It came together last minute.

WALLY

Oh. So these are your friends?

COCO

Not really.

She points to a make-shift bar.

COCO

Make yourself a drink and hang out.

Coco walks away.

WALLY

Uh, okay.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Wally wanders around with a drink in his hand. More people have arrived and it's hard to maneuver through the crowd.

He looks for Coco but she's nowhere to be found.

Wally awkwardly leans against a counter and sips from his drink, checking out the crowd.

These kids look a lot like the ones at the party he and Coco attended, but this time, no one's talking to him. No one knows who he is. Or cares.

Finally, Wally leaves the kitchen...

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

...and enters the dining room. There are a few people in there, including Coco, in a corner...

MAKING OUT with the cute guy she was talking to earlier.

Wally FREEZES. He almost drops his drink he's so stunned. Devastated, actually.

After a moment, he forces his feet to walk towards them. He approaches Coco and the guy and TAPS her on the shoulder.

She turns, sees Wally, and rolls her eyes. She's WASTED.

COCO

What?

WALLY

What...what are you doing?

COCO

Having fun.

WALLY

But...I thought...we  
were...together. We have fun. I  
mean, why would you do this  
with...him?

The guy Coco was kissing starts laughing.

COCO

Dude, we were hanging out. But it  
wasn't serious.

WALLY

I thought it was.

COCO

You were so weird it was kind of hot, okay? But come on. I mean, you're a total freak.

A few people around them LAUGH to themselves.

WALLY

(choking up)

But I thought...I thought you liked me...you're just drunk...and...

COCO

(interrupting)

I'm done with you. Move on, okay?

As Coco turns away...

WALLY

No! I will not move on! I love you! I've loved you since the first time I saw you!

COCO

Everyone at that opening, they didn't care about any of you! They were laughing at you! Your family's a bunch of losers!

Now everyone from inside the kitchen is around them, listening. It's so humiliating, it's just cruel.

WALLY

That's not true! That is NOT TRUE! That picture proves it! We are extraordinary people! We ARE!

Wally begins to CRY. The jig is up.

WALLY

Fine! I've been embarrassed and disappointed by my family my whole life! And I thought things had finally changed since the photo! But I guess not, as you so happily pointed out! I guess you did me a favor, telling me the truth!

Wally storms out of the dining room...

INT. FRONT HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

...into the entry way and out of the apartment.

Josephine, the maid, comes out from one of the back rooms, and stands there. Looking very, very sad.

EXT. NATHAN'S LOFT - SAME

Joy rings the bell, looking fantastically chic in the wrap dress from the trunk and the new boots Nathan bought for her.

Nathan opens the door, smiling.

NATHAN

Right on time. You look fabulous.

INT. LOFT - CONTINUOUS

She scans Nathan's home. She's never seen anything like it.

JOY

(in awe)

It's so...big. It looks like the museum.

NATHAN

Would you like a drink? I have Fiji water, Pellegrino, Diet Coke...

JOY

Diet coke. Thanks.

She glances at Nathan in the kitchen. He wears a crisp blue button down shirt and black pants.

Nathan pours himself a glass of wine, then brings both drinks to the living room. They both sit on the sofa, sipping.

JOY

Where are we going to dinner?

NATHAN

We have a reservation at Pastis. It's downtown. You'll love it.

JOY

Cool.

She smiles at him. Smitten. Overwhelmed with excitement.

He smiles back, with a hint of nervousness.

NATHAN

You really are very beautiful.

JOY

(melting inside)

No one's ever said that to me  
before. Except my mother.

Nathan slowly leans in towards Joy and KISSES her, lightly, on the lips.

After he pulls away, Joy's eyes are still closed, her lips still in a slight pucker. Waiting.

Suddenly, Nathan STANDS and downs his wine in one gulp. His face is sheet white.

NATHAN

Oh my bloody God. I can't do this.

He's growing agitated.

NATHAN

I'm sorry...I can't. I thought I could but it's wrong. It's inappropriate in twenty different ways...

Joy, eyes now open, looks like she's been shot.

JOY

What?

NATHAN

Joy. Darling. We cannot date.

JOY

(growing upset)

What do you mean? Look at how much time we spend together? You bought me clothes. You came to Yonkers!

NATHAN

I know. But I'm thirty nine years old. You're seventeen. You could be my daughter, for God's sakes.

JOY

But that never bothered you before.

NATHAN

And I'm so sorry. It's all my fault. All of it.

Joy loses her shit.

JOY

I thought you really liked me! I  
thought we were going to have sex!  
I thought I was going to lose my  
virginity to you!

Nathan's eyes GO WIDE.

JOY

You are *fucked* up!

Nathan touches her shoulder but she flinches.

NATHAN

Joy, I wanted to get to know you. I  
think you've really come into your  
own...

She THROWS her glass against a wall, smashing to bits on one  
of his paintings.

JOY

Shut up! Just shut the fuck up!

Joy rushes out, SLAMMING the door behind her.

EXT. CURB, STREET - LATER

Joy sits on the curb near the entrance to Nathan's building,  
hunched over, CRYING. Hysterical.

PEOPLE pass by, some glancing her way, then continuing on.  
After a moment...

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Excuse me? Are you okay?

Joy looks up and sees a very handsome BOY, about 16.

JOY

(through tears)

No.

BOY

Are you hurt?

JOY

Does having your heart ripped out  
count?

BOY

Definitely.

He removes a tissue from his pocket, hands it to her.

JOY

Thanks.

BOY

I'm Sebastian.

JOY

Joy.

SEBASTIAN

You look familiar. Have we met?

JOY

I don't think so.

SEBASTIAN

Does the perpetrator live in this building?

Joy nods, wiping her tears with the tissue.

SEBASTIAN

My father lives here too. I was just dropping by for a quick hello. Are you from the city?

JOY

(shaking her head)

Yonkers.

He smiles at her.

SEBASTIAN

I'm up at Columbia. I'm a junior.

She nods, getting a good look at him. He's hot. Hotter than any boy in her school. After a pause...

SEBASTIAN

Would you like to get a drink?  
Drown your sorrows and all that?

JOY

Don't you have to do your thing upstairs...?

SEBASTIAN

Nah, I'll go to his office on Monday. He works at MoMA.

Her face goes white. Does a double-take.

JOY

What's your last name?

(beat)

I mean, I can't have a drink with you if I don't know your name.

He stands and offers his hand, helps her up.

SEBASTIAN

Lund. Sebastian Lund.

INT. THE LOWES' HOUSE, YONKERS - LATER

Wally, his face red and streaked with tears, runs into the house and heads straight for the LENDING LIBRARY.

He grabs as many BOOKS as he can from the shelves and goes through the kitchen...

EXT. BACK YARD - CONTINUOUS

...out the back door. He throws them in a heap on the small back lawn. The outside lights TURN ON automatically and Wally heads back inside.

A few moments later, the light in Miriam's room comes on and we see Wally through the window grabbing stacks of books from her personal collection.

Then he reappears outside and dumps them into the pile.

Wally heads inside for more. Soon, the lights are on in his room, Joy's room, and the ransacking continues. It's obvious no one is home.

He exits with more piles of books, throws them down, then hurries into the NEXT DOOR NEIGHBOR'S dark back lawn.

When Wally emerges into the light we see he's pushing...the LEAF MUNCHER ULTIMATE. A high powered shredder.

He turns it on and begins RIPPING pages out of the Lowes' books, FEEDING them in as fast as he can.

WALLY

(at the top of his lungs)

It's all bullshit! Love is bullshit! Words are bullshit!

(ripping)

Fucking pieces of shit!

Confetti-sized pieces of white paper start BLOWING OUT the other end of the machine. It looks like snow. Or ash.

As Wally rips and feeds the Muncher more and more books, a white layer begins to cover the yard.

INT. BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Sherman sits in his La-Z-Boy, staring into space, when he sees flurries, or something, hitting the small window just above ground.

He gets up, places a step stool against the wall, and climbs up to get a look.

INT./EXT. BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE on Sherman's feet, in slippers, RUNNING up the stairs, emerging from the basement.

EXT. BACK YARD - CONTINUOUS

Sherman RUNS out of the back door and sees Wally and the dwindling pile of books. In shock.

SHERMAN  
(to Wally)  
What are you doing?

Wally can't hear him above the motor. Or doesn't want to.

SHERMAN  
(louder)  
Wallace Lowe! What the hell are  
you doing?!

Now Wally looks up, still ripping pages. He is COVERED, head to toe, in the remnants of his family's treasures.

WALLY  
Shredding!

SHERMAN  
Are these your mother's books?

WALLY  
(in a rage)  
They're everyone's books! They  
made us this way! Mom made us this  
way! And so did you!

SHERMAN  
For God's sakes! You can't shred  
your mother's books! She'll be  
devastated! And it's sacrilegious!

WALLY

Since when do you give a shit what  
Mom thinks?!

Sherman looks at his son, then turns off the shredder. Wally turns it back on. Sherman turns it back off.

WALLY

Leave me alone! Go back downstairs  
where you belong!

SHERMAN

Wally, listen to me.

WALLY

Why?! You have no credibility in  
this family! None!

SHERMAN

Because I happen to be the only one  
home. And seeing *this*, I know this  
family's really in trouble.

He SPITS some paper out of his mouth.

WALLY

Took you long enough!

Sherman pauses, then sits on the back stoop, puts his head in his hands. Then starts MUMBLING...

SHERMAN

I was daydreaming. We were pulling  
into the Canal Street station and I  
was thinking about...

WALLY

What?! I can't hear you!

SHERMAN

(louder)

I was thinking about your mother  
and our retirement and how great it  
was going to be to spend those  
years together.

WALLY

What are you talking about?

SHERMAN

And then, out of nowhere, I saw  
colors in front of me.

(MORE)

SHERMAN (cont'd)

It was a jacket and a  
backpack...attached to a  
person...falling onto the tracks.  
I called in the 12-9, and tried to  
stop. But there was just too much  
train. And not enough time.

Wally stares at his father. He now realizes what he's  
talking about.

SHERMAN

And then...the sound. The wheels  
hitting the body of that boy. It's  
the worst sound that exists, I  
think. In a minute, everything I  
knew had changed and I became a  
murderer.

WALLY

Dad. You're *not* a murderer.

SHERMAN

(ignoring Wally)

I think about it every second.  
From the time I wake up until I go  
to bed. And I dream about it too.

(beat)

There's only one thing I know for  
sure that I can pass on to you.  
You can't hide. From who you are,  
what you've done. You *can't* use me  
as an example. I won't let you.

Wally looks at Sherman, stunned. And sad. Very sad for him.

Suddenly, the back door opens. It's Miriam.

She steps outside and sees the back yard covered in white.

MIRIAM

Oh my God! What the hell happened?  
What is that stuff?

SHERMAN

(looking at Wally)

It's...ah...it's...books.

MIRIAM

What?! What are you talking about?

Sherman points to the LEAF MUNCHER ULTIMATE.

MIRIAM

(in horror)

Who did this? Who could possibly do such a vile thing?

WALLY

(softly)

I did.

MIRIAM

Wallace, are you *insane*!?

WALLY

I think so.

SHERMAN

Miriam, he just had a bit of a meltdown. Runs in the family.

MIRIAM

That's not funny.

She looks at her son, devastated.

Miriam walks out onto the lawn, wading through the layers of white, and sits down. Picking up pieces, examining them for text. To see what book they're from.

She fondles the husks--the spines, the front and back covers-- and begins to CRY.

MIRIAM

How could you do this, Wally? You, of all people?

Wally goes to his mother, sits next to her.

WALLY

Mom, they're just books.

MIRIAM

No, they're not! They're the only thing this family had left!

SHERMAN

That's not true.

MIRIAM

What do you know?

WALLY

I'm sorry.

(beat)

(MORE)

WALLY (cont'd)

Coco broke up with me. I love her and she humiliated me. In front of all these people...

Miriam looks at her son, softening.

MIRIAM

Jesus. That's awful.

WALLY

Yeah.

Miriam holds Wally's face.

MIRIAM

Honey, listen to me.

(beat)

Love's a fucking bitch.

She glares at Sherman. After a pause...

SHERMAN

Where's Joy?

INT. DORM ROOM, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY - SAME

Joy and Sebastian fuck wildly on a twin bed. Joy's MOANS are particularly loud.

They move smoothly from one position to the next. Like they've been doing it for years. While she's on top...

SEBASTIAN

This is *really* your first time?

JOY

(breathing heavily)

I read a lot.

INT. DANCE STUDIO - NIGHT

Coco dances. She leaps through the air, executes a beautiful foot work series, then begins to pirouette.

Turning and turning and turning. She's trying for a record fifteen times.

But as she completes number eleven, Coco loses her balance and FALLS on the floor. Wiping out.

She lays there, still for a moment, then her body begins to heave up and down. She's CRYING. For the first time since her sister's death.

EXT. HOUSE, STATEN ISLAND - DAY

Sherman stands in front of a small home near the Fresh Kills Landfill. He double checks the ADDRESS on one of his labelled envelopes and then looks at the number on the house.

They match. Sherman, visibly nervous, slowly walks up the path to the front door, rings the bell.

After a moment, a MAN, late 40s, opens the door. He wears a New York City Department of Sanitation uniform.

MAN

Can I help you?

SHERMAN

Are you...Arthur Evans?

MAN

Yes.

SHERMAN

I, um...I...

Sherman looks like he's about to pass out. He can't do it.

He walks back down the path. Arthur, confused, notices the ENVELOPE in his hand.

MAN

Excuse me? Wait...

Arthur hurries towards Sherman.

ARTHUR

Can I see that?

Sherman pauses, closing his eyes, then hands it to him. Arthur glances at the front, then looks at Sherman.

ARTHUR

You're the one who sends us money  
every month?

Sherman is now breathing heavily, hyperventilating.

INT. LIVING ROOM, THE EVANS' HOUSE - LATER

Arthur's wife, PEG EVANS, mid 40s, hands Sherman a glass of water. Sherman drinks it in one gulp.

PEG

Do you still feel dizzy?

Sherman nods.

PEG

Put your head between your legs.  
The blood will flow to your brain.

Sherman does as he's told. As he hangs there, Arthur and Peg stare at him. Confused.

After a moment, Sherman lifts his head.

PEG

Slowly. Sit up slowly.

Now Sherman is in an upright position. He looks around for the first time. The home is modest but cozy.

ARTHUR

So...what's your name?

SHERMAN

Sherman Lowe.

ARTHUR

(looking at Peg)

Sherman, um, why have you been sending us three hundred dollars every month for almost four years?

SHERMAN

It's all I could afford.

PEG

We've always wanted to send it back but there's never been a return address.

ARTHUR

(to Sherman)

You haven't answered my question.

Sherman takes a deep breath.

SHERMAN

Because...I killed your son. It's the only way I can live with myself.

Arthur and Peg look at each other, completely baffled.

ARTHUR

What are you talking about? How do you know we have...had a son?

SHERMAN

I was there.

PEG

Where?

SHERMAN

Driving the train.

Arthur puts his head in his hands. Peg's eyes well up.

PEG

Oh my God.

SHERMAN

I'm so sorry. I was in a mental hospital for two months afterwards.

(starting to cry)

And sending the money helped with the guilt, a little, but I couldn't get over it. I couldn't leave my basement for three years, it was the beginning of the end of my marriage, my kids hate me...

Peg and Arthur look at him, in shock. Peg hands him a tissue and Sherman BLOWS his nose.

SHERMAN

Thank you.

Arthur steadies himself.

ARTHUR

It wasn't your fault.

SHERMAN

Of course it was.

PEG

He committed suicide.

ARTHUR

Our son, Richard, was clinically depressed since he was thirteen. He had tried to kill himself twice before that day.

PEG

(interjecting)

Don't get us wrong. It's been devastating. But years ago we knew he was determined.

(MORE)

PEG (cont'd)

Whether it was slitting his wrists,  
taking too many pills...

(tearing up again)

Our son was so unhappy he didn't  
want to live. We got him help, did  
everything we could, but he made  
his choice.

Sherman looks at Peg and Arthur, in disbelief.

SHERMAN

I had no idea.

PEG

Of course you didn't.

SHERMAN

Do you have any other children?

ARTHUR

No.

They sit in silence. Sherman blows his nose again.

SHERMAN

(standing)

I'm sorry I bothered you...

ARTHUR

Don't be. We're glad you came.  
You were the last person to see our  
son alive.

Sherman nods.

PEG

And we donated your money to the  
local suicide prevention hot line.  
They've been able to hire two more  
part-time counselors.

SHERMAN

Really?

ARTHUR

You've helped saved lives. Think  
about that every time you think  
about Richard. We do.

Sherman exits the house and...

EXT. THE EVANS' HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

... Arthur comes out after him, holding something. He hands it to Sherman: it's a business card for a DOCTOR.

ARTHUR

(gently)

This was Richard's psychiatrist.

Sherman considers this and leaves.

INT. LIVING ROOM, THE LOWES' HOUSE - EVENING

As Miriam walks downstairs to make dinner, she sees Sherman in the living room, reading a trade mystery novel from the basement. The only books left in the house.

MIRIAM

(shocked)

What are you doing here?

SHERMAN

Living in my living room.

Miriam takes this in, then sits next to him on the sofa.

MIRIAM

Something has happened to you, hasn't it? You're feeling better.

SHERMAN

Starting to.

MIRIAM

That's good. Really good.

A pause.

MIRIAM

Sherman, we need to talk.

SHERMAN

Isn't that what we're doing?

MIRIAM

No, I mean, about substantial things. Real things. Like our marriage.

SHERMAN

Oh.

Sherman puts down his book. Miriam prepares herself.

MIRIAM

I'm truly happy you're starting to come out of your hole...but I think we should finally do what we should have done a long time ago. Get a divorce.

Silence as both of them let the word hang in the room.

MIRIAM

It doesn't have to be right away. I know you'll need time to...

SHERMAN

(interjecting)

I think it's an excellent idea.

MIRIAM

You do?

SHERMAN

And I'm going to see a therapist.

MIRIAM

(stunned)

You are?

SHERMAN

Yes.

MIRIAM

I'm proud of you.

Sherman responds with a slight smile. Their fingers touch ever so slightly on the sofa. Neither pulls away.

EXT. STRAWBERRY FIELDS, CENTRAL PARK - DUSK

Coco sits on the edge of the IMAGINE mosaic, strewn with the usual flowers, candles, etc.

OTHERS sit on the benches behind them. A few MUSICIANS mill around, playing Lennon songs on their acoustic guitars.

Wally approaches, slowly, then sits beside her. A long silence. Then...

COCO

I didn't think you would come.

(beat)

I was so drunk...I hate myself.

I'm such an asshole.

Wally doesn't reply.

COCO

I wish I could be more like Helena. She never judged anyone. It was a gift. She loved every person she took a picture of. I think she felt like one of them.

(beat)

I'm so sorry, Wally. I'm sorry I said those horrible things to you. My therapist says I have intimacy issues.

Wally opens his bag and takes out the silver box he stole from Coco's apartment. Hands it to her.

COCO

You took this? Josephine was going mad. It's a family heirloom.

WALLY

Yeah. I...steal things.

COCO

Why?

WALLY

I don't know. I used to think it was for attention but...I think it's because I want a piece of people, to take home.

(beat)

I wanted to take home a piece of you. And Helena.

COCO

That's fucked up but...sweet.

An awkward beat.

WALLY

(looking around)

I've never been here.

COCO

It's my favorite place. I came here right after I found out about Helena.

WALLY

It's beautiful.

(beat)

(MORE)

WALLY (cont'd)

But it's sad that we're back there again. That the world is even more of a mess than it was then.

COCO

Yeah.

WALLY

Why don't we learn from the past?

COCO

I don't know. Amnesia?

WALLY

Or maybe because people feel lost. They want to assert themselves in the world. To be noticed.

A beat.

WALLY

A thing is not seen because it is visible, but conversely, visible because it is seen.

COCO

Who said that?

WALLY

(standing)

Plato.

COCO

Where are you going?

WALLY

Home.

COCO

Wait. Am I going to see you again?

WALLY

No.

He looks down at her, studying her face. Then walks away.

INT. TOWNHOUSE, MANHATTAN - NIGHT

Miriam stands with Bea at a BOOK PARTY for one of Bea's authors. They sip white wine and mingle with the literary crowd. Every so often, Bea looks at Miriam and smiles.

When they get a moment alone, Miriam leads Bea into a corner.

MIRIAM

I've been meaning to tell you something all night...

BEA

What?

MIRIAM

Sherman and I have agreed to divorce.

BEA

Really?

MIRIAM

I took what you said to heart. And it turned out he wanted exactly the same thing.

Bea beams at Miriam.

MIRIAM

What?

BEA

I'm happy for you. That you got what you wanted.

MIRIAM

Me too. I feel free. It's wonderful.

Bea takes something out of her bag.

BEA

I was going to give this to you anyway, but now there's an even better reason.

She hands Miriam a beautifully wrapped package.

MIRIAM

Bea, no, you shouldn't have...

BEA

Shut up and open it.

Miriam smiles and carefully unwraps it. Her eyes go wide as she realizes what it is: a first edition of Hemingway's, A Moveable Feast.

BEA

To start your collection.

Miriam looks like she's about to cry.

MIRIAM

(shaking her head)

This is too much. I can't...

Bea HUGS Miriam, cutting her off. Caught off guard, Miriam reacts stiffly, then slowly her body releases her tension.

Cradled in Bea's arms, Miriam relaxes into the embrace, for the first time in many, many years.

INSERT CARD: **ONE YEAR LATER**

INT. BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

Light streams in from two windows. We hear HONKING and city noise from outside.

An ALARM goes off. A hand reaches out and turns it off.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sherman is in the shower. He works up a good lather, scrubbing his scalp vigorously.

INT. TAXI DEPOT - LATER

Sherman, leaner, passes the DISPATCHER'S booth. He carries a brown bag lunch.

SHERMAN

Morning, Georgie.

GEORGIE

Morning, Sherman. I think we're going to miss that rain from the north today.

SHERMAN

Too bad. Rain equals fares.

GEORGIE

What are you worried about?

Sherman smiles at Georgie, then gets into his YELLOW CAB.

As he flips the ON DUTY light on and pulls out of the depot, CLOSE on a group of PLAQUES on the wall. They all read:

"EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH: SHERMAN LOWE."

INT. TAXI CAB - CONTINUOUS

A block out from the depot, a MAN in a suit, carrying a briefcase, HAILS Sherman's cab.

Sherman pulls over and the man gets in.

MAN  
11 Wall Street.

Sherman starts the METER.

SHERMAN  
Yes, sir. New York Stock Exchange.

As Sherman drives, he glances at his rear-view mirror.

SHERMAN  
How do you think the Dow will do  
today?

MAN  
You play the market?

SHERMAN  
I dabble.

MAN  
Momentum readings are bullish but I  
think we're going to see a short-  
term decline in the next few days.

Sherman smiles at his fare.

SHERMAN  
Thanks. Always helps to hear it  
from a pro.

MAN  
You seem like a smart guy. Can I  
ask why you drive a cab?

SHERMAN  
(smiling)  
I love it. I meet fascinating  
people every day. New York's the  
best city on earth.

INT. BEDROOM - SAME

A spacious bedroom with floor to ceiling bookcases on one  
wall. CLOSE on the bed.

Miriam's eyes flutter awake. She turns over and smiles when she sees Bea next to her, still asleep.

Miriam gently kisses Bea's neck, her forehead, and finally her lips. Bea kisses Miriam back, her eyes still closed.

BEA

Is it time?

MIRIAM

It's time.

Bea opens her eyes and looks towards the end of the bed where a large GOLDEN RETRIEVER sits, staring at both of them.

EXT. STREET, UPPER EAST SIDE, MANHATTAN - CONTINUOUS

Bea and Miriam, both in sweats, WALK their dog, HARRY. They stop in front of an upscale BAKERY. Bea takes Harry's leash.

MIRIAM

A half dozen bagels, five muffins, and three baguettes?

BEA

I think five. Then we'll have enough for the dinner party on Thursday.

Before she enters the bakery...

MIRIAM

I love you.

BEA

(beaming)

Love you too.

MIRIAM

(to the dog)

And I love you, Harry.

Harry BARKS in response.

INT. BEDROOM - SAME

Wally wakes up to an ALARM in a new bedroom. It's furnished in tasteful, but age-appropriate furniture.

INT. BEDROOM - SAME

A RADIO ALARM goes off and Joy SLAMS the snooze button. Her room is now more modern, but a mess.

The wall above her DESK is a collage:

Pages torn from magazines, photographs, stickers from concerts, drawings, lists on Post-It notes, etc.

INT. HALLWAY - LATER

Joy, still in her PJs, shuffles out into the hallway. Wally walks ahead of her, already dressed in casual preppy clothes.

JOY

Morning, dude.

WALLY

Morning, dude.

The enter...

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

...the kitchen and sit at the large table, where Miriam and Bea are already there, drinking coffee and reading The New York Times. The table is set.

Bagels, muffins, cream cheese, orange juice, milk sit in the center. Joy and Wally help themselves.

Miriam smiles as her kids sit down.

MIRIAM

Sleep well?

JOY

Like the dead. Thanks for the Ambien, Bea. It rocks.

BEA

You're welcome. But you get only one a week. And you'll never find my stash.

WALLY

(to Miriam and Bea)  
Jane and I are going to that party tonight, remember?

MIRIAM

Where is it?

WALLY

Somewhere downtown.

BEA

Email me at the office with all the details and *make sure* you can hear your cell this time.

WALLY

Promise.

MIRIAM

(to Joy)

Are you going out tonight,  
sweetheart?

JOY

Probably not.

WALLY

Come with us.

JOY

And hang with sophomore art geeks?

WALLY

It's mostly going to be the staff  
of the literary magazine.

JOY

Pass.

WALLY

Debbie Downer.

JOY

Pubescent serial monogamist.

EXT. STREET - LATER

Joy, Wally, Miriam, and Bea are outside their building. Saying their morning good-byes. The DOORMAN smiles, familiar with the routine.

Miriam kisses Joy and Wally. Then Bea kisses Joy and Wally. Then Bea kisses Miriam.

Bea hails a cab, dressed in an impeccably stylish suit.

Wally and Joy hail another cab. Joy wears arty hipster clothes. Much like what Helena wore.

They all get in and Miriam waves as they drive away.

INT. HALLWAY, THE BEACON SCHOOL - LATER

STUDENTS pour out into the hallway from their classes at this alternative public high school with a focus on the arts.

Outsider heaven.

ANGLE ON JOY

At her locker, getting books for her next class. Groups of TEENAGERS, not unlike herself, socialize around her. She's still a loner.

But as she walks down the hall to her next class, it's with an air of confidence. She passes and nods at...

Wally, who HOLDS HANDS with his cute girlfriend, JANE. She has red hair, wears a skirt and high-top Converse sneakers.

INT. STUDY, BEA AND MIRIAM'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Miriam, now alone in the apartment, sits at a desk, TYPING.

CLOSE ON computer screen: it's a MANUSCRIPT in progress.

INT. AUDITORIUM, THE BEACON SCHOOL - MORNING

Time has passed. This auditorium is filling up. A BANNER hung across the top of the stage reads:

CONGRATULATIONS BEACON CLASS OF 2007!

INT. AUDITORIUM - LATER

We are in the middle of the ceremony. The graduating STUDENTS sit in caps and gowns in the front third of the auditorium, while FAMILIES sit behind them.

The PRINCIPAL hands out diplomas on the stage...

PRINCIPAL

....Marshall Loman. Marshall will be attending the Tisch School of the Arts in September.

APPLAUSE as bespectacled MARSHALL makes his way to the stage.

Marshall accepts his diploma and SHAKES the Principal's hand. Then PUMPS his hands in the air as he walks off stage.

## PRINCIPAL

Joy Lowe. Joy graduated with honors and will be attending Wesleyan University.

A louder round of APPLAUSE from the audience and then a group of PEOPLE stand up, going nuts:

Miriam, Bea, Wally, Jane, and Sherman, who is VIDEOTAPING.

Joy walks to the stage and accepts her diploma, shaking the Principal's hand.

## ANGLE ON MIRIAM AND THE CREW

Bea puts her arms around Miriam. Wally and Jane jump up and down. Sherman is behind the camera, smiling.

## ANGLE ON JOY

She sits back down in her seat as the next name is called. She looks back at her crazy family, deeply touched.

## EXT. RESTAURANT, UPPER EAST SIDE - LATER

A TAXI pulls up to the curb. Miriam, Bea, Joy, Wally, Jane, and Sherman pour out.

## SHERMAN

(to the driver)

Thanks, Mac.

## MAC

Congrats, man.

## INT. PRIVATE ROOM, RESTAURANT - LATER

Everyone sits at the table, finishing their celebratory lunch. They all drink champagne. And from the looks of it, most of them are three sheets to the wind.

Joy is opening GIFTS. She picks up an ENVELOPE.

## SHERMAN

That's from me, honey.

Joy smiles at her father and opens it: it's a STOCK CERTIFICATE. She holds it up for everyone to see.

## SHERMAN

That should double in about five years.

She gets up and HUGS him.

JOY  
Thank you, Dad.

MIRIAM  
That's wonderful, Sherman.

BEA  
Very generous.

SHERMAN  
I do what I can.

Now we PAN DOWN, DOWN, DOWN...

EXT. SUBWAY STATION - NIGHT (PAST)

...and STOP on Helena, who has her Leica around her neck.

WALLY (O.S.)  
Plant magic dust...

She walks down the street, approaching the CANAL  
STREET/LAFAYETTE STREET station. The place of her death.

WALLY (O.S.)  
...expect hope doubt wonder  
mistrust despair and right where  
soulless our, with all their minds,  
eyes blindly stare...

She pauses for a moment, then heads down the stairs.

WALLY (O.S)  
...life herself stands.

As Helena disappears into vast BLACKNESS...

FADE TO WHITE.