

THE IDEAL WOMAN

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INT. WESTON HOUSE. KITCHEN. DAY. 1962.

ANN WESTON (41) stands over her gas stove; it's searing hot and has started to melt the wall behind it. She watches, clearly contented with the first stages of her home going up in flames.

Our heroine spots a few crumbs on the laminate counter top. She sweeps them away with care: This is muscle memory. Muscle memory and being torn between two identities, as 1960's housewives so often were. Today it's homemaker verses pyromaniac.

Ann watches, with a dead gaze, as the bright, patterned wallpaper - that was so painstakingly picked out by our arsonist - burns and melts. Its flowery border curls grotesquely, to expose the raw, drywall underneath.

Violent flames begin to shoot up from behind the stove as the entire back wall of the kitchen singes and quickly catches on fire.

Ann reaches down and twists the knob of the oven to increase the heat. The flames continue to grow; climbing higher up the wall.

Ann's face becomes sweaty from steam. She doesn't flinch. She lifts her eyes to see a poster, hanging higher above the oven.

INSERT POSTER: An advertisement for a fallout bomb shelter. The tag line reads: YOUR FAMILY SURVIVAL PLAN. Pictured is a family of three - husband, wife and son. The Mother and Son are stocking a closet-sized room, that resembles a submarine. The two are all toothy grins, and the Mother reaches up towards a shelf, stocked with canned goods. The son stands beneath her holding out a can. The husband reclines in an armchair nearby, smoking and reading the newspaper. His armchair takes up most of the shelter's space.

Ann watches as the flames reach the poster.

As the edges of the poster begin to burn and curl, Ann smiles as wide as the Mother in the advertisement.

INT. JONES HOUSE. BOY'S BEDROOM. MORNING. 1962.

Brothers BOBBY JONES (10) and ED JONES (13), both entitled and precocious, sit crouched tightly together at their bedroom window. Each jostles for more space; the eternal battle between brothers.

Ed stares eagerly through a pair of binoculars at a window of Ann Weston's house directly across the street.

Bobby attempts to grab the binoculars out of Ed's hands.

ED/BOBBY
Knock it off./It's my turn!

We see Ann move into the frame of the window. She has only a brassiere and garters on. Her back faces the brothers.

Ed looks intently through the binoculars. Bobby is frozen now, and stares as well.

Ann puts on a skirt. She turns slightly. We can now see the outline of her breast. She plucks a blouse off a chaise chair.

ED
(softly)
Come on...

Ann looks down at her blouse in her hands, then she turns in the direction of the boys.

ED (CONT'D)
Yes. .

Immediately, Ann looks up to stare directly at the brothers.

ED (CONT'D)
Shit!

Ed throws down the binoculars and runs to the bedroom door. Bobby follows in a panicked frenzy.

INT. WESTON HOUSE. MASTER BEDROOM. CONTINUOUS.

Ann turns away from the window and half-smiles to herself. She puts on her blouse, flips her hair and bends briefly to look in the mirror on her vanity. She gives herself a self-satisfied once-over, then heads to the bedroom door.

EXT. WESTON HOUSE. FRONT PORCH. CONTINUOUS.

Ann comes out on the porch of her pristine ranch home that oozes the American dream. She surveys the checker set that is EVERGREEN PARKWAY. It is a perfectly symmetrical, upper middle-class street, lined with sparkling and nearly-identical ranch homes and manicured lawns.

SUPER: OCTOBER 22, 1962

Ann takes out an art deco cigarette case from her skirt pocket. She is never without it. She lights a cigarette, smokes and observes -

Kids hop on their schwinn bicycles to go to school.

Husbands wave goodbye to their wives and hastily get into their pastel Chevys and Lincolns to head to the train station.

Housewives tend to their flowers with pruning shears and bright watering pans as they attempt to herd their young children like cattle.

Ann spots Ed and Bobby's Mom, CINDY JONES (late 30's), sweet but both desperate and dinky, across the street in her front yard.

Cindy stares at a patch of brown, dead grass in the middle of her lawn: It may as well be a lifeless, mangled body.

Cindy suddenly notices Ann. She waves frantically. Ann waves back.

ANN

Good morning, Cindy. How are you?

CINDY

I'm all right. I am just trying to solve this. The mystery of the dead grass.

ANN

Well. If you haven't solved it by noon, call the sheriff's department.

CINDY

Every morning Ann. You look just like a magazine ad.

ANN

Please --

Cindy has already jerked her body combatively towards the front door.

CINDY

(squawks)

Ed! Bobby! You're going to be late for school.

(turns back to Ann,
pleasant)

Those two.

(MORE)

CINDY (CONT'D)
I never know what they're up to.
Did you know Bobby got the Ranger
award for Boy Scouts? Did Stan tell
you?

ANN
He didn't. How wonderful.

Bobby sprints out on the porch with Ed pulling at him.

BOBBY
(to Cindy)
He pushed me.

ED
He tripped. He always trips.

The boys spot Ann. They freeze in their tracks, like they're being held at gunpoint.

CINDY
Ed. Where are your manners? Say
hello to Mrs. Weston.

Ed waves awkwardly.

ED
Hello. Mrs. Weston.

ANN
Good morning, Ed. Bobby I hear you
got the Ranger award.
Congratulations. You're quite the
explorer, aren't you?

ED
We're gonna be late.

The two boys leap off the porch. They go and retrieve their bikes and ride out of the driveway. They shoot Ann a side glance as they go.

ANN
I'd better get inside.

CINDY
Yes -- If I didn't have breakfast
on the table by 7:30, Ken would
think I left him. Till tonight?

ANN
Till tonight.

Ann goes to the front door and opens it.

INT. WESTON HOUSE. KITCHEN. CONTINUOUS.

The interior decor is mid-century modern. It rebels against its traditional, cookie-cutter exterior.

Ann enters, still with her cigarette.

STAN WESTON (40's) stands at the oven making fried eggs. The act of cooking makes him a modern man, and Stan likes to think he is just that.

ANN

I completely forgot we were having them over tonight.

STAN

Come here.

Ann smiles and walks over to him. He nods his head towards her cigarette. Ann holds it up to him. This ritual is familiar. Stan takes a puff.

STAN (CONT'D)

Who went to four different supermarkets?

ANN

That was last week. This is this week. You didn't tell me Bobby got the Ranger Award.

STAN

I didn't realize that was information you'd be interested in. It wasn't information I was interested in.

Ann goes to the kitchen window and looks out.

STAN (CONT'D)

People are always telling me things I don't care about on this street.

ANN

Really. And when John sold us this house he said he was selling the view not the house. But what am I looking at?

Stan gestures to the eggs.

STAN

Did you want one?

Ann shakes her head.

ANN
Did the girls eat?

STAN
Teri had cereal. Jackie isn't eating this week. Or she's not eating eggs. I can't keep track.

ANN
(yells)
Jackie! You need to eat something. And hurry up you two, you're already late.

Ann thrusts her cigarette into an ashtray on the counter top, a little roughly.

ANN (CONT'D)
I just wish I hadn't invited them. She practically cornered me at the supermarket. And then Trish weaseled her way in too. They do things in droves.

Stan comes up behind her, and hugs her around the waist.

STAN
They'll come too early. They'll drink too much. They'll leave too late. Round and round we go.

JACKIE WESTON (15) strides in. She is a willful introvert, who is sharp and intense. TERI WESTON (13) trails behind her, following her older sister's lead as always. She is a pile of nerves and painfully sweet.

Stan and Ann don't notice them. The two girls sit at the kitchen table and watch their parents.

JACKIE
Hello.

Ann breaks away from Stan, alarmed.

TERI
My friends' parents never do that.

STAN
That's because your friends' parents don't like each other. Jackie, eggs?

A beat. Jackie stares at her parents quite seriously: Eggs are the cause she's taken up this week.

JACKIE

No.

ANN

I want you to eat something. And can you help me after school? We have guests tonight.

JACKIE

The president's speaking tonight.

STAN

That's why we're having them over.

JACKIE

It's a group event?

TERI

Will Jackie be on? She's so pretty.

Jackie rolls her eyes. Stan comes over and gives Jackie a plate of eggs.

STAN

You were the first Jackie.

JACKIE

That's not what kids say. They think you named me after her.

ANN

Yes. 15 years ago I decided to name you after a girl from Miss Porters.

Teri stares at Ann, yearningly.

TERI

You look kind of like Jackie, Mom.

ANN

Thank you, sweetie.

STAN

Mom's more of a Marilyn.

ANN

Stan. Please. That's morbid.

JACKIE

Correction. She was almost Marilyn. She could have been Marilyn.

Ann smarts, this comment hit a nerve. Stan eyes Ann, then turns to Jackie, dutifully.

STAN

Apologize. What's gotten into you this morning?

JACKIE

Fine. I'm sorry. We need to get to school.

Jackie gets up from the table and walks to the front door. Teri follows her immediately.

STAN

(after Jackie)

You and I will be talking when you get home, young lady.

The front door slams shut.

ANN

She's been like this with me for weeks.

STAN

I did tell you to have boys.

Ann picks up Jackie's full plate of eggs.

STAN (CONT'D)

I'm going. I'll miss the train.

ANN

Want me to drive you?

STAN

I need the drive. My windshield wipers give me ideas for campaign art.

ANN

Cosmic messages from your windshield wipers. It's too quiet out here.

STAN

Where's Charlie?

ANN

In the back. Digging in that corner of the yard again.

STAN

Get him, will you? He's the only
one that's nice to me in the
morning.

Ann playfully scowls at him. Stan exits. Ann takes a big bite of Jackie's eggs, then puts them down on the counter top.

She goes back to the kitchen window and surveys her backyard. We follow her gaze to see a perfectly square strip of green lawn, surrounded by a tall, slate grey fence.

A fox terrier, CHARLIE, is at the back, right-hand corner of the yard, digging madly. Ann watches the dog with a frown.

Ann turns and looks towards the other corner of the kitchen and eyes a framed movie poster on the wall. It is by itself and elevated; reminiscent of a shrine.

INSERT MOVIE POSTER: Pictured is our heroine Ann and a man in a passionate embrace. The text reads: *Goodbye & If, Presented by Warner Brothers, Starring ANN CARR and ROCK HUDSON*

Suddenly, a barrelling movement from a side window interrupts Ann. Something comes bounding past the house and into the backyard.

Ann jumps, startled: Nothing ever happens here.

We see an enormous DEER stop dead in its tracks in the backyard. It has a long, dark scar on its neck. The animal is large and majestic. It is a striking contrast to the groomed and contained green square that it stands on.

The deer looks both ways. It runs to one side of the fenced yard, then back to the other side. It repeats this a few times, desperately. Its eyes dart wildly, like a caged animal.

ANN

Oh, poor thing.

The deer circles quickly again, then stops and looks around.

ANN (CONT'D)

Just go out the way you came.

The deer tilts its head to stare directly at Ann for a moment.

Charlie has turned away from digging his hole. He lets out a small and frightened bark.

The deer bounds back past the side of the house, out to the front yard.

Ann goes to the front window to watch. But all she sees when she gets there are leaves rustling across the street.

We hear Charlie pawing at the back door. Ann goes and opens the door, and picks the dog up.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY. SKYSCRAPER. MORNING.

A sea of hats swarms in and out of the building, and one of them is Stan's.

INT. HARTLEY-SWAIN AGENCY. MORNING.

Stan approaches a desk outside a corner office. A woman, SHEILA (60's), sits behind the desk. She stands and comes to get his coat and hat.

SHEILA
(monotone)
How was your weekend, Mr. Weston?

STAN
Whatever I said last Monday --

SHEILA
-- Frank wants to see you
immediately. And Jim's going to be
at this desk the moment you step in
there --

Stan has already walked into his office.

INT. HARTLEY SWAIN AGENCY. STAN'S OFFICE. CONTINUOUS.

The office is peppered with unfinished ads and sketches: The room seems on the verge of being swallowed by 1960's commercialism.

As Stan walks in, he spots a poster board propped on his windowsill.

INSERT POSTER: An advertisement for Acme Coffee. The tagline reads: HUSBAND-PLEASING COFFEE. There's a woman smelling a fresh cup in her kitchen.

Stan hits the wireless intercom on his desk.

STAN

Sheila, you can tell Jim --

The door bursts open before Stan's finished his sentence. It's JIM (30's), he's always bursting through doors. He nods towards the Acme Coffee advertisement Stan's holding.

JIM

Perfect, right?

STAN

Not really.

JIM

What? I was here Friday night.

STAN

I sketched it myself. All you had to do was work on the facial expression. The smile's not wide enough.

JIM

Any wider and she'd be spreading her legs for the coffee. Anyway she's not the one pleased by the coffee. Her husband is. Why don't we get him in there?

STAN

The kitchen is her domain. And she's pleased that he's pleased. Do you know anything about women?

JIM

Not really.

Stan walks over and hands Jim the poster.

STAN

Work on it. I'm late for a meeting with Frank.

INT. HARTLEY-SWAIN AGENCY. FRANK HARTLEY'S OFFICE. MORNING.

Stan enters. DICK SIMMS (Late 20's), an opportunist twit, lounges sloppily on a Barcelona chair, drink already in hand.

FRANK HARTLEY (60) sits behind the desk regally, waiting for people to come to him as they always do. He stands up when Stan closes the door.

FRANK

Stan. Good weekend?

STAN

Great weekend.

FRANK

Drink?

STAN

You call me in here "immediately," and now you're offering me a drink at 8:30 AM. Should I be worried?

Dick laughs. Frank goes to the corner of his office and turns a large poster around: It is the Fallout Shelter advertisement from the first scene in Ann's kitchen.

Frank eyes it, proudly, like a man looking down at his newborn, first son.

DICK

Hammacher Schlemmer is upping their retainer. They sold more of those this month than they ever have.

STAN

And that's because of our art?

FRANK

Or because of Kennedy. But the client doesn't know that. So will you have a drink?

Frank goes to the bar before Stan can answer. He pours two scotches and hands one to Stan.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Good work.

Stan hesitates, then drinks.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Personally, it's goddamn perplexing to me that people actually buy these things. They only fit 3-5 people. They're depressing as hell.

STAN

Less depressing than getting blown up.

DICK

Please. Being cooped up with my wife like that. I'll take the H-bomb.

FRANK

Anyway you'd sooner be killed by your neighbors. Having one of these during a nuclear incident is like having a loaf of bread on a block where everyone is starving.

DICK

Well. I'll die to fuck the commies. Better dead than red right?

FRANK

Hey. Who invited McCarthy?

Stan chuckles. He and Frank share an amused look. Dick doesn't notice. He looks at his watch.

DICK

I've got a 9 o'clock.

Dick gets up and puts his drink down. He gives Stan an awkward pat as he walks out.

DICK (CONT'D)

Good work, fellas.

Dick exits.

FRANK

Those young guys are like walking kamikazes. I don't get it.

STAN

They've never served.

FRANK

You said it.

STAN

(plainly)

You know Ann was on one of those black lists.

Frank looks taken aback, and slightly hurt.

FRANK

You've never told me that--

STAN

--We don't like to talk about it--

FRANK

--Thought I knew everything about you.

Stan lights a cigarette.

STAN

Amazing how easy it was to turn the lights out on a career. Just out of speculation. Being an actress is hard enough. And she had it. She was a star.

FRANK

I always thought she stopped because of the kids.

STAN

It was right after we had Jackie. She said she'd go back when things cooled off. But once they did she was pregnant with Teri.

FRANK

She's always welcome to come back and model. She's perfect for Budweiser.

STAN

She never liked that.

FRANK

We all have to settle in the middle somewhere.

STAN

True. I thought I was going to be an artist.

FRANK

You are an artist.

Stan raises his eyebrows at Frank.

STAN

Anyway Ann doesn't settle. It's nothing or everything.

FRANK

They say McCarthy killed careers. Having kids kills more.

STAN

Hey. Save that tag line for when
the birth control companies start
doing ads.

FRANK

You know I'm thinking about it.

EXT. HAMDEN MIDDLE SCHOOL. MORNING.

It's a beautiful stone building, with large trees and luscious grass. The serenity is interrupted by the loud, shrill sound of an alarm siren.

INT. HAMDEN MIDDLE SCHOOL. CLASSROOM. CONTINUOUS.

We still hear the alarm siren, louder now.

All the kids in the class sit on the floor, under their desks in a Duck and Cover drill.

The teacher, SUSAN GELLER (40), sits at her desk and stares out at her students with a bitter melancholy; like she has a secret she wishes she could share with them.

Teri sits below one of the tiny desks neatly, taking up as little space as she possibly can. She fingers at her shoe lace.

Ed crouches nearby under a desk. He glances at Susan, then throws a wad of paper at another boy diagonal from him.

Susan notices, and walks over to the boy's desk. She holds out her hand. The boy reluctantly hands her the wad of paper. The boy and Ed make faces as she walks away.

Susan sits at her desk and puts her reading glasses on, then smooths the paper out to look at it -

INSERT PAPER: A drawing of a large spotted mushroom, reminiscent of a nuclear mushroom cloud. There's a tall, fat man with a mustache, and napkin tucked into his shirt. He stands over the mushroom with a fork and knife, about to devour it. On his napkin are the words: **KILL THE PINKOS**.

SUSAN

Mr. Jones.

ED

Yes Ms. Geller.

SUSAN

Come to the front of the room,
please.

ED

I can't. I'll get blown up.

Kids in the classroom snigger loudly. After a few moments, the alarm siren stops.

SUSAN

Quiet everyone. Now please, Ed.

Ed walks to the front of the room. The students stay lazily under their desks. Susan turns the drawing around for everyone to see.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Do you find this humorous?

ED

He's just eating his vegetables,
Ms. Geller.

The classroom explodes in laughter.

SUSAN

Interesting that you all find the
end of everything so amusing.

Teri stares at Susan, fearfully. The rest of the classroom suddenly goes quiet.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Then it would not matter whether or
not you've eaten your vegetables.
Was that the joke, Ed?

ED

It wasn't a joke. I'm not scared.
It would be worth it. If it meant
the end of communism.

SUSAN

Very heroic. I see you agree with
the old men in charge, gambling
your entire generation like a chip
one throws on a black jack table. I
do hope they win the bet. For your
sake.

Susan looks down at the mushroom drawing once more, then
hands the paper to Ed.

SUSAN (CONT'D)
Now please bring this to the
Principal's office. See if he finds
it as funny as you do.

Ed sulks off towards the door. Susan watches after him.

CUT TO:

INT. WESTON HOUSE. KITCHEN. LATE AFTERNOON.

CLOSE on stuffed mushrooms.

Ann stands over a wide, colorful array of canapes: She arranges and rearranges them like an artist perfecting a painting. Jackie watches a rerun of The Twilight Zone in the adjacent living room.

ANN
Jackie?

JACKIE (O.S.)
It's almost done.

ANN
I thought you were going to help
me. And where's Teri?

ROD STERLING (O.S.)
For civilization to survive...the
human race has to remain civilized.

Ann walks over to the living room.

ANN
Can you please turn that off? I
have a million things to do before
they get here.

JACKIE
Can't you get help like everybody
else?

ANN
I don't need help.

JACKIE
And yet -- here you are. Asking for
help.

Ann lights a cigarette.

ANN

What is it with you lately? Please.
I'm not happy about tonight as it
is.

JACKIE

So why have them over?

ANN

There's no reason to have neighbors
over. You just have them over.

Jackie comes into the kitchen and takes two glasses out from
a shelf and puts them on the counter: She helped. Ann looks
out the window and spots Charlie in the back yard digging.

ANN (CONT'D)

That dog.

Jackie stands next to Ann and watches Charlie. We hear the
front door open.

ANN (CONT'D)

(loudly)

Stan? Can you get Charlie? He's
trying to dig a hole to China out
there.

STAN (O.S.)

Can you close your eyes?

Jackie and Ann share a look.

ANN

OK. Why?

STAN

Are they closed?

Neither Ann nor Jackie close their eyes.

ANN

They're closed. You know I hate
surprises.

Stan walks in, toting a huge cardboard poster. He frowns.

STAN

You said they were closed.

JACKIE

What is that?

Stan turns the poster around: It is the Fallout Bomb Shelter advertisement.

STAN
(excited)
Hammacher Schlemmer tripled their sales for this thing last month. All because of this ad. Frank went nuts.

Jackie raises her eyebrows, then exits. Stan watches her go, surprised at this response. Ann puts out her cigarette.

STAN (CONT'D)
Where should we put it?

ANN
Well. If we had a bomb shelter, I'd say let's put it there.

STAN
Ann.

ANN
I'm sorry. But don't you think it's
--

STAN
What?

ANN
I don't know. Not something to hang up on the wall like a Warhol.

STAN
Please. This could be a Warhol.
Something ironic about -- the commercialization of fear.

ANN
Exactly.

STAN
I'm proud of it.

Stan goes and kisses Ann on the cheek, then hands her the poster.

STAN (CONT'D)
Find a place for it before everyone gets here?

ANN

It's ridiculous. The concept. No one can buy their way out of the bomb. Don't you agree?

STAN

I do agree. But you can say one nice thing.

ANN

Oh, Stan come on --

STAN

I'll get the dog.

Stan heads to the back door.

INT. WESTON HOUSE. LIVING ROOM. NIGHT.

The room is a cloud of cigarette smoke. Two couples gather at the Westons' house. Everyone is too many drinks in to remember how many they've had.

KEN JONES (40's) is sprawled out on the couch like a king; he usually acts like one. JAMES SHAW (late 30's), shifts self-consciously on a small unassuming chair. Stan refills the mens' drinks then sits on a lounge chair.

TRISH SHAW (late 30's), stands with Cindy and nods profusely at something she's saying: Trish is always utterly agreeable.

Ann comes in with a tray of canapes. Cindy plucks one eagerly off the plate. Trish does the same.

TRISH

Ann. These are too good.

Stan reaches over from his lounge chair, takes Ann's hand and squeezes it, affectionately. Ken eyes them bitterly.

CINDY

Only Ann would master French canapes.

KEN

Anything to be un-American, right Ann?

ANN

Curiosity is un-American now. Does that make ignorance, patriotism?

KEN

Come on. It was a joke. Anyway all actresses are un-American. Your country adores you so you don't need to adore your country.

ANN

Well. That was a very long time ago.

JAMES

Trish has seen Goodnight To This three times. And she has cried all three times.

TRISH

(blushing)

James.

STAN

You were barely a baby in that one.

CINDY

(through a mouthful)

Really Ann what are these? I can't stop myself.

KEN

Try to.

STAN

Kenny. Don't get sloppy.

KEN

What? You should see her at the grocery store. You'd think she was shopping to stock that shelter you've got hanging on your wall. One man's nuclear war will be another woman's calorie crisis.

TRISH

You know we have one of those shelters. Way out in the backyard past the pool. I can't stand it. It's so dank down there.

STAN

When did you get it?

JAMES

My Grandfather built it. The man never saw a fear-driven commercial opportunity he didn't like.

James eyes dart insecurely around the room, to check if anyone would prefer a man like that.

TRISH

It's true. It's why we have so many guns in the house. I think we should get rid of them.

JAMES

(haltingly)

Trish. That will be fine.

The adults notice that Teri and Jackie are lingering at the door.

JACKIE

Mom? Can we watch?

STAN

Christ, it's a minute to 7.

Stan takes the remote control and turns the TV on. Ann nods to Jackie and Teri who come in, and curl up on the floor. Ken eyes Jackie, a moment too long.

ON TV -

Music SWELLS, and John F. Kennedy addresses the nation.

JOHN F. KENNEDY

Good Evening my fellow citizens. This Government, as promised, has maintained the closest surveillance of the Soviet military buildup on the island of Cuba. Within the past week, unmistakable evidence has established the fact that a series of offensive missile sites is now in preparation on that imprisoned island. The purpose of these bases can be none other than to provide a nuclear strike capability against the Western Hemisphere.

Upon receiving the first preliminary hard information of this nature last Tuesday morning at 9 A.M., I directed that our surveillance be stepped up. And having now confirmed and completed our evaluation of the evidence and our decision on a course of action, this Government feels obliged to report this new crisis to you in fullest detail.

Ann stares at the TV. We continue to hear the speech as Ann turns to look at Teri and Jackie.

ANN
Girls. Stan? Maybe they should go upstairs.

JACKIE
I want to watch.

ANN
Stan.

STAN
They're old enough.

ON TV -

JOHN F. KENNEDY
Additional sites not yet completed appear to be designed for intermediate range ballistic missiles, capable of traveling more than twice as far and thus capable of striking most of the major cities in the Western Hemisphere, ranging as far north as Hudson Bay, Canada, and as far south as Lima, Peru.

Ann watches Teri nervously. Teri stares wide-eyed at the screen.

INT. WESTON HOUSE. KITCHEN. NIGHT.

We still hear JFK's speech from the adjacent living room. Ann walks into the kitchen and puts the half-eaten plate of appetizers on the counter. Ann glances coldly, with disdain, at the poster on the wall. She focuses on the words YOUR FAMILY SURVIVAL PLAN.

JOHN F. KENNEDY (O.S.)
...We will not prematurely or unnecessarily risk the costs of worldwide nuclear war in which even the fruits of victory would be ashes in our mouth; but neither will we shrink from that risk at any time it must be faced.

Stan enters.

STAN

What are you doing? Don't you want
to see this?

ANN

No. No I don't.

Ann lights a cigarette.

STAN

Everything will be fine. Believe
me. Don't get upset.

ANN

I'm not upset. I just don't need to
see it. Especially with this group -

-

STAN

-- I know this may bring things up
for you, but as a Mother you need
to see it. Or you need to sit with
your daughters at least.

ANN

I don't want to be a Mother right
now. I want to be a person for a
minute.

Stan shifts uncomfortably.

STAN

(talks low)

There's a way to conduct yourself.

Ann doesn't say anything, instead she stares blankly at him. Stan shakes his head, and heads back into the living room.

EXT. WESTON HOUSE. BACKYARD. NIGHT.

Ann walks outside and stands in the middle of her yard, smoking. She turns to the right and looks into the window of the next house, over her fence. We follow her gaze to see a family of four sitting, riveted to their television. They're watching The Andy Griffith Show.

Ann looks to her left where we see the upstairs window of another house. A mom puts a baby to sleep in a crib. Ann's gaze moves to downstairs, and we see a husband having a drink, watching JFK talk on the television.

We hear a scratching: It's Charlie digging. Ann discards her cigarette and walks over to Charlie. She picks him up and walks back towards the house.

INT. WESTON HOUSE. LIVING ROOM. NIGHT.

Ann enters the living room. All the adults are silent, still staring at the television. Cindy has tears in her eyes. Jackie looks at the TV indifferently. Teri is no longer there.

On TV -

JOHN F. KENNEDY

The cost of freedom is always high,
but Americans have always paid it.
And one path we shall never choose,
and that is the path of surrender
or submission.

Our goal is not the victory of
might, but the vindication of
right; not peace at the expense of
freedom, but both peace and
freedom, here in this hemisphere,
and, we hope, around the world. God
willing, that goal will be
achieved. Thank you and good night.

A long beat. Stan switches the TV off. Everyone is silent for a moment. Ken leans back, amused and validated.

KEN

Well James you've always wanted
people to like you. You're about to
be the most popular guy in the
neighborhood with that shelter.

CINDY

Ken. Please.

ANN

Jackie. Why don't you join Teri?
I'll be up soon.

Jackie gets up and walks out of the room. Stan sighs, and lights a cigarette.

STAN

Everyone's going to get too
hysterical about this --

TRISH
-- James. We should go. I want to
check on the kids.

James gets up.

TRISH (CONT'D)
Thank you for having us Ann.
Everything was divine.

Ann gives Trish a hug, her and James go.

Ken gets up and refills his whiskey at the bar. Cindy stares
into space.

CINDY
How am I supposed to get up
tomorrow morning, like everything's
normal?

KEN
You may not have to.

STAN
Jesus. Ken. Do you have a limit?

KEN
Look I'm sorry. Maybe it's time for
us to shove off too. Cindy.

Cindy slowly gets up. Ken doesn't wait for her, he heads to
the front door. Cindy gives Ann a warm kiss on the cheek.

CINDY
A wonderful evening. You outdid
yourself. As usual.

Cindy and Ken exit. Stan turns to Ann to say something.

ANN
I want to go check on them.

Ann goes. Stan watches after her, a little defeated. He goes
to the bar and pours himself a drink.

INT. WESTON HOUSE. TERI'S ROOM. NIGHT.

Teri lies in her twin bed, facing the wall. There's a knock
at the door. Teri stays put.

TERI
Yes.

Ann enters.

ANN
Are you all right? I'm sorry I
disappeared. I just didn't feel
like I needed to see it all.

Teri turns over to face Ann.

TERI
It's OK. I didn't want to either.

Ann sits down on the bed and strokes Teri's hair.

ANN
It wasn't because I was scared.
Just tired. It's all going to be
fine. You know that right?

Teri stares at her.

ANN (CONT'D)
We can talk about it if you want.

TERI
Is it true that...

Teri trails off.

ANN
What? Talk to me.

TERI
That the old men -- they're
gambling our generation. Like
blackjack chips. That they don't
even care if we die.

ANN
Who told you that?

Teri doesn't respond.

ANN (CONT'D)
Teri. Everyone cares about you.
Children are all adults care about.
I don't know who told you
otherwise.

Teri leans over and gives Ann a hug. Ann holds her, and
kisses her forehead.

INT. WESTON HOUSE. MASTER BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Ann enters. Stan is laying in bed, reading. He puts his book down, and sits up on his elbows. Ann takes her dress off. She goes to sit at her vanity in her slip. She begins to brush her hair, slowly and methodically.

ANN
(to no one)
They're both asleep.

STAN
Are you all right?

ANN
Yes.

STAN
Really everyone's going to be hysterical about this. There's no need to be.

ANN
I'm sure you're right.

Stan nods, convinced he fixed everything. He goes back to reading.

ANN (CONT'D)
It does make you wonder though.

STAN
What?

Ann turns to Stan.

ANN
That if the world ended tomorrow, have you been living the life you want to lead?

STAN
Of course I have.

Ann turns back to her mirror.

STAN (CONT'D)
Haven't you?

ANN
Of course.

Ann gets up and goes and sits on Stan's side of the bed. She climbs on top of Stan, and gives him a warm kiss.

Stan kisses her back, hard. He moves her easily to the bed, and hovers over her. He moves a piece of hair from in front of her face. He leans in again, to kiss her.

Ann pushes him back softly. She looks at him with longing, but we see that this longing is not at all sexual. She stares at him for a few moments.

ANN (CONT'D)
Do you still see me?

Stan studies Ann, perplexed. His eyes search hers for any clue of what he should say, so he will not ruin this moment.

STAN
Of course I do.

He leans in immediately and kisses her neck. He begins to move the strap of her slip off her shoulder. Ann looks up at the ceiling, lost in her unanswered question.

INT. WESTON HOUSE. MASTER BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Ann lays in bed, sleeping.

Suddenly, we hear the jarring sound of a massive explosion. Ann falls violently to the floor. We hear only her ears ringing and her heavy breathing as she crouches in a ball.

After a few moments, there's silence. Ann lifts up timidly, and looks around the room.

Pieces of the top of the house have blown off. Sirens begin to ring, and Ann looks beyond the house, at the utterly decimated street. Everything is ash.

ANN
Stan?

Ann gets up, shakily.

INT. WESTON HOUSE. HALLWAY. CONTINUOUS.

Ann walks, petrified, through the barren hallway. A beam falls three feet in front of her. She jumps back, just getting out of its way in time.

ANN
Jackie? Teri.

Ann's voice breaks. She's on the verge of tears. We hear sounds ahead. Ann walks towards them.

INT. WESTON HOUSE. LIVING ROOM. CONTINUOUS.

Ann enters. She gasps at the mangled remains of her living room.

There is a gathering of men in suits, sitting in chairs amidst the wreckage. Stan is standing in front of them. The fallout shelter advertisement hangs on a hinge jutting out from a wooden beam behind Stan.

Stan holds a black gas mask in his hand.

STAN

Your family survival plan -- it's never finished. Never. Now these gas masks will protect you from any contingency. Airborne pollutants.

Toxic gas. They sold out in just the last month, alone. They'll allow you to live through any sort of warfare, comfortably with your loved ones. You just cannot take them off. See, we have black for the men...

Stan takes another mask out from behind him.

STAN (CONT'D)

...And a softer sky blue for the ladies.

Stan notices Ann.

STAN (CONT'D)

Oh honey. Perfect timing.

The men turn in eerie unison, to stare at Ann.

STAN (CONT'D)

Come up here.

Ann stares at Stan, bewildered. But she walks to the front where he is, being pushed by an invisible force.

STAN (CONT'D)

My wife can model this for you.

Stan puts the sky blue gas mask, roughly on Ann, like he's outfitting a rookie soldier. We still hear Stan's voice, but it is duller and farther away.

STAN (CONT'D)

You put it on this way. You can
breathe perfectly. See. See how
she's breathing. Perfectly.

We are now inside the gas mask with Ann, who breathes choppy breaths. We hear the muffled sounds of Stan's voice, and the men murmuring.

Ann puts her hands up to the mask and tries to pull it off. It won't budge. Ann begins to scream.

ANN

Stan? Stan!

INT. WESTON HOUSE. MASTER BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Ann shoots up in bed, sweating. The phone is ringing loudly, over and over again. Ann looks over to see Stan sleeping next to her, snoring. She puts her hand to her heart and takes a few deep breaths. Then she picks up the phone on the bedside table.

ANN

(into phone)

Yes? -- Mother. Slow down. Please,
slow down.

Ann switches on the light, on her bedside table. She sits up and rubs her eyes.

ANN (CONT'D)

(into phone)

Nothing's happened. It's not -- you
need to relax. I can barely
understand you. Take a breath.

Stan has woken up. He sits up on his elbows.

STAN

(blearily)

It's 4 AM. Who is it?

ANN

Your Mother.

STAN

What's wrong?

ANN

(into phone)

That happens sometimes.

The sounds on the other end of the phone get louder. Ann holds the mouth of the phone.

ANN (CONT'D)
(to Stan)
She's hysterical. Her radio show cut out in the middle. She can't hear anything.

STAN
And?

ANN
She thinks it has to do with what's happening.

Stan plops back down in a huff. He groans.

ANN (CONT'D)
Can you talk to her? I can't talk to her when she's like this.
(into phone)
Mother. Talk to Stan, all right?

Ann hands Stan the phone. We still hear sounds emanating from it.

ANN (CONT'D)
I'll make coffee.

STAN
(to Ann)
Hey.

Stan puts his hand to Ann's forehead.

STAN (CONT'D)
You're soaked.

ANN
Bad dream.

STAN
What happened?

ANN
I don't know. I couldn't breathe.

STAN
You smoke too much.

Ann nods. She gets up and walks to the bathroom.

Stan reaches over and gets a cigarette from his bedside table. He lights it, and takes a long inhale.

STAN (CONT'D)
(into phone)
I'm sure it's just a power failure.
Yes. I'll stay on with you until it
comes back, all right?

INT. WESTON HOUSE. KITCHEN. MORNING.

Ann hustles around the kitchen and makes coffee.

After a few moments, she looks out the window. Her eyes widen in delight, we follow her gaze to see the deer with the scar on its neck, standing in the corner of the lawn. He nibbles on some grass. Ann watches the deer, smiling; its happiness gratifies her.

ANN
Aha. You like it here now.

Charlie runs into the kitchen and barks. The deer perks up and stares at Ann. Then it runs past the side of the house and disappears again. Ann frowns at Charlie.

Stan enters from the stairs in a suit.

ANN (CONT'D)
Are you eating?

STAN
No. I'm going to go in early.

ANN
Why is she listening to radio shows
at 4 AM?

STAN
They help her sleep. The silence is
what wakes her up.

ANN
Conditioned. From your Father. The
man never stopped talking.

Stan nods with a smile. He pours himself a cup of coffee. He leans back against the counter and watches Ann for a moment.

STAN
Are you OK? What was that about
last night?

ANN

What?

STAN

Leaving the room during the address. And something about -- whether or not you're living the life you want to lead.

ANN

Nothing. One too many? I always have too much when I host. It's a task, Stan.

STAN

You can always --

ANN

What?

STAN

I don't know. Go back to work.

ANN

What are you talking about?

STAN

I'm just saying. The girls are old enough. Frank -- even said something about Budweiser.

ANN

That's not something I like doing.

STAN

Which is what I told him.

Ann starts washing dishes.

STAN (CONT'D)

So acting then.

ANN

What about acting?

STAN

I feel like I'm talking to a parrot.

ANN

There's no picking back up in that industry. Once you're out, you're out. And I don't want to be back in.

STAN

It doesn't need to be what it was before. There are local theater troupes. The school always needs help in the drama department --

Ann glares at Stan.

STAN (CONT'D)

What?

ANN

I either am. Or I am not. I can't settle for almost there. I'm not built for that. You are. I'm not.

Stan prickles, this comment cut to the core.

STAN

OK. Lucky you.

ANN

Stan.

Stan takes his hat from the counter and exits.

INT. HAMDEN HIGH SCHOOL. BATHROOM. MORNING.

Jackie sits on a toilet, in a stall, idly. She turns to her right to get toilet paper, and notices writing carved into the plastic wall of the stall -

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE IF YOU GROW UP?

Jackie runs her fingers over the question. She continues to read the next lines, where students have scrawled out occupations:

JOURNALIST, FASHION MODEL, MOTHER, DOCTOR, STEWARDESS, HOUSEWIFE, ALIVE

Jackie's eyes fix on the last word, "Alive." She takes out a pen from her pocket, and writes something under "Alive":

"COMMUNIST"

She looks at her work and half-smiles, amused.

INT. HAMDEN MIDDLE SCHOOL. CLASSROOM. MORNING.

Susan stands up front at the chalkboard. She is in the middle of a history lesson. But her hands tremble and she looks unnerved and distracted.

Teri sits at her desk and rips little pieces of paper from her notebook nervously. Then she tears them into smaller pieces.

SUSAN

And who was actually the first,
before Columbus, to sail to
America?

There's silence.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

I'll give you a hint. He came from Iceland. You can't always assume that who history tells you came first, actually came first.

A girl, SALLY (12) raises her hand.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Yes, Sally. Do you know?

Sally shakes her head.

ED

(mutters)

She doesn't know anything.

The class giggles.

SUSAN

Ed. Do not speak over your classmates. Sally?

SALLY

I was just wondering, Ms. Geller.
What's a quarantine?

Teri looks up, as does the rest of the class. It's the first thing they've actually heard in forty minutes.

Susan puts down her chalk and stares out at the class.

SUSAN

Well. They call it a quarantine,
but really it is a blockade.

(MORE)

SUSAN (CONT'D)
They don't want to use the word
"blockade," because it sounds more -
militaristic. The quarantine is an
attempt to block Soviet ships from
delivering missiles to Cuba.

A boy in back chimes in, without raising his hand.

BOY
Will it work?

SUSAN
We should get back to the lesson --

SALLY
Please, Ms. Geller.

The rest of the class interjects with pleas. Susan hesitates, then begins to speak again -

SUSAN
I don't know if it will work, or if it won't work. The first Soviet ships are approaching. Things could escalate at any moment. Some teachers choose not to be honest about this. I see no reason not to be. Unfortunately, this all could result in a nuclear war.

ED
My Father says war is necessary. He also says you sound like a Communist.

Some of the class turns to stare at Ed, in disbelief. Then they look back, wide-eyed at Susan. Susan is calmer than we've seen her before. She smiles, amused.

SUSAN
I am not one, Mr. Jones. That I can assure you. And if war does come, as your Dad says it should, it's important for you to be prepared. Because if things escalate, you'll be dismissed to be at home, with your Housewife Mothers. You'd have around 15 minutes after the siren. If you live farther away than that, you should stay at school.

Ms. Geller watches the kids for a moment. Then she turns back towards the blackboard.

SUSAN (CONT'D)
It was Leif Erikson. The explorer
from Iceland, that came before
Columbus.

INT. GROCERY STORE. AISLE 2. DAY.

Ann walks down an aisle with a shopping cart. She arrives at the canned goods section. It has been completely picked over: There is barely anything left. Ann frowns and picks up one of the reject cans. It's Stewed pears. She puts it back on the shelf.

ANN
(to herself)
The world has gone insane.

MOLLY (O.S.)
Ann!

MOLLY (late 30's) approaches Ann as if she's the exact person she has been dying to see. Molly's shopping cart is filled to the brim with cans. Ann notices, and attempts to hide her annoyance.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
Ann. Oh my goodness, how are you?
It has been so long.

ANN
Molly. It really has.

MOLLY
Well. I've been cooped up with a
newborn. Four boys now, can you
believe it? You know Rich and I saw
Jackie at Carvel a few weeks back.
She's so beautiful.

ANN
Thank you -- and also implacable
lately. Thank God Teri still needs
me. How are you and Rich?

MOLLY
I guess as well as can be expected.
Is Stan concerned?

ANN
Not really. When they've fought in
a war they become almost de-
sensitized to this kind of thing.

Ann gestures at Molly's mountain of canned goods.

ANN (CONT'D)
I take it Rich is concerned.

MOLLY
No. I am. And it's caused a rift
already. He's so cross with me. But
you know -- if anything happened
and I wasn't prepared, for the
kids, I'd never forgive myself --

ANN
-- I have to ask, can I have a can
or two of green peas from you?
There's nothing left.

Molly shifts squeamishly.

MOLLY
(lightly)
I see that.

ANN
Teri has been a pile of nerves. I
wanted to make her favorite --

MOLLY
(shakes her head)
I can't.

Awkward beat.

ANN
Really, Molly. It's one can. I
can't imagine one can is life or
death. You could feed Castro's army
with that cart.

MOLLY
You always had a unique sense of
humor. I really do have to go. It
was nice to see you.

Molly starts to walk by Ann. Ann casually reaches into
Molly's cart and takes one can out. Then another. She tosses
them into her own cart.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
Really, Ann. Put those back. Or I
will take them back.

ANN
 You'd rather be torn apart by a
 pack of wolves than turn heads.

Ann turns her cart around, and walks away.

ANN (CONT'D)
 Make sure to have Rich teach those
 boys how to share. Someone should.

CUT TO:

INT. THE WESTON HOUSE. KITCHEN. DAY.

Ann bops gleefully around the kitchen, high off her encounter with Molly. In suburbia, it's the little victories.

"Paper Moon," by Ella Fitzgerald, plays on the radio.

Ann dusts the counter tops and sings along, completely uninhibited.

ANN
 (sings)
*Say it's only a paper moon,
 Sailing over a cardboard sea,
 But it wouldn't be make believe if
 you believed in me.
 Yes, it's only a canvas sky,
 Hanging over a muslin tree,
 But it wouldn't be make-believe if
 you believed in me --*

The telephone rings. Ann turns down the radio and picks up the phone. She's slightly out of breath.

ANN (CONT'D)
 Weston residence.

INT. HAMDEN SCHOOL. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE. SAME.

SAM FORD (60's), the school principal, sits at his desk going through papers. He is Americana incarnate, like his office decor.

Ed Jones' "Kill The Pinkos" drawing lies discarded on his desk.

We intercut between Ann and Sam.

SAM
 Ms. Weston. It's Principal Ford.

Ann switches the radio off and goes and sits down at the kitchen table.

SAM (CONT'D)
Is this a bad time?

ANN
No. No it's a fine time.

Ann checks her watch.

ANN (CONT'D)
Is everything all right?

SAM
Well. Yes and no.

ANN
OK.

SAM
I debated even calling you. Jackie hasn't done anything against school policy. But -- we're concerned.

Ann takes out her cigarette case. She lights a cigarette and takes a puff. Then she leans back.

ANN
I'm listening.

SAM
In the bathroom, the kids write these questions on the walls. One was asking what they want to be when they grow up. One of my teachers saw that someone wrote "Communist" as their response. She was startled, as you can imagine. She recognized it as Jackie's handwriting.

Ann places her cigarette on the ash tray on the table.

ANN
All right.

SAM
It's a tense week. I don't have to tell you this. The teacher scrubbed it off, because we wouldn't want students to get the wrong idea.
About Jackie.

(MORE)

SAM (CONT'D)
That -- could be hard for her. With
the other students. As you can
imagine.

ANN
I can imagine it, yes.

SAM
I thought you should know. And that
maybe you'd talk to her. She's a
very bright girl.

ANN
I will. She is.

SAM
Maybe prep school is worth thinking
about, a lot of our students are
switching --

ANN
-- My husband and I can handle this
with her on our own, Mr. Ford.
Jackie has an eccentric sense of
humor. Sometimes it gets her into
trouble. We'll handle it. Unless,
of course, there's something I'm
unaware of with the school's
policies?

Sam clears his throat.

SAM
No. No there isn't. Thank you, Mrs.
Weston.

Ann hangs up.

INT. SID'S RESTAURANT. NIGHT.

It's the neighborhood spot for repressed parents to get out
for the evening. There's red banquets, clouds of smoke and
the constant clinking of glasses mixed with tinny music that
makes adults feel like teenagers again. The dance floor
rarely lets up, but only because it's the one place where
husbands can swap wives in public.

Stan and Ann sit at a table for dinner, smoking. They have
martinis. Ann stares at the dance floor, lost in thought.

STAN
I learned who the real fear-mongers
are in the office today.
(MORE)

STAN (CONT'D)
And their victims - the alarmists.
Jim comes in and says to me "The
world could end tomorrow!" So I
said "All right. Then have
Tropicana on my desk by midnight."

ANN
Mm-hm.

Ann takes a sip of her martini.

Stan's stares down at his drink sulkily; he was sure that
punch line was a hit.

STAN
(clears throat)
Did the girls say anything about
how school is?

ANN
Jackie went to Lisa's house
tonight. Teri's home. Cindy's going
to run across the street and check
on her and feed Charlie.

STAN
I didn't ask where they were. And
you already told me that.

Ann looks at him.

STAN (CONT'D)
What's on your mind tonight? You're
a million miles away.

ANN
I'm sorry. The principal called
earlier.

STAN
And?

ANN
Really. It's nothing. Just --
something I have to talk to Jackie
about.

A young, male SERVER comes over.

SERVER
You folks ready to order?

Ann looks down at her menu, relieved at the distraction.

ANN
(to no one)
What are you getting?

STAN
We need a few minutes.

The server goes. Ann leans back and sighs.

ANN
Really. Stan. It's not a big thing.

STAN
So tell me then.

ANN
Apparently some of the kids write
questions on the bathroom walls.
One was about what they want to be
when they grow up. Jackie wrote
"Communist."

STAN
What?

ANN
Frankly, I was relieved she didn't
say stewardess.

STAN
Ann.

ANN
I know she was joking.

STAN
Like her Mother.

ANN
What does that mean?

STAN
It means I don't see the humor. Not
yours. Not hers. What the hell is
with her lately?

ANN
I'll talk to her.

STAN
Or maybe I should.

Stan takes another cigarette out from his pocket, and lights
it aggressively.

ANN

You need to calm down. It's just words.

STAN

You would say that.

ANN

If you have something to say Stan, please, say it.

STAN

I am patient with you on your differences. Your open thinking.

ANN

My open thinking --

STAN

There's that parrot again.

ANN

(raises voice)

Do not speak to me like I am a stupid housewife.

They both notice people around them staring. Stan lowers his voice.

STAN

Keep your open thinking. But do not poison the well when it comes to our daughter.

ANN

I am not poisoning anything. I didn't do anything.

STAN

Just because we don't talk about it doesn't mean it didn't happen.

ANN

I made one mistake. You, and the rest of the world, wants to hold it over my head for my entire life.

STAN

Well. It was a big mistake. That you made more than once.

ANN

You didn't think it was so big back in Los Angeles.

(MORE)

ANN (CONT'D)
It became bigger to you when we
moved to this glossy advertisement
of an American town.

STAN
Here we go. My advertising career.
How moving here ruined your life.
How I was such a disappointment to
you --

ANN
No. You weren't. Right now, you
are.

Ann grabs Stan's car keys off the table and picks up her purse.

STAN
Look. Ann. Just sit back down.

ANN
Open thinking? Another way to say
"thinking." You used to think too.
Find your own way home.

Ann exits. The server comes back over.

SERVER
You folks about ready to order?

EXT. HAMDEN MIDDLE SCHOOL. PARKING LOT. NIGHT.

Jackie follows behind LISA (15), a sheep whose herdsmen are teenage boys. Currently those boys are BILLY (17) and MARK (17).

Mark totes a six pack of beer, and both boys move flippantly; as if they'd take or leave anything. Not caring is their newfound religion.

Jackie slows and looks around her nervously. Lisa turns back to her.

LISA
Hurry up.

JACKIE
Where are we going?

LISA
(loud, so the herdsmen can
hear)
Don't be a wet blanket, Weston.

MARK
Shh. Come on.

The four go to a first floor window of the school. Billy stands on his tip toes, and pops open the window. Mark gestures to Lisa and puffs up.

MARK (CONT'D)
I'll help you up.

Mark hoists Lisa up. She pulls herself through the window, but not before Mark pinches her butt.

LISA
(delighted)
Mark! Stop!

BILLY
(to Jackie)
Need help?

JACKIE
I'm fine.

Billy and Mark share an amused look as Jackie hoists herself up through the window. Mark leans over to look up her skirt.

Billy and Mark follow her.

INT. HAMDEN MIDDLE SCHOOL. CLASSROOM. CONTINUOUS.

It's a sixth grade classroom with drawings, geography and arithmetic covering the walls.

The four teens tumble in sloppily.

Mark plops down at one of the tiny desks and opens one of the beers from the six-pack. He pulls up another desk next to his own, and motions to Lisa to come sit.

Billy lights a cigarette. He goes to the teacher's desk and start rifling through the drawers. The cigarette hangs from his mouth as he does this, and he's fully conscious of how staggering it makes him look.

Jackie stands apart, and observes the three teens like a worried parent.

JACKIE
What are we doing here?

MARK
Sit down Weston, would you?

Billy holds up a film reel.

BILLY
And enjoy the feature presentation.

Billy pulls down the projector screen behind the teacher's desk. He slides the film reel into the projector on the desk and turns it on.

Jackie sits down, reluctantly.

Cartoon music BLARES from the screen.

Mark passes two beers to Billy who plops down next to Jackie at a desk. Billy hands Jackie a beer, and looks at her indifferently, aware they're sitting together by default.

ON SCREEN -

A cartoon turtle - BERT THE TURTLE - walks between trees, wearing a helmet. He smells a flower that he's holding. Cartoon music plays as he walks...

SONG (V.O.)

*Dum dum, deedle-dum dum
Deedle-dum dum, deedle-dum dum*

There was a turtle by the name of Bert, and Bert the Turtle was very alert, When danger threatened him he never got hurt, He knew just what to do.

*He'd duck and cover, duck and cover
He did what we all must learn to do, you and you and you and you...
duck and cover!*

ACTION ON SCREEN

Bert the turtle walks along a path. At some point a stick of dynamite comes into frame next to his head. The camera comes out to show it's a monkey on a tree branch, dangling a stick of dynamite by Bert.

Bert turns to see the dynamite, and jumps in alarm. Then he immediately ducks to the ground and hides in his shell as the stick of dynamite goes off. The tree breaks, and the monkey disappears. Bert stays inside his shell.

Mark chuckles and throws an empty beer bottle at the screen. It breaks.

MARK
Bert! You're dead!

Lisa giggles.

ON SCREEN -

Bert stays in his turtle shell.

The title DUCK AND COVER comes up as text, over the picture.

Cartoon music continues to play in the background. A MAN's voice comes in: It aims at seriousness, but is reminiscent of the husband in Leave it to Beaver.

MAN (V.O.)

Be sure and remember what Bert the Turtle just did friends, because every one of us must remember to do the same thing. That's what this film is all about. Duck and Cover.

BILLY

(to Jackie)

Remember this?

Jackie nods.

ON SCREEN -

A special message comes up as text, that's also spoken -

MAN (V.O.)

This is an official civil defense film produced in cooperation with the Federal Civil Defense administration and in consultation with the safety commission of the national education association.

MARK

Yes, Mr. President!

CLOSE on Jackie now. The civil defense message is reflected on her face.

MAN (V.O.)

Hey Bert, come on out and meet all these nice people. Please? Oh all right...

INT. STAN'S CAR. NIGHT.

We still hear the man in the civil defense video as Ann drives home from the restaurant with a vengeance, smoking a cigarette.

MAN (V.O.)
...We really can't blame you. You see, Bert is a very, very careful fellow. When there's danger, this is the way he keeps from being hurt. Sometimes it even saves his life.

Ann turns into her driveway and parks Stan's car diagonally, with a screech, to twist the knife more.

Ann gets out of the car. She goes to the front door and opens it.

INT. THE WESTON HOUSE. KITCHEN. CONTINUOUS.

Ann walks into the dimly lit kitchen. She throws down her keys hostilely.

We see the silhouetted shadow of someone behind her, sitting on the couch, in the living room. Ann turns slowly. She feels a presence as well. She jumps at seeing Cindy lean forward out of the shadows.

ANN
Oh -- Cindy. Jesus. You scared me.

CINDY
I'm sorry Ann. I didn't know you'd be back so soon. I just wanted to sit for a moment and catch my breath. Teri's already asleep. I think she's upset by all of this.

Ann nods. She walks to the living room and switches a light on. Cindy sits on the couch with a highball of vodka on the table next to her.

ANN
Is everything all right?

CINDY
Of course. I hope you didn't mind I helped myself. I just needed a moment. This week has been...

Cindy trails off. Ann watches her, concerned. Then she notices something.

ANN
That's -- is that my dress? And my necklace.

Cindy stares back at Ann, flustered.

CINDY

I should have asked first. I -- I have this gala next month. For Ken's firm. I have nothing to wear and -- you always have such beautiful things. You always look so glamorous. I thought I could borrow something.

ANN

You could have just asked, Cindy.

CINDY

I thought I'd see what I liked and saved you time. That makes sense, doesn't it?

Ann doesn't respond. She watches Cindy, warily.

CINDY (CONT'D)

(whispers)

I'm sorry, Ann.

Cindy looks down at her hands, beginning to get emotional.

CINDY (CONT'D)

Things have been bad -- at home.

Cindy shakily takes her pack of cigarettes from the end table. She takes one out, then attempts to light it. But she struggles to, as her hands tremble. Ann walks over and lights it. Cindy looks up at her.

CINDY (CONT'D)

I guess I felt like being someone else tonight.

Cindy takes another puff, and nods a little frantically.

CINDY (CONT'D)

I did. I felt like being someone else. And then I realized - us. Women, Mothers, Wives. We can't be anybody else but each other. We can't be anybody else but each other, can we?

Ann sits slowly on a chair, like she's just received terrible news.

CINDY (CONT'D)
(mutters to herself)
We can't be anybody else but each
other.

ANN
Stop saying that.

CINDY
Well it's true. If we want to be
anybody else, all we can be is each
other. Nobody will let us be
anything different. Isn't that
right?

Ann stares at Cindy, her eyes glisten.

ANN
We are very different. And we are
married to very different men.

CINDY
Yes. We are different in who we
are. And in who we are married to.
But not in what we are. I admire
who you are. I always have. What is
it they say -- about imitation and
flattery? Anyway. I'm so sorry.

Ann stands up.

ANN
You need to go now.

CINDY
Yes. I'll go and change.

Cindy stands up shakily from the couch. She walks past Ann.

ANN
What if Teri had come down?

Cindy stops for a moment to look back at Ann.

CINDY
I fed Charlie.

Cindy goes.

INT. HAMDEN MIDDLE SCHOOL. CLASSROOM. NIGHT.

Billy, Mark and Lisa start to climb back out the window. Jackie stands by the classroom door. Mark looks back and glares at her impatiently, tired of his one willful sheep.

MARK

Weston. Let's go?

JACKIE

I have to go to the bathroom.

BILLY

All right. Meet us outside.

INT. HAMDEN MIDDLE SCHOOL. HALLWAY. NIGHT.

Jackie comes out of the girls' bathroom. She wipes her wet hands on her skirt.

We hear muffled sounds from a classroom ahead of her. She tiptoes quietly towards the door, and peeks through the window.

We see Susan sitting at her desk. She's crying, quite hysterically by herself.

Susan buries her face in her hands, and takes a deep breath. She begins to gather herself, but then suddenly looks down and starts to cry again.

Jackie forgets herself and watches Susan for another moment. Then she quietly tip toes past the classroom.

EXT. HAMDEN MIDDLE SCHOOL. BILLY'S CAR. NIGHT.

Billy sits in the driver's seat of a Ford Mustang. Jackie sits in the passenger seat. She gazes ahead of her, lost in thought.

Billy observes Jackie, perplexed by her autonomy.

BILLY

You OK?

JACKIE

What? Oh. Yeah. Sorry.

Billy lights a cigarette. He stares out into the woods in front of them.

BILLY

What is it about those woods? It's
where everyone goes to score.

JACKIE

They're not doing that.

BILLY

How would you know?

JACKIE

I hope they're not. I have to be
home soon. Lisa knows that.

BILLY

She doesn't care. You lost your
alliance the moment she got into
the car.

Jackie ignores him and looks out the side window.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Why are you even friends? You're so
different.

JACKIE

Convenience. I guess.

BILLY

You're different than all the
girls. You're always so sure of
yourself. I like that. Especially
during a week like this one. We can
joke, but it's scary you know?
Anyway you're different.

Jackie looks down.

JACKIE

I'm not, really.

BILLY

You are. And not just for the sake
of being different.

Jackie glances up at him and half-smiles.

JACKIE

Thanks.

Billy leans over and kisses her awkwardly. Like most teenage
boys, he has no sense of timing. Jackie draws away from him
at first.

He looks at her expectantly. She kisses him back, a little curiously.

Billy puts his hand on her thigh, and tries to put it under her skirt. Jackie moves away from him.

JACKIE (CONT'D)
I don't want to do that.

Billy frowns at her playfully.

BILLY
It doesn't have to be everything.

He tries to kiss her again, and puts his hand under her skirt once more.

JACKIE
Billy, no.

BILLY
(whispers)
It's not that big of a deal. Trust me. Besides -- the world could end tomorrow.

Jackie shoves him backward, hard. He stares at her, surprised.

JACKIE
I said no.

Jackie looks forward again. Billy looks in the rearview mirror and runs his fingers through his hair.

BILLY
You get in my goddamn car with me.
What did you expect?

JACKIE
To get driven home. By the only person that drove us here.

Billy looks at her, cynically.

BILLY
Clever. The clever girl from the clever family. My Dad calls your Mom a little commie bitch, anyway.

Jackie turns and stares at Billy for a moment, trembling.

She swiftly punches him squarely in the face.

Billy keels over his steering wheel holding his nose.

BILLY (CONT'D)
Jesus!

Jackie doesn't flinch. Instead she stares at him and waits, wanting to see the fruit of her labor.

Billy looks up at her. Blood gushes from his nose.

BILLY (CONT'D)
I'm bleeding. Fuck.

Jackie gets out of the car, quickly. She slams the door shut and walks off across the parking lot.

EXT. A ROAD. NIGHT.

Jackie walks along the side of a quiet road, in the dark. She pulls her skirt down, protectively. Headlights come up behind her. Jackie turns to look, and puts her hand to her eye, blinded.

Susan slows down to a stop next to Jackie. She rolls down the window.

SUSAN
You go to Hamden, don't you?

JACKIE
Uh. Yes, yes I do.

SUSAN
I have your sister in my class.

JACKIE
Right. I knew that.

SUSAN
Do you know how dangerous it is to be walking alone at night like this?

Jackie nods.

SUSAN (CONT'D)
Where are you coming from?

Jackie doesn't answer. She looks down the road.

SUSAN (CONT'D)
Get in. I'll drive you home.

JACKIE

Really, it's all right I'm not far -

SUSAN

It's not a choice, Miss Weston. I can drop you a few houses down so your parents think the person who was supposed to drop you off, dropped you off.

Susan leans over and pushes the passenger door open. Jackie gets in.

INT. WESTON HOUSE. KITCHEN. NIGHT.

Ann sits at the kitchen table smoking a cigarette. She stares ahead of her, lost in thought. Teri enters.

TERI

Where's Dad?

ANN

I had a headache. He wanted to finish his dinner. He'll be home soon.

TERI

Did Mrs. Jones leave?

ANN

Yes. I'm glad she could fill in for me tonight.

Ann takes a long drag of her cigarette. Teri sits down at the table next to her. Ann notices Teri's red eyes. She puts her cigarette out.

ANN (CONT'D)

Have you been crying, sweetie?

TERI

Mom. Please don't make me go to school tomorrow. Can I stay home with you? I'll do anything. I'll help with everything.

ANN

What do you mean? Do you not feel well?

TERI

Yes I'm sick.

Ann puts her hand to Teri's forehead.

ANN
You feel cool to me.

TERI
I can't go to school. If I go, I won't die with you. Please don't make me go.

Teri starts to cry. Ann is bewildered, she goes to stand over Teri. She bends down and hugs her.

ANN
Honey --

TERI
-- I can't run home in 15 minutes. We're further than some of the other kids. I don't want to die with the kids and the teacher. They're awful. I want to be with you.

ANN
Who is dying? Who is telling you all of this, the kids at school?

TERI
Ms. Geller. She said we'd have fifteen minutes when nuclear war starts. To go home and die and be annihilated with our housewife mothers. But we're more than 15 minutes away.

Ann kneels down. She stares into Teri's eyes, with a livid look.

ANN
Ms. Geller said all of that to you?

Teri eyes her warily, then nods. Ann takes a deep breath, and gathers herself.

ANN (CONT'D)
I know. And Dad knows, that things are going to be fine.

TERI
But how do you know? How do you know they won't all blow up everyone?

ANN

Because I believe, deep down,
neither side wants that.

TERI

The kids at school say Soviets --

ANN

--I don't care what the kids at
school say. I've lived longer than
they have. I'm not just some
"housewife mother" like your
teacher says.

Teri half-smiles through tears.

ANN (CONT'D)

I don't think the humans on our
side, nor the humans on their side
want that. Deep down I know they
don't.

TERI

Do you promise?

ANN

I promise. Have I ever broken a
promise?

Teri shakes her head.

ANN (CONT'D)

Now can you do something for me?
Can you go upstairs, and try to get
some sleep? If you still don't want
to go to school in the morning you
don't have to go. And we will spend
the day together. Does that sound
all right?

TERI

Yes.

Ann gives Teri a warm hug. Teri buries her face in Ann's
neck.

After a few moments, Teri pulls away. She gets up and starts
to go.

ANN

Want Charlie in your room tonight?

TERI

Yes.

ANN
I'll get him.

INT. SUSAN'S CAR. NIGHT.

Susan and Jackie drive in silence. The radio is on, and the newscaster talks about the importance of civil rights.

JACKIE
Thank you. For driving me. It's
Evergreen Parkway.

Susan nods. Jackie watches her, internally debating something.

JACKIE (CONT'D)
I was at the school. With friends.

SUSAN
You all spend the entire school day
trying to get out of that place.
Then you go there at night in your
free time.

Jackie looks down and smiles to herself.

SUSAN (CONT'D)
Are they still there? Defiling the
gym or something? I hope not
because I'll have to go back.

JACKIE
No. No they left.

Susan stops at a red light. She turns to look at Jackie.

SUSAN
Did something happen?

JACKIE
No.

The light turns green. Susan doesn't move. Jackie glances up at the light, then back at Susan.

Susan continues to stare at Jackie. There is a tenderness in her eyes and Jackie notices.

JACKIE (CONT'D)
Nothing happened. I promise.

SUSAN
Good.

Susan turns forward, and drives.

JACKIE
(hesitantly)
I went to the bathroom and saw you.
In your classroom. Are you OK?

Susan doesn't answer.

JACKIE (CONT'D)
Sorry. That was personal.

SUSAN
It's all right. This week has
brought up a lot for me. That's
all. I'm sure it has for a lot of
people.

A long beat.

JACKIE
Could you tell me? Lately I feel
like I can't talk to anyone.

Susan looks over and considers her. She switches off the radio.

SUSAN
There was someone that I cared very
much about. Someone that I loved.
Years ago. During the Red Scare. It
was when I was a graduate student
at NYU. This person worked in the
State Department. They were hunted
out, put on a list and fired.

Jackie leans back.

JACKIE
That's terrible.

SUSAN
Yes. And then they committed
suicide.

Jackie's eyes widen. It's the first time she's been spoken to by an adult like this.

SUSAN (CONT'D)
It was very hard -- to lose them.
Especially like that. This was the
first person, really, who I had. It
is already hard to find a person
that understands you.

(MORE)

SUSAN (CONT'D)
It's even harder to find someone
that is like you. When you're like
me.

Susan draws in a breath.

SUSAN (CONT'D)
(softly)
It's impossible really.

JACKIE
I don't know what to say. I am so
sorry.

SUSAN
Thank you.

JACKIE
Sometimes I think my Mom was on one
of those lists. But I don't know.

Susan glances at Jackie, then looks ahead.

SUSAN
This was a different kind of list.
It was for what the government
called "perversion." This person.
This woman. It was about who she
was. Not about her political
affiliation. If the society you
come to believe you are a part of
does not want you to exist, it can
be hard to convince yourself that
you should.

Susan straightens up. She turns the radio back on.

SUSAN (CONT'D)
I don't know if that makes sense to
you.

JACKIE
I think it does, yes.

Susan points ahead.

SUSAN
It's a right up here, isn't it?

Jackie nods.

EXT. WESTON HOUSE. BACKYARD. NIGHT.

Ann walks to the back door with Charlie under her arm. She sees headlights approach in the street. She watches as the car stops a few houses down.

Ann squints and sees Jackie in the passenger seat.

Ann goes quickly to the back door of the house and puts Charlie inside.

EXT. WESTON HOUSE. FRONT YARD. CONTINUOUS.

Ann jogs across the front yard, then walks briskly towards Susan's car. Jackie opens the front door as she arrives.

JACKIE

Mom...

ANN

You were supposed to be home a half hour ago. Where is Lisa?

Ann looks at Susan, then back at Jackie.

ANN (CONT'D)

What happened? Someone needs to tell me what's going on here.

JACKIE

Can I tell you inside? Please Mom. Ms. Geller was just helping me.

ANN

Go in. Now.

Jackie hurries to the house. Susan gets out of the car.

SUSAN

I'm sorry, Mrs. Weston --

ANN

We've met already. So it's Ann. Thank you.

SUSAN

Ann. She was walking on the road by herself. I thought it better to get her in the car, tell her I'd drop her a few houses down than have her run away from me.

A long beat.

ANN

Well. Thank you. That makes sense.

Susan nods. She turns to get back into her car.

ANN (CONT'D)

What does not make sense is what you have been saying to my younger daughter.

SUSAN

Excuse me?

ANN

I think you heard me fine.

Ann begins to raise her voice now: She is more hysterical than we've seen her.

ANN (CONT'D)

I was just hoping you could explain to me why you are telling twelve and thirteen-year-olds that they are going to die.

Susan stares at Ann, unsure of what to say.

ANN (CONT'D)

I asked you a question.

Lights in houses begin to go on. A few people come out onto their porch.

A car pulls into the Weston's driveway from the other direction. Stan gets out from the passenger door.

SUSAN

I don't. Ann I --

ANN

My daughter is terrified. Not of what's going on in Cuba -- of you. Of you telling these kids that they are going to be annihilated. That men are gambling away their lives. That they don't care about them. She is thirteen.

SUSAN

It was not in that context --

Stan approaches.

STAN

Ann? What's going on?

ANN

You people bring us in to make sure we are amenable to you teaching this decade verses that decade in history, or if more geometry and less algebra this year sounds all right to us. Yet you neglect to tell us that in the event of a crisis, you will be telling our children that soon they'll need to run home and die with their listless, housewife Mothers. Tell me. Are you a Mother, Susan?

Susan stares at her, defeated.

ANN (CONT'D)

Are you?

SUSAN

No. No I am not a Mother.

ANN

Then please. Stick to what you know.

Ann turns and walks back towards the house.

Susan stands frozen and powerless. She notices neighbors on their porches murmuring. People have drawn back the curtains of their windows, and watch from their living rooms.

Ann passes Stan.

STAN

What happened?

Ann ignores him. Stan follows her.

STAN (CONT'D)

Ann.

ANN

Not now.

STAN

We should talk about tonight.

ANN

There is nothing to say.

Ann walks hurriedly into the house.

INT. WESTON HOUSE. JACKIE'S ROOM. NIGHT.

Jackie sits on her bed. Ann enters and shuts the door behind her. She goes and sits at the foot of the bed. She waits, not saying anything.

JACKIE

I'm sorry I was late. We goofed around at the school. Nothing happened. I swear. I just wanted to get away from them.

Ann studies Jackie for a moment. Then she nods, trustingly.

ANN

OK.

JACKIE

OK?

ANN

Yes.

JACKIE

OK...

ANN

Principal Ford called me today.
About you.

JACKIE

About what?

ANN

Something about you writing that you wanted to be a Communist on the bathroom wall. In answer to the question "what do you want to be when you grow up?"

JACKIE

Jesus. It was a joke. They're analyzing handwriting now. Is it a high school or the Pentagon?

ANN

Jackie. Enough. Why would you write that you wanted to be a Communist when you grow up? It's not funny.

JACKIE
If I grow up. If I grow up.

ANN
Will you stop? With the drama.

JACKIE
No. That was the question. The kids ask it all the time. "What do you want to be IF you grow up?" Not When. If. I love how adults notice the nuances of handwriting, but they don't notice kids questioning their own mortality.

Ann watches Jackie, waiting.

JACKIE (CONT'D)
I wrote it as a joke, OK? I'm sick of how kids are about what they think people are. Everyone wants to put a label on someone if they can't figure them out. I just wanted to make them angry. To shake them up. But kids are unshakeable. And who are you to lecture me about this? You're the reason kids ask if my Mom's a communist. And if I am.

ANN
You've never told me that.

JACKIE
Because I don't care. And because you and Dad have always banned the subject.

ANN
We don't ban it. We just...

Ann trails off. A beat.

ANN (CONT'D)
Look, I'm always here to answer questions. I'm always honest with you.

Ann looks at her for a moment, then gets up to go.

JACKIE
About a month ago, Frank Levy found a little movie house in Buchanan where they show old films. We went to see After Dark.

Ann turns back, and sits back down on the bed.

ANN
You are far too young for that movie.

JACKIE
We bought tickets to It Happened One Night and snuck in. You were incredible. You had so much pain. Was it real?

ANN
That was acting.

JACKIE
The whole thing made me - just - so angry. That you stopped. Where did all of that go?

ANN
What do you mean?

JACKIE
I mean, where did it all go?

Ann looks down evasively: She's spent over a decade avoiding this question.

ANN
It's a hard question, Jackie.

Ann takes a cigarette from her case and starts to light it. Jackie takes the cigarette from her. Ann frowns.

ANN (CONT'D)
I guess some days I know. Some days I don't know.

JACKIE
Did Dad make you stop?

ANN
Of course not. Your Dad loved when I was an actress. He was the only one that made me feel like I was worth anything back then.

JACKIE
What? The whole country loved you --

ANN
-- That doesn't do it. My Mother --
was a very, very cruel woman.
(MORE)

ANN (CONT'D)
I've never really talked to you about her. But she handed me to a studio when I was your age. You go through things, when it happens that young. I'd never want that for you.

JACKIE
But you loved it.

ANN
(honestly)
More than anything. Yes.

JACKIE
So why did you stop?

Ann stares at her, not answering.

JACKIE (CONT'D)
I really need to know.

ANN
I was with someone before Dad. A very talented director. I thought he was a genius. But he was radical, and not a good person. I thought it was a partnership. It wasn't. I followed him to meetings, certain dinners. I signed petitions. I didn't care. For a time I'd do anything for his approval. And for his casting, let's be honest.

Ann sighs. She side-eyes Jackie, reluctant to go on.

ANN (CONT'D)
Anyway he drank too much, everybody did. He could be rough. And at one point I was pregnant. He was particularly violent one night. There was an accident, things got out of hand. It -- the pregnancy -- it didn't work out.

Ann looks down, embarrassed.

ANN (CONT'D)
Your Dad doesn't know that part.

Jackie nods, earnestly.

ANN (CONT'D)

I left, and met Dad on the set of Paramount the next month. He was doing sketches for some movie that was a total flop. And then my name was published in a list, then another, then another -- I couldn't get work anymore. I got pregnant. With you. And I was just so happy to be. After everything.

Ann smiles at Jackie, then reaches out and strokes her hair.

ANN (CONT'D)

Dad's college friend had a friend in advertising in New York. That was that.

A long beat. Jackie looks down at her hands.

JACKIE

I wish you'd waited. For things to settle.

Ann smiles, amused.

JACKIE (CONT'D)

What?

ANN

When you find out you're going to be a Mother -- in that moment -- you are done waiting for the world. You believe the world should wait for you. And then you realize that no one waits. And after time passes, you are angry that they didn't. But you're too proud, too embarrassed, too ashamed to say that you're angry. So you don't say anything.

Jackie stares at her, then nods.

Ann gets up, then looks down at Jackie for a moment.

ANN (CONT'D)

You know how much I love you, right?

JACKIE

Yes.

Ann gives her a warm smile. She walks to the door.

JACKIE (CONT'D)

Mom -- Did the government also hunt
other people? Homosexuals.

Ann turns at the doorway, taken aback.

ANN

Yes. Who told you that?

JACKIE

Ms. Geller.

Ann stares beyond Jackie, guiltily realizing something.

JACKIE (CONT'D)

Don't be mad. I asked her.

ANN

I'm not mad.

JACKIE

I think that's terrible. That the
government did that.

ANN

I agree.

INT. HAMDEN SCHOOL. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE. MORNING.

Susan waits at Sam Ford's desk. She notices a back issue of Life Magazine on the desk, under a paperweight. It is from October 27, 1961.

INSERT MAGAZINE COVER: An American soldier staring through jungle leaves straight at us. You can only see his eye, and part of his helmet. The headline reads: COMMUNISM, KHRUSCHEV CLOSE IN | VIETNAM: OUR NEXT SHOWDOWN.

Susan continues to stare at the magazine cover, impassively. Sam comes in. He goes and sits behind his desk.

SAM

Sorry about that. Debbie's typewriter is always breaking. And lord knows, she can't fix it.

SUSAN

That's all right.

SAM

Did you want coffee?

SUSAN

No. Thank you.

Sam shifts uncomfortably.

SAM

Look. I'll get straight to the point, Ms. Geller. There has been some concern, from parents. About how you are handling -- this whole situation.

SUSAN

From which parents?

SAM

All of them. I can't tell you the amount of calls I received about your and Mrs. Weston's encounter in the street the other night.

SUSAN

That was between Ann and I.

SAM

Well everyone heard it. And if they didn't hear it, they were called and told about it. And then I was called.

SUSAN

Well -- I'm sorry. But you have always told us we have the right to handle this topic with the students, the way we so choose. I have never taken the road of denial. You know that.

SAM

That was before every parent complained. You're on their radar now. And that puts me in an impossible position. Now, it's not just this one thing concerning you. It's more. Once people start talking, questions begin to come up about other things.

SUSAN

What other things?

SAM

I'm not going to go down a rabbit hole.

(MORE)

SAM (CONT'D)

We have always been lenient with you - with your broad-mindedness - because you're very smart. The smartest of our female teachers.

SUSAN

If you can't be more specific, I can't defend myself.

SAM

You won't need to. This isn't a court.

Sam clears his throat, and picks a piece of lint off his sleeve.

SAM (CONT'D)

We'd -- like you to take a leave of absence.

Susan draws back, like he's raised his arm to strike her.

SAM (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. This week -- it's tense. It's not for good. Just a leave of absence. Mrs. Powell will be teaching your class today. You can go home, then come back early tomorrow morning, before anyone gets here, and gather your things.

SUSAN

I had a bad few days Mr. Ford. Please. This seems drastic.

SAM

As I said. It's not necessarily permanent.

SUSAN

Not necessarily.

Susan stares at him, her eyes glisten. Sam looks down, uncomfortably.

Susan gets up. Then she looks back at Sam, a little desperately.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

After 12 years. This is where I go every day. Where I need to go.

SAM

Ms. Geller. You cannot tell students that grumpy old men are gambling away their lives. That desk is not your personal soapbox for spouting your progressive, pacifist views. You are not paid to preach and think --

SUSAN

You're right. I am paid to get them to think.

SAM

About the things they are supposed to think about.

SUSAN

According to who?

Sam looks at her. He starts busying himself with organizing papers on his desk.

INT. WESTON HOUSE. LAUNDRY ROOM. DAY.

Ann puts clothes from the washing machine into the dryer.

She walks to the door of the small laundry room.

INT. WESTON HOUSE. KITCHEN. CONTINUOUS.

Ann walks into the kitchen. She takes dishes from the drying rack and begins putting them into the cabinets.

Suddenly she looks up. She goes to the window and looks into the empty backyard.

EXT. WESTON HOUSE. BACKYARD. CONTINUOUS.

Ann walks quickly into the yard. She heads to the corner where Charlie digs.

She bends down to observe the hole he's dug. The hole has gotten deeper, and goes under the fence. She crouches to look through the opening.

She quickly lifts back up and looks around.

ANN

Charlie?

EXT. WESTON HOUSE. FRONT YARD. CONTINUOUS.

Ann jogs to the front of her house. She looks both ways, up and down the quiet street.

ANN
Charlie?

She puts her hand to her head, panicked.

ANN (CONT'D)
Damn.

EXT. EVERGREEN PARKWAY. STREET. DAY.

Ann rounds a corner of the lovely, quiet street.

ANN
(yells)
Charlie!

She stops and frantically turns in circles, scanning the street. She begins to run again.

ANN (CONT'D)
Charlie? Charlie. Come!

We hear a small bark in the distance. Ann stops. She looks towards the sound.

We follow Ann's gaze to see Charlie down the road, his back is arched. He barks at something. Ann walks angrily towards him.

ANN (CONT'D)
Charlie. Come here. Now.

Ann gets to the dog, and picks him up.

ANN (CONT'D)
Charlie. Bad. What were you thinking? Dad would kill me.

Charlie continues to bark at the ground.

Ann looks down, a little ways in front of her where Charlie is barking, to see -

The deer with the scar on its neck. It lies dead at the side of the road. The once free, majestic animal is now discarded road kill.

Ann draws in a breath and puts Charlie down.

Ann steps towards the deer. She stands, frozen in place, staring at it.

Charlie continues to bark.

INT. HAMDEN MIDDLE SCHOOL. HALLWAY. EARLY MORNING.

A FEMALE TEACHER walks through a quiet hallway. She slows in front of a classroom door. She pauses, noticing that the window on the door is blocked by something; a dark mass.

She goes to push the door open, but struggles to do so: There is something large blocking her entry.

INT. HAMDEN MIDDLE SCHOOL. ANOTHER HALLWAY. CONTINUOUS.

The hallway is empty and silent. Suddenly, we hear a piercing, high-pitched scream from the female teacher.

INT. GROCERY STORE. AISLE 3. DAY.

Ann walks down an aisle, aimlessly, with a barely-full grocery cart. She stares blankly at the shelves: She has no idea why she came here. We hear women's voices from around the corner of the aisle.

Ann cringes at recognizing who it is - Trish, Molly and Cindy.

Ann shrinks back, then looks behind her for an escape. Then she overhears their conversation, and pauses.

TRISH (O.C.)

--Of course I feel so sorry for her too.

MOLLY (O.C.)

Of course. But from what I've heard

--

CINDY (O.C.)

Whatever you heard is true.
Honestly I can't help but be relieved she's not teaching Ed anymore. He always said she picked on him for no reason at all.

Ann walks and turns the corner to meet the women. All three have carts overflowing with canned foods.

TRISH
Ann! What a surprise.

Cindy looks down, still embarrassed from the other night.

MOLLY
(curtly)
Hi, Ann.

TRISH
How are you?

ANN
I'm all right. I'll admit I
couldn't help but overhear. What's
this about Ed and Teri's teacher?

The three women look at one another, uncomfortable.

CINDY
You haven't heard?

ANN
No. I haven't.

MOLLY
They had her take a leave of
absence.

ANN
What?

CINDY
Everyone supported you Ann. What we
heard she said to those kids...It
is unforgivable. You gave her a
true dose of what she needed.

TRISH
Cindy --

MOLLY
---Really, Cindy. We need to be
respectful.

Ann stares at the three women. They all look at one another,
unsure of who should speak.

ANN
Did something else happen?

TRISH
They haven't told the kids yet.

CINDY

Apparently they found her early
this morning. In her classroom.
God, I can barely say it --

MOLLY

-- she passed away.

ANN

How did she...

Ann trails off: It dawns on her.

TRISH

It's just terrible.

MOLLY

Over a stupid job. Really. I just.
I cannot understand it.

Ann barely hears them. She stares ahead of her and breathes in and out slowly. The voices of the women gossiping becomes more muffled.

The grocery store gets blurry, and the three women start to blend together. We continue to hear only Ann breathing.

TRISH

(muffled)

Ann? Ann.

CINDY

Ann.

Ann comes out of her trance. She stares at the three women blankly.

TRISH

Poor thing. I know. It's such a
shock.

Molly looks down at a can in her hand.

MOLLY

Trish did you say you put stewed
peaches in the cobbler? Or berries?

TRISH

Berries.

Ann turns and walks quickly away from them, leaving her cart.

EXT. GROCERY STORE. ANN'S CAR. DAY.

Ann gets into the driver's seat of her car and slams the door. She looks ahead of her. She continues to breathe deeply. After a few moments, she starts her engine, and puts the car in reverse.

INT. ANN'S CAR. DAY.

Ann drives with the radio blasting. She speeds past a sign that reads: NEW YORK, 20 Miles

EXT. NEW YORK CITY. SKYSCRAPER. DAY.

Ann stands outside Stan's office building, and looks up. A few men walk by and look her up and down; some check her out, some wonder what she is doing there.

Ann starts to walk towards the entrance, then stops herself.

She doesn't move for a moment. She stares up again at the building, indecisively. After a few moments, she turns and walks away.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY. THE PLAZA HOTEL. DAY.

Ann walks in front of The Plaza Hotel, and moves around a horse and carriage.

Suddenly she is face to face with a movie house - The Paris Theater. She stares at the marquis, longingly. It's everything a movie theater should look like: Nostalgic, romantic and utterly inviting.

Ann goes up to the box office. A bored man, OSCAR (60's) is almost hidden by a back issue of Mad Magazine: He lazily sits, reading it, behind the glass. Ann notices the cover.

INSERT MAGAZINE COVER: Pictured with the Mad Magazine mascot in big bold letters is the date 1961. The bottom half of the cover is a reflection of the top half, showing 1961 reads the same upside down. Headline reads: NO MATTER HOW YOU LOOK AT IT, IT'S GONNA BE A MAD YEAR. 1961, THE FIRST UPSIDE DOWN YEAR SINCE 1881, THE LAST UPSIDE DOWN YEAR TILL 6009.

ANN
(more to herself)
The upside down year. More like
this year. 1962 not 1961.

Oscar doesn't look up, he rarely does.

OSCAR

You can't do it with 1962 that's
the point. Doesn't look the same
upside down.

ANN

Yes, it was just a joke --

OSCAR

-- The Loneliness of the Long
Distance Runner or Long Day's
Journey Into Night?

ANN

Either.

Oscar looks up from his magazine.

OSCAR

Either?

ANN

Yes. Either.

Oscar stares at Ann, blankly.

ANN (CONT'D)

Which ever one you like better.

Oscar sits up, and rips a ticket from a roll in front of him.

OSCAR

I've gotta tell you lady, I've been
sitting in this booth for 8 years.
I have never heard that answer
before.

He slides the ticket under the opening of his window.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

And there are some crazy, goddamn
people in this city.

Ann takes the ticket and walks into the theater.

INT. THE PARIS THEATER. DAY.

CLOSE ON Ann, who watches Long Day's Journey Into Night,
transfixed.

MARY TYRONE (O.C.)
 I've never understood anything
 about it, except that one day long
 ago I found I could no longer call
 my soul my own.

ON SCREEN -

Mary Tyrone (played by Katharine Hepburn) speaks to her husband and son.

MARY TYRONE (CONT'D)
 But some day, dear, I will find it
 again - some day when you're all
 well, and I see you healthy and
 happy and successful, and I don't
 have to feel guilty any more.

Ann watches Katharine Hepburn, yearningly.

EXT. THE PARIS THEATER. STREET. DAY.

Ann walks out of the theater. Her gait is a little lighter. She walks down the street and notices the windows of the department store, Bergdorf Goodman. She pauses and admires one window display, then moves to the next.

She looks in the last window, at the corner of 58th and Fifth Avenue. Something catches her eye on the street beyond, we follow her gaze to see -

Stan and a young woman, MARY (20's) talk closely outside the department store. Mary is animated when she talks, like nothing bad has happened to her yet.

After a few moments, Mary strokes Stan's face. Stan grabs her around the waist and nestles his head into her neck playfully. She laughs, then kisses him briefly. She goes into the department store. Stan turns and walks down the street.

Ann turns away from the window, and puts her hand to her mouth: She cannot move.

After a few moments, she walks towards the revolving doors to enter the department store.

INT. BERGDORF GOODMAN. FIRST FLOOR. DAY.

Ann walks through the first floor of the department store. She glances around, innocently, with the look of a woman trying to find the perfect scarf.

A SALESWOMAN (50's) takes notice of her and approaches, pleasantly.

SALESWOMAN
Can I help you find anything, Miss?

ANN
No. Thank you.

Ann walks briskly by her. She scans the different customers, but cannot find who she is looking for.

Ann passes a few rows of handbags, and stops. She looks around one last time, and begins to give up.

We hear a voice from behind Ann.

WOMAN (O.C.)
Chanel number five?

Ann turns. She is face to face with Mary. Ann stares at her. Mary holds up a bottle of Chanel No. 5 perfume.

MARY
Would you like to try it?

A beat. Ann continues to stare.

MARY (CONT'D)
Miss?

ANN
No. Thank you.

MARY
I don't know why they have me push
the famous one. Chanel has so many
incredible scents.

Mary goes behind a counter near them.

MARY (CONT'D)
Maybe there's another one you'd
like to try? One that's more
unique. You have such a special
look, if you don't mind me saying.
Every woman in America loves Chanel
number five. So why buy it?

Ann glances after her. She slowly follows Mary to the counter and starts to look at the different bottles.

ANN
Marilyn wore Chanel Number Five.

MARY
And look where it got her.

Ann flinches, a little jealously, at Mary's brazenness. Mary takes a bottle of perfume out and sprays it onto a strip. She hands the strip to Ann.

MARY (CONT'D)
Maybe this one?

Ann takes the strip from Mary and smells it, slowly.

ANN
It's very lovely. You are good at
your job. I'll take that one.

Mary smiles at her. Ann watches, transfixed, as Mary plucks a bottle out from behind the counter, and begins to wrap it.

MARY
I think special women need their
own, special scents. We should not
all smell the same. We already give
men enough of an excuse not to
notice the differences between us,
don't we?

Ann stares at Mary with the melancholy of longing. Mary notices, and then Ann notices she notices.

ANN
(clears throat)
I guess that's true. Yes.

Mary puts the wrapped perfume in a bag, and hands it to Ann. Ann takes it.

MARY
I've always thought someone should
launch a fragrance line where each
bottle is even just slightly
different. So every woman has a
different scent.

ANN
Is that what you'd like to do?
Fragrances.

MARY
No. I'd like to model. But, that
does not pay rent. Yet. It will
though. It will be twenty-one
dollars.

ANN
Excuse me?

MARY
The perfume.

ANN
Yes. Sorry.

Ann reaches into her bag and takes out some cash. She hands it to Mary. Mary takes the cash and looks at Ann.

MARY
You know, you look so familiar. I cannot put my finger on it. Like you've been in pictures or something.

Mary puts the money in the register and takes out change. She hands the change and a receipt to Ann.

MARY (CONT'D)
You really do. Like you could be a movie star. And I've already made the sale, so you know I'm telling the truth.

ANN
Well. Thank you.

Ann turns, and starts to walk away. Then she turns back.

ANN (CONT'D)
What do you wear? What scent -- I mean.

Mary blushes.

MARY
Chanel number five.

Ann smiles coolly, a little disappointed.

INT. GREENWICH VILLAGE. BAR. NIGHT.

Ann walks into a speakeasy bar. Like many Greenwich Village spots in the 1960's, it doubles as a creative utopia. The crowd is young and beatnik; a mishmash of dreamers, outcasts and artists. This is the future, the world just does not know it yet.

There's a stage at the front; a folk band performs.

Ann spots an empty table, and walks over to it and sits. The minute she sits, a young guy, TOM (20's) comes over.

TOM
You in the right place?

Ann looks up at him.

ANN
Is this a bar?

TOM
Well. Sure.

ANN
(nostalgically)
I asked the taxi driver to bring me
to a bar in Greenwich Village. We
used to live around here. When we
moved from Los Angeles. Post LA,
pre-suburbs.

TOM
What can I get you?

ANN
Martini?

Tom nods and goes.

Ann scans the room. She looks up at the musicians playing on the stage. She lights a cigarette, and begins to smoke.

Tom comes with a martini. Ann picks it up immediately. She downs half of it.

ANN (CONT'D)
Could you bring the next one?

TOM
Sure.

Tom goes. Ann looks back up at the stage as the musicians finish their set. The crowd claps and whistles.

An EMCEE with long hair hops up on the stage and picks up the microphone.

EMCEE
The Journeymen everybody. Give them
another round.

The crowd claps and whistles again. Tom comes with Ann's martini. She hands him her empty first. Then she starts to drink the second, quickly.

EMCEE (CONT'D)

And now we've got -- someone new to the fray. We like the rookies here. We do. Because everyone's got something to say right?

A few people in the crowd shout in agreement.

EMCEE (CONT'D)

Fresh off the boat. Beat Poet.
Anson Daniels.

The crowd claps warmly, as does the Emcee.

ANSON (20's) hops up on the stage haphazardly. He nods graciously at the crowd as if he is not used to being loved, even though he is disturbingly handsome.

EMCEE (CONT'D)

(into microphone)

But uh, what kind of name is Anson, huh? You're going to need to change that name for a beat poet, you know what I mean everybody?

The crowd laughs. Anson smiles, sheepishly. He takes the microphone from the Emcee. He brings a stool to the middle of the stage and sits down.

He takes a journal from his back pocket. He opens it, and is suddenly comfortable. This is clearly his most natural state. Ann watches, curious, as Anson begins to read his poem.

ANSON

Artifice.

It sounds nice. The word.

Like the name of a god, or a hero, or maybe just a man.

Not any man. The ideal man.

The ideal man?

It sounds idyllic.

Like a pleasant suburban block that never shows its insides.

We do not like insides.

Only Outsides.

Rounded corners, glossy counter-tops, ideal men.

Outsides are our American mantra, our white whale, our gospel.

If it looks good, it feels good.

(MORE)

ANSON (CONT'D)
 If it looks familiar, it feels
 comfortable.
 If it looks same, we can nestle
 cozily in same.
 But if it looks different, deeper:
 Run.
 One day I found myself on a run -
 that run I've taken each day of my
 life.
 The one away from insides.
 Towards - being the ideal man I
 guess.
 "I have to be him," I chant to
 myself like a prayer.
 But on this particular run I
 realized I always end up in the
 same exact spot.
 The spot is called Artifice. The
 spot is being the Ideal Man.
 I used to think I liked that spot.
 But in that instant I knew it was
 only because my parents lived
 there. And their parents before
 them. And theirs before them.
 And suddenly I realized: I don't
 live there anymore.

Anson stops, and looks up. The room is silent.

Ann looks down, moved and exposed. She clutches the edge of the table, as if she's about to disappear.

A few people begin to clap, then more people do. Ann straightens up in an attempt to gather herself.

Anson smiles at the crowd and scans the room. He glances in Ann's direction. He notices her, and smiles. Ann stares at him, and smiles, tenderly back.

EXT. BAR. ALLEY. NIGHT.

Anson has Ann pinned up against the wall of the alleyway outside the bar. Ann kisses him, fiercely.

He kisses her back, passionately. Then he begins to kiss her neck, hugging her.

ANN
 Wait. Please, wait.

Anson stops. He stares at her, and does not hide his pining. It is nostalgic: Something about her reminds him of something he left behind a long time ago.

ANSON
I live three blocks away.

Ann laughs and puts her head into his chest.

ANN
I'm sure you do. Of course you do.

He pulls at a piece of Ann's hair, familiarly.

ANSON
So then --

ANN
I just shouldn't do this. I can't
do this.

Ann kisses him quickly, then walks away.

Anson leans against the wall and crosses his arms. He watches
after her, with a sad gaze.

ANSON
I know you.

Ann turns.

ANN
Excuse me?

ANSON
I recognized you. From your movies.
You are something.

A beat. Ann nods, graciously.

ANN
Thank you.

ANSON
So. Who are you now?

ANN
I guess the ideal woman.

EXT. WESTON HOUSE. FRONT YARD. NIGHT.

Ann pulls into the driveway, sloppily. She is still very
tipsy. Stan is sitting on the front porch. He stands up as
Ann gets out of the car. Ann walks up to the porch and waves
at Stan.

STAN

What the hell, Ann? I was worried sick. I almost called the police. Where were you?

ANN

I went to the city. Took in a film.

STAN

You went to the city and took in a film?

ANN

Please. Stan. You sound like a parrot.

STAN

You have two daughters. Do you know that?

ANN

They came out of me which I think makes me more aware of their existence than you are --

STAN

(raises voice)

Stop joking, stop fucking joking with me. I swear to Christ, you're the only Mother I know who would disappear on a scary goddamn week like this.

ANN

Scary? Now it is a scary week? Now it's scary. You pull that when it's convenient. The rest of the time it's about selling bomb shelters and other people being alarmists, and other people being hysterical --

STAN

-- Oh please. I always let you do whatever the hell you want. And you know it.

ANN

You say that as if it's a gift.

STAN

Have you taken a look around this neighborhood? It is a gift. You are supposed to be here when they get home from school.

(MORE)

STAN (CONT'D)

You are supposed to be here when
they have dinner. You are supposed
to be here when they go to sleep.

ANN

And you are supposed to not fuck
other women.

Stan stops and stares at her. A light goes on across the street. Ann walks off the porch. Stan follows her.

EXT. WESTON HOUSE. BACKYARD. CONTINUOUS.

Stan and Ann get to the backyard, and Stan watches as Ann lights a cigarette. Ann smokes, and stares indifferently at him.

STAN

How did you find out?

ANN

Does it really matter?

STAN

I'm sorry. I am. It doesn't --
Jesus, Ann. You know it doesn't
mean anything.

ANN

Why, then?

STAN

I don't know. Sometimes I
just...need something else. At some
point I needed something else.

Ann shakily discards her cigarette. She puts her hands to her face.

STAN (CONT'D)

Ann --

ANN

-- You need. You need --

STAN

-- Yes. I need --

ANN

-- Do you think you are the only
one that needs something else? I
need something else every single
day.

(MORE)

ANN (CONT'D)

I thought that that's what we are doing here. It's an unspoken contract we have. Forever giving up on something else. And living with that curse for the rest of our lives. Together.

Stan backs up a little, like she struck him.

STAN

(emotional)

How can you -- Do you see it that way? I don't, Ann. Really. Really, I don't. I made a mistake. I know. But I don't see it that way. I swear. I never have.

Ann inhales, then breathes out. She stares at him.

ANN

Because the world is kinder to you.

Ann walks by Stan, shakily, into the house.

MONTAGE - VARIOUS

- Empty Living Room

JFK (V.O.)

The Soviet missile bases in Cuba are being dismantled.

- Empty Kitchen

JFK (V.O.)

Their missiles and related equipment are being traded.

- Empty Master Bedroom

JFK (V.O.)

The fixed installations at these sites are being destroyed.

- Empty Jackie's Room

JFK (V.O.)

The continuation of these measures, in air and sea until the threat to peace posed by these offensive weapons is gone, is in keeping with our pledge to secure their withdrawal or elimination from this hemisphere.

- Empty Teri's Room

JFK (V.O.)

Progress is now being made towards
the restoration of peace in the
Caribbean.

- Empty Backyard

JFK (V.O.)

And it is our firm hope and
purpose, that this progress shall
go forward.

- Carvel - It's a picture-perfect tableau: Jackie, Teri and Stan get ice creams. They walk to sit down at a wooden picnic table outside. Other families sit smiling, enjoying their colorful ice creams.

JFK (V.O.)

We will continue to keep the
American people informed on this
vital matter. Thank you.

END OF MONTAGE

EXT. HAMDEN CEMETERY. DAY.

Ann walks through a cemetery. She weaves between the different graves, holding flowers. She arrives at a tombstone.

INSERT TOMBSTONE: SUSAN C. GELLER, 1922 - 1962

Ann places her flowers at the foot of the tombstone. She stares at the grave for a moment.

ANN

It's over, you know. They put down
their swords. For now. Things are
back to normal. Which is good,
isn't it? Good or numb. I can't
tell the difference anymore.

Ann takes her cigarette case out. Then she glances at the tombstone and puts it back in her pocket.

ANN (CONT'D)

I don't know why but I think you're
someone that wouldn't have liked
smoking.

Ann tries to laugh, but can't. She crosses her arms, and then she takes in a breath. She shakes her head, violently.

ANN (CONT'D)

Why -- Why do we always assume we know everything about each other? As women. It's what we always do. We don't know each other's stories. We don't know each other's pain. We just assume that we do. And then we hurt each other. And we aren't hurting the right people.

Ann starts to cry. She crouches slowly, and sits next to the tombstone.

ANN (CONT'D)

I hurt you. I hurt you because I thought I knew you. But I barely knew you. And you barely knew me. And something tells me we could have been great friends.

Ann looks at the tombstone longingly.

ANN (CONT'D)

We should have been great friends.

Ann wipes indelicately at her face with her bare hands. She looks again at the tombstone, then stares ahead of her determinedly.

INT. THE WESTON HOUSE. KITCHEN. DAY.

We are back in the first scene.

Ann watches as the wallpaper melts, slowly. Then her eyes widen as the entire back wall of the kitchen catches on fire.

The paint curls, and the fire finally reaches the fallout shelter poster. Ann smiles as it begins to burn. By the time the poster goes up in flames, the entire kitchen has caught on fire.

Ann walks calmly out of the kitchen to the foyer, and opens the front door.

EXT. THE WESTON HOUSE. FRONT YARD. CONTINUOUS.

Ann walks out of the house, indifferently. She turns, and stands in the front yard. She watches as black smoke curls out of every window.

After a few moments, the entire house is burning down. Shingles begin to fall and crumble. Ann cannot turn away, she continues to stare. The flames are reflected in her eyes.

A man's voice suddenly interrupts us.

MAN (O.S.)
CUT!

A clapperboard comes into frame. It snaps shut with a loud CLAP.

WOMAN A.C. (O.S.)
35, 2, Third.

On the clapper we see the title of the film: THE IDEAL WOMAN

We see that Evergreen Parkway and the houses on it are part of a huge, ever-changing movie set on a large studio lot. It's bustling with trailers, cast and crew.

Ann puts her hand to her brow, and wipes some sweat from her forehead, then smiles. The man that yelled cut is the director, JIM (50's). He approaches Ann with something to say. He always has something to say and it's usually the right thing.

JIM
Ann that was fantastic. Absolutely
fantastic. We've got it.

Ann nods and lights a cigarette. We hear an Assistant Director's voice.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (O.S.)
All right, moving on to scene 37.
The Ideal Woman, scene 37. Let's
make the change quick folks. Quick
change.

Ann smokes, and notices a conversation nearby between two men - the movie's male SCREENWRITER (30's) and a male JOURNALIST (40's) who holds a small tape recorder. Ann watches them, as Jim shuffles through the pages of his script -

SCREENWRITER
(to journalist)
-- What I was saying was Ann didn't
actually burn her house down in
real life, Sid. She got divorced --

JOURNALIST
-- Kind of like burning the house
down --

SCREENWRITER

--It's the rewritten ending for a woman. Perhaps what every housewife wants to do. Burning the goddamn house down. That's the magic of this movie. And that is what I really ran with, when Ms. Carr came to me with her story. I wanted to write it as an alternate ending for the housewife. This is what the modern woman is --

Ann sighs and crosses her arms, glaring at them.

ANN

(to Jim)

He goes on and on. Every interview. I hope he'll at least credit me for coming up with the movie title.

Jim doesn't look up from his script.

JIM

Come on. You're the star here. What's up? He remind you of your ex-husband or something?

ANN

What? No. At least Stan knew when to shut up.

We hear music in the distance: It's Paper Moon, by Ella Fitzgerald.

ANN (CONT'D)

Why are they playing this?

JIM

Sound is playing around on the record player. It's for the end of the movie -- what do you think?

Ann doesn't answer. Instead she closes her eyes, contented, and hums along with the song, softly.

An actress, LIZ (40's) approaches Jim desperate for notes, or attention, or both. She holds out her script frantically.

LIZ

Jim --

JIM

-- Ann. Quick change, come on --

LIZ

--I know the character of Cindy Jones in and out. I do. But it's this line when Ann sees Cindy has puts on her dress and necklace. See. That I have trouble with.

Ann comes out of her trance from the song.

ANN

Which line?

Liz ignores Ann.

LIZ

"We can't be anyone else but each other." What does that mean? "We can't be anyone else but each other."

JIM

Because you can't be anyone else but each other. You are housewives. That's the pain. Try saying it with that in mind.

LIZ

(meaningfully)

We can't be anyone else but each other. We can't be anyone else but each other.

ANN

Jim. Will that --

JIM

(to actress)

-- That's it. See? You're getting the hang of it.

LIZ

We can't be anyone else but each other--

ANN

Stop. Stop saying that --

JIM

Yes.

LIZ

We can't be anyone else but each other.

CLOSE on Ann, she's perspiring.

ANN
I -- Jim. I feel like I'm going to faint.

Ann blinks to look at them but it's becoming hard to see them, or anything around her. The music starts to fade.

ELLA FITZGERALD
(sings)
It's a Barnum and Bailey world, just as phony as it could be. But it wouldn't be make believe, if you believed in me.

LIZ (O.S.)
We can't be anyone else but each other. We can't be anyone else but each other --

CUT TO:

INT. THE WESTON HOUSE. MASTER BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Ann shoots up in bed, sweating. She can't breathe. She attempts to inhale. She blinks a few times, then clutches at herself.

She closes her eyes, then slowly turns to look next to her.

Stan is there, sleeping soundly. He snores.

Ann turns away from him. She cups her face in the palms of her hands, and lets out a quiet sob.

She takes a deep breath in, lifts her head up, and looks straight at the camera.

FADE TO BLACK.

CUT TO:

MUSIC SWELLS: PAPER MOON, BY ELLA FITZGERALD

THE END