

HEROES AND VILLAINS

ENTERTAINMENT



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FROM LITTLE ACORNS GROW

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EXT. VASSAR COLLEGE. QUAD. DAY. 1946.

It is an utterly quiet and beautiful lawn. Bells ring in the distance. Three boys peacefully toss a football around.

HELENA (V.O.)

In 1946, a New York Times reporter came to our university to see if the G.I.s they'd let come study with us ladies that year would die for Dear Old Vassar. That meant start a football team.

Throngs of FEMALE STUDENTS begin to exit the buildings surrounding the lawn. They all begin to cross the quad from different directions.

HELENA (V.O.)

But those veterans had no intention of starting a football team, and the poor journalist left with nothing much to report.

The G.I.s' game of catch is slowly interrupted, as masses of female students begin to overwhelm them. The boys slowly disappear in a sea of women, who weave, quickly and busily between them.

HELENA (V.O.)

The article the journalist managed to scrape together described our school like this...

FADE TO BLACK.

HELENA (V.O.)

"All was serene, as one would expect it to be at a girls' college."

CUT TO:

EXT. VASSAR COLLEGE. LAWN. DAY.

A group of girls bellow over one another like generals trading orders, as they clamber and climb into a huge split oak tree. Six girls have already wedged themselves inside the tree, as more attempt to violently hoist themselves into it from all sides.

HELENA BEAM (22) crouches nearby, patiently waiting for her turn. She watches the hysterics: Quiet observation is her most comfortable state.

HELENA (V.O.)

The challenge was to stuff as many girls into the large split oak tree as we could. We were up to 8. But we could see across the lawn that Raymond House had 8 in their tree too.

Helena turns from the tree. We follow her gaze to see another girl, who stands apart from the others. Her shoulders are back and her arms are crossed. There is something about her posture that tells us she is comfortable everywhere...

HELENA (V.O.)

Bow Brooks. She stood militantly, gazing at the other tree like it was the German front lines. She was waiting for an idea, one always came to her. Every time, it was the same glint in Bow's eye when she'd schemed up something. It reminded me of electric, summer rain or fireworks on July 4th.

BOW BROOKS (22) swerves around to face their tree. Some of the girls take notice and pause, suddenly at attention.

BOW

Here's what we'll do. Bits, get out. Get on my shoulders.

The girls look at one another, confused. One girl, BITS (21), begins to dutifully crawl out from between a tangle of arms and legs. She's accustomed to being ordered around rather than giving the orders.

A towering girl, JOAN, always the devil's advocate, pipes up between two branches, a little jealously.

JOAN

Why Bits?

BOW

Because she's light.

Another girl, ELEANOR (22), sternly puts her arm out to intercept Bits: She's going to stop all this nonsense. Bits freezes in place.

ELEANOR

For God's sake, Bow. The rules were just to climb in.

BOW

No one thought we'd do anything interesting, so they didn't make rules. Don't you want to leave a legacy before we graduate --

ELEANOR

-- Piled into a tree like sardines -
-

BOW

(to no one)

-- She's betrothed now so she doesn't care what legacy she leaves.

Eleanor smarts, and glares for a moment at Bow. She nudges Bits.

ELEANOR

Fine. Bits, get out of the tree.

HELENA (V.O.)

If you gave Bow enough time, she could convince anyone of anything.

Bow watches keenly, as Bits continues to work her way out from a barricade of limbs. Girls climb in and out as they all attempt to rearrange.

HELENA (V.O.)

And all of us wanted to be around Bow. In the routine and mundane life we all led, at what many times felt like a finishing school disguised as a college, where faculty in universities around the country gave out P.H.T.'s - Putting Husbands Through degrees - Bow was the hopeful and shiny bright light we all gathered around.

Bits has finally freed herself from the tree. She trots over to Bow.

BOW

(warmly)

I'm now calling you Harry Houdini.

Bits beams as Bow crouches down to the ground. Bits climbs, somewhat awkwardly onto Bow's shoulders. Bow stands easily, like toting a full-sized human is the most natural thing in the world.

HELENA (V.O.)
I don't know what Bow thought of me
then. But while everyone called me
Helli, Bow called me Helena. I will
always love her for that.

Bow turns to the other side of the lawn. She frowns, then
pivots again towards their oak tree...

BOW
Helena.

Helena quickly runs over to Bow's side.

BOW (CONT'D)
On the shoulders is just our fall
back. This is the pièce de
résistance.

Bow reaches into her jacket pocket and takes out a jar of enormous spiders. She hands it to Helena. Bits looks down
from Bow's shoulders, both delighted and horrified.

BITS
Bow!

BOW
(to Helena)
Ready to be my trojan horse?

Helena nods, very seriously.

BOW (CONT'D)
There's a hole on the back of their
tree. Don't let anyone see you.
It'll be like yelling "fire" in a
theater.

Helena turns and sprints away from their tree, towards the
other side of the lawn.

EXT. VASSAR COLLEGE. LAWN. CONTINUOUS.

Helena hops and jumps from tree to tree stealthily: She's
seen this scene in a film noir detective movie somewhere. She
peers out from one of the trees cautiously, and sees the
other split oak tree.

The girls in the oak tree idly gossip, bored, with their
backs turned to Helena. Helena creeps up to the back of the
oak tree. We hear murmurs from the girls whose conversation
we cannot make out.

Helena grimaces as she opens up the top of Bow's jar of spiders and pours it quickly into the hole until it's empty.

She immediately sprints away from the tree, like a bomber who only has seconds to escape before the explosion. As Helena runs she steals glances back at the tree: What's taking so long? Suddenly, she nearly trips face first into GI student, ELLIS BENNETT (22) who sits on the ground, looking up from a book, amused. He raises his eyebrows at Helena -- Yes, he saw everything.

Before Helena can react, we suddenly hear high-pitched screaming. Girls begin to fall, leap and tumble out of the split oak tree. Helena eyes widen, and she sprints away from Ellis, who watches after her.

INT. VASSAR COLLEGE. JOSSELYN HOUSE. NIGHT.

Bow, Helena, Joan and Bits sit around a furnished common room cackling; the kind of cackling that hurts your ribs. Eleanor sits nearby in an armchair reading, watching them a little disapprovingly. Bow has her arm around Helena.

BOW

Did you see her? Like a kamikaze pilot.

BITS

What about you? You had me on your shoulders for half an hour --

JOAN

-- That's easy. You're Tiny Tim.

Bow reaches over and slaps Joan's thigh.

BOW

She's Harry Houdini!

BITS

(hurt)

Joan you don't always need to say that to me --

BOW

(to Bits)

-- Ignore her. Don't let them tell you what you are, Harry. Did I ever tell you my story about the actress named Ginny? She had the best legs and everyone talked about them.

(MORE)

BOW (CONT'D)

Like people talking about you being tiny, all they'd say about Ginny was she had good legs. Now that may sound all well and good, but she traveled from far away to be a silent film actress. But the directors here would only cast her in bimbo roles for her legs. She grew sick of it. She wanted a true dramatic role, not a just a legsy one. So she went home one night, took a big jar of nitric acid and poured it all over those long legs of hers. No one would ever hire her for her legs again, and she delighted in watching them burn.

Joan, Bits and Helena check one another: Was that story horrible or beautiful? After a beat...

HELENA

That's terrible.

BOW

Terrible? The director called her up that very week to give her a dramatic role that had nothing to do with her legs. He admired her tenacity.

Eleanor snaps her book shut. The girls go silent, and Eleanor glares at them.

ELEANOR

That's Lotus Thompson. The silent film actress. And the one before that was just King Lear with the names changed.

BOW

And?

ELEANOR

They're not your stories.

BOW

I never said they were my stories. But I told them at the correct moment. That's what counts. Yesterday it would have just been sad tales about an angry old man and a crazed desperate actress.

Eleanor gets up and walks out of the room. Bow yells after her...

BOW (CONT'D)

Ms. Winston has no imagination.

BITS

Ms. Winston?

BOW

I just invented her. She's the mean little woman who works at the library and pokes you with a stick if you take any inspiration from books you take out.

The girls crack up again.

HELENA

You should be a writer, Bow.

BOW

I'm not going to be a writer. Writers have no power. I'm going to run a publishing house. We'll tell all the stories. Especially stories from women -- ones I choose. Because no one else will choose them. That's better than being a writer.

Joan groans and falls back on the couch.

JOAN

Tonight I'll have nightmares about that actress pouring acid on her legs --

BOW

-- You know I was named after a silent film actress. Clara Bow.

BITS

Never heard of her.

BOW

Well you've heard the phrase "It Girl," haven't you? She was the first. She had "It."

JOAN

(dramatically)

What is "It?"

BOW

You can't define it. She was one of
the most famous silent film stars.
Anyway I hated the name Clara so by
6 years old I told my parents
they'd have to start calling me
Bow.

We hear a few stones SMACK the window. Joan shoots up and
goes to look out.

JOAN

Oh...

BITS

What?

JOAN

There's a boy down there.

BITS

What?

Bits rushes to the window, excitedly. Joan opens it. We hear
Ellis' voice.

ELLIS (O.C.)

I don't mean to disturb you ladies -
-

JOAN

(airily)

-- You're not disturbing us. But
you'll get your head chopped clean
off if anyone sees you.

ELLIS (O.C.)

I'm Ellis Bennett. And I just
wondered if there was a girl up
there who terrorizes other girls
with arachnids in her spare time.

BOW

Oh, brother.

Bits bursts out laughing. Helena turns red. Joan runs back
over and starts to pull on Helena's arm.

JOAN

Helli, come on!

Bow gets up and goes to the window. She looks out of it
indifferently. Joan's got hold of Helena's calf now. Helena
grabs onto the leg of the couch.

HELENA
No. Absolutely not.

BOW
(out window)
Rapunzel can't come to her tower
right now. May I take a message?

ELLIS (O.C.)
Well, you can tell her I'm willing
to keep my mouth shut. Though the
image was disturbing --

BOW
-- From a veteran that's a big
statement --

ELLIS (O.C.)
-- Exactly. Now, I'll keep quiet
but I'll need her name. You know.
In case the FBI comes asking
questions.

Bow and Bits burst out laughing as Helena continues to fight
Joan off.

HELENA
Bow. Don't you dare.

BOW
(out window)
General Bennett, I am sworn to
secrecy --

BITS
(screams)
-- Helli! Helli Beam.

Bow closes the window with a SLAM, as they all stifle
laughter. Joan dives on top of Helena and scream-laugh, and
Helena spreads out on the floor laughing uncontrollably.

HELENA
Bits! Traitor!

Bow picks Bits up and throws her onto the couch...

BOW
This one would never hold up under
torture.

INT. VASSAR COLLEGE. CLASSROOM. DAY.

Bow and Helena sit in a classroom of girls. PROFESSOR HALBRON (50's), whose dryness reflects the classroom's barren walls, walks through the aisle between desks and hands out books.

PROFESSOR HALBRON

This will be the last book on our reading list this semester. 4 weeks out from graduation, I realize -- so don't think you can just breeze through it, as if it is the last gasp. It's not a death rattle ladies, it's an important piece of literature. And I will grade final papers as I've graded all of your papers.

He puts one of the books on Bow's desk. She picks it up and looks at it. She raises her hand. Without turning around, Professor Halbron sighs knowingly: This happens every class.

PROFESSOR HALBRON (CONT'D)

Yes. Ms. Brooks.

BOW

We've read six "important pieces of literature" this semester. Five of which were written by men. Why aren't we reading more by women?

A long beat. The rest of the class looks at the professor, curiously.

PROFESSOR HALBRON

You are a very talented writer Ms. Brooks. But please let me be the judge of what literature I think is fundamental to your education.

BOW

So that's not literature by women?

PROFESSOR HALBRON

(to everyone)

As I said, be done with this by the end of next week. I'll expect final papers the week after that. That will be all for today.

The girls get up and begin to file out. Bow passes Helena, who stays at her desk. Bow leans down to whisper to her...

BOW

One day we'll overthrow the
dictatorship.

Helena smiles at Bow, but stays seated. Professor Halbron has sat down behind his desk. He starts to shuffle papers. Helena gets up and approaches the desk.

HELENA

Professor Halbron. I was wondering
if you'd had a chance to read my
short story.

PROFESSOR HALBRON

I did. Yes.

He continues to shuffle papers and doesn't look up, as if that answer settles everything.

HELENA

What did you think of it?

He eyes Helena, then takes her story out from a drawer in his desk. Helena stares at it: Red slashes bleed out of every page.

PROFESSOR HALBRON

The technique is pristine. The
grammar is just flawless. But I
think when it comes to your
portfolio, you should lead with the
piece on Silas Marner.

HELENA

But that was a critique. This is a
short story.

Professor Halbron clears his throat and leans back in his chair. He takes off his glasses and stares at Helena.

PROFESSOR HALBRON

I don't think that's where your
strengths lie, if you want my
honest opinion Ms. Beam. There's an
It factor when it comes to
inventing stories out of thin air.
I do not think you have it. I don't
say this to be harsh. I like to be
realistic before girls graduate. I
just think you should focus on what
you're good at.

Professor Halbron hands her the story. Helena takes it,
crushed.

EXT. VASSAR COLLEGE. QUAD. DAY.

Helena walks out of the building and down the steps. She looks down at her story in her hands. She tears it up indifferently.

ELLIS (O.C.)
She terrorizes sororities, wastes
paper...what will she do next?

Helena looks up to see Ellis sitting on a bicycle in front of the building.

HELENA
Oh. Hi.

Ellis doesn't say anything, he crosses his arms and watches her.

HELENA (CONT'D)
I should --

Helena starts to go...

ELLIS
That's it? I had to bribe a
sophomore for your class schedule.
And, you know, I could've gotten
expelled for last night --

HELENA
-- actually my friends and I could
have gotten expelled.

ELLIS
Fair enough. Can you come for a
ride?

A beat. Helena stares at him and doesn't say anything.

ELLIS (CONT'D)
You don't talk very much, do you?

HELENA
I talk. But you are wasting your
time. I'm just not that
interesting.

ELLIS
Oh. She's a liar too.

HELENA
I'm not a liar --

ELLIS

-- where do you come off saying
you're not interesting? I think
you're very interesting. And I am
told I am the best judge of people.

HELENA

By who?

Ellis looks down and smirks, sheepishly.

ELLIS

My Mom of course --

HELENA

-- Oh lord --

ELLIS

-- but don't get the wrong idea!
That woman means nothing to me.

Helena looks down and snorts. Ellis sits back, delighted at
making her laugh.

ELLIS (CONT'D)

Come on. One ride.

Helena pauses a moment, skeptically. Then she approaches him.
Ellis immediately hops off his bike. He takes her bag off her
shoulder and throws it on the ground. Helena picks the bag up
again.

HELENA

What --

ELLIS

-- Come on. You don't need that.
Throw it. Throw it on the ground.

HELENA

Someone could take it.

ELLIS

Your books? You're not that
interesting. Come on.

Helena reluctantly places the bag on the ground. She
approaches the bike, and fits herself onto the back of the
seat, awkwardly behind Ellis.

ELLIS (CONT'D)

Hold on to me OK?

HELENA
It's a bicycle --

Ellis pedals fast before she can finish her sentence. Helena is forced to grab him around the waist so she doesn't fall off.

ELLIS
See. That move works.

They move quickly down the dirt path as buildings go by. Some girls watch and stare as they go.

HELENA
(loudly)
Where are we going?

ELLIS
I don't know! I didn't think past getting you on the bike. You know you're beautiful, too.

HELENA
What?

ELLIS
You're beautiful. And interesting.

Helena blushes a little. Always the observer, she is not used to being so visible. Their surroundings begin to blur as Ellis goes faster, and Helena squeezes him a bit tighter. She rests her head, just barely, on his upper back as she watches blues, greens and yellows go by.

INT. THE DUTCH CABIN RESTAURANT. NIGHT.

Female students and male GIs celebrate graduation night, and the restaurant is a perfect storm of big band music, clouds of cigarette smoke and patrons with zero sense of direction.

Post-war exuberance is in full force: One would think it's everyone's last night on earth. The parents visiting for the occasion have long since been abandoned, so this is that long-awaited pandemonium where adolescents shed all inhibitions for the evening. A large sign hangs unevenly from the wall that reads: **CLASS OF 1946**

Helena sits quietly at the bar with a martini. She watches Ellis and his friends dominate the dance floor like it's enemy soil. Bow approaches from behind Helena and sits down next to her. Helena smiles at Bow. They both quietly survey the room.

BOW
Everybody's so excited. Their life
can finally start.

HELENA
Did your parents come?

BOW
Of course not. They confuse love
with money.

Bow signals to the bartender, who notices her before she
lifts a finger.

BOW (CONT'D)
Could I get a martini?

The bartender begins to make her a drink. Helena watches
Ellis.

BOW (CONT'D)
You like him, don't you?

HELENA
I do -- yes.

BOW
Well, good. But I've seen you
around Joan. Just don't let him
pull all the strings.

The bartender sets Bow's drink down. She picks it up and
takes a huge gulp. Helena follows her lead, then smirks at
Bow.

BOW (CONT'D)
(playfully)
What?

Helena pauses, but then leans into her liquid courage...

HELENA
Nothing. You just -- you talk
almost like a man sometimes.

BOW
Well I'm not one. Thank god.

HELENA
You don't wish you were one?

BOW
Absolutely not. It's boring for
them.

HELENA
I don't think so.

BOW
It's true. They can never surprise anyone. We can surprise like a heart attack. Because no one thinks we'll do anything.

A long beat.

BOW (CONT'D)
I do have the perfect name though.
If I were a man.

HELENA
What is it?

BOW
I'll never tell.

HELENA
Come on. You have to, now.

Bow scrunches her nose at Helena indecisively, then takes another sip of her drink. She puts it down and lights a cigarette.

BOW
James Stratton.

HELENA
James Stratton?

BOW
James Stratton. He has "it."
Definitely. He sounds like someone women and men alike are destined to fall madly in love with. And James Stratton says exactly what he means. That's very important.

Helena looks into her martini glass like there's an answer inside.

HELENA
I wish I could create stories like you do.

BOW
Why can't you?

HELENA
Professor Halbron doesn't think so.

BOW

He's a miserable man. Miserable men
like to tell pretty young women
they-don't-think-so to anything
those women suggest --

Perry Como's song, DIG YOU LATER (HUBBA HUBBA HUBBA) EXPLODES
from the dance floor and dilutes their serious conversation,
as billboard hits often do.

Before Helena can respond to Bow, Ellis barrels across the
room to the two women.

ELLIS

We've gotta dance to this! Can I
steal her away?

Ellis grabs Helena's hand and drags her off her bar stool
before she can answer. Everyone on the dance floor starts to
sing along to the song...

BAND/STUDENTS

*It's always fair weather, when hep
cats get together. And every time
they meet, here's the way you'll
hear them greet! Greet! A hubba
hubba hubba hubba, hello Dad. Well
a hubba hubba hubba, I just got
back --*

The dance floor is now packed with people. Ellis joins the
other GIs intermittently as they put their arms around each
other and shout certain lines...

BAND/GIS

*Let's shoot some breeze/
Say, whatever happened to the
Japanese?*

Ellis comes back to Helena and swings her around, just as a
few GI's band together for...

BAND/GIS (CONT'D)

It was mighty smoky over Tokyo!

The music continues, and Ellis takes Helena's waist and
kisses her neck. He takes something out of his pocket and
holds it out to her: A tiny diamond ring. Helena looks down
at it, stupefied. Before she can say anything, we hear Joan
scream.

JOAN

Helli! Eleanor, look!

We hear Eleanor scream, then Bits scream and the screaming becomes contagious. The whole dance floor has noticed Helena and Ellis now as they sing along and cheer.

HELENA
I.../
ELLIS
/Yes?

Helena stares at Ellis, frozen in place. She nods, ever so slightly. Ellis immediately puts the ring on her finger. He picks her up and swings her around as the GIs whistle. Ellis puts Helena back down and hugs her.

Helena embraces him, then stares out beyond his shoulder. We follow her gaze to see the back of Bow, who walks, casually, out of the restaurant.

INT. CHAPEL. DAY.

...The music from the party continues merrily, as Helena and Ellis stand at the front of the church for the nuptials. The setting is glossy - almost too glossy - as if we're watching a TV commercial about domestic bliss. Ellis and Helena hold hands and face one another as a priest addresses a picture-perfect audience. Women dab at their face with handkerchiefs, men check the time, young women stare up at the pew, dreamily and jealously...

EXT. CHAPEL. DAY.

...Helena and Ellis run out of the chapel towards a bright red Chevy as a mob of wedding attendees run out of the church behind them and throw rice, aggressively. Ellis hops in the front seat of the car, and Helena the passenger seat. They wave boisterously as they drive away.

INT. BENNETT APARTMENT. FOYER. DAY.

Ellis carries Helena through the threshold of an apartment, dramatically knocking open the door and struggling to get through.

Ellis takes a break and drops her, rather sloppily. Then he takes a deep breath and picks her back up again, but this time puts her over his shoulder. He barrels down the hallway as she laughs...

CUT TO:

INT. BENNETT APARTMENT. BEDROOM. NIGHT.

...music CUTS out.

Helena shoots up in bed in pitch black darkness, gasping for breath. She squints, and adjusts her eyes as she looks around the room. We can only make out her shadow. She turns and sees Ellis passed out next to her. She marvels at him for a moment, the way light-sleepers gape at deep sleepers.

She looks down at herself, concerned: Something is not right. She touches her chest then moves her hand down under the covers. After a moment, she takes her hand back out from the blankets and sees that it's shiny. She draws in a slow breath, and gets out of bed. She walks, slowly in the dark to the bathroom down the hall, her hand still held out...

INT. BENNETT APARTMENT. BATHROOM. CONTINUOUS.

...Helena enters the bathroom, which is dark. She waits a moment, as if to stall the inevitable. After what seems like an eternity, she switches the light on.

She stares at her hand, which is soaked with blood, as is her white nightgown. She looks up at her reflection in the mirror, indifferently. She drops her hand down, and stares at herself.

ELLIS (O.C.)
(muffled)
Helli?

Helena draws in a sharp breath.

ELLIS (CONT'D)
(closer)
Helli.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE. DAY.

Ellis and Helena sit in silence across from DR. GUNTHERY (55), who eyes the couple cryptically, as if he holds an eternal secret only doctors are aware of. The furniture in the room is all antique, making it hard to be comfortable anywhere. Dr. Gunthry straightens a glossy statue on his desk: It's unclear what exactly it is.

Helena focuses hard on a jeweled letter opener that sits on the desk. Ellis slumps a little in his chair like a defeated victim. The doctor clears his throat and gulps, as if he's just swallowed vinegar...

DR. GUNTHERY
So. This -- has happened three
times since you got married?

ELLIS
Four times.

DR. GUNTHERY
Four times in --

Dr. Gunthry flips over a page in the folder in front of him.

DR. GUNTHERY (CONT'D)
Eight years.

Ellis looks at Helena. She doesn't move. He answers for
her...

ELLIS
Yes.

DR. GUNTHERY
Mm.

Dr. Gunthry writes something down.

ELLIS
Is there anything that we can do?

Dr. Gunthry puts the cap delicately on his fountain pen, and
places it, carefully on his desk. He leans back...

DR. GUNTHERY
Unfortunately I'm not sure I would
suggest you keep trying.

HELENA
I don't need to be told not to try
again. I don't want to.

Ellis and Dr. Gunthry look at Helena, surprised. Dr. Gunthry
clears his throat and addresses Ellis only...

DR. GUNTHERY
It could become dangerous for her,
Mr. Bennett. And sadly every time
this happens the chances become
higher it will happen the next
time...

The two men continue to talk but we cannot hear them. Their
voices have become muffled. CLOSE on Helena, who stares ahead
of her, blankly.

EXT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE. MADISON AVENUE. DAY.

Helena and Ellis walk out of the building onto the sidewalk. Ellis is quiet, and Helena glances at him. He is far away. Ellis looks down the street and spots a cab. He shoots his hand up to hail it, like one would for a rescue boat.

ELLIS

I should get back to work.

Ellis gives Helena a brisk kiss on the cheek. He heads towards the cab then turns back to her for a brief moment.

ELLIS (CONT'D)

It'll work out, all right?

Helena doesn't answer. Ellis gets in the cab and waves from the window. Helena watches the cab go, and then turns and walks down the sidewalk.

INT. BENNETT APARTMENT. LIVING ROOM. DAY.

Helena sits in a small living room, on the floor next to the TV. It's perfect, traditional American decor that feels older than the couple that lives there; no doubt reeking of a controlling Mother-in-Law who moonlights as an interior decorator.

Helena wears a nightgown and smokes a cigarette, sprawled out on the floor. She drinks wine and switches channels on the television...

On TV -

I Love Lucy. Ethel and Lucy squabble...

ETHEL

What are you writing about?

LUCY

I'm writing about things I know.

ETHEL

That won't be a novel. That'll be a short story.

Helena flips the channel.

On TV -

A roar of applause for the contestants on What's My Line?

Helena flips the channel again.

On TV -

A talk show host - MACK WALLACE (40's) - sits across from a woman, they both laugh, uproariously. Helena gives up on channel-changing, then rolls her eyes as if any sort of laughter is a huge inconvenience. She lights another cigarette and takes a sip of her drink, not noticing the woman on the television is Bow...

On TV -

MACK

-- Well still, I'd say you're a broad. Now that I know the term doesn't insult you.

BOW

I think men use that term for women they're scared of.

Helena gapes up at the screen, recognizing Bow's voice. She puts down her drink and turns up the volume.

MACK

For those just tuning in, I'm here with Bow Brooks. President -- that's right. President, of the publishing house Rollins and Henson. She's one of the first female presidents of a publishing company. Uh, now -- how did you manage that Bow?

BOW

I waited for someone to die, obviously.

Mack and the audience explode in laughter.

MACK

Seriously though. The books you put out -- men love them. But women do too -- especially. In fact you've become known for that.

BOW

I don't pick writers because I think they wrote something a woman would like. I pick a writer if they have a good story. And women like good stories. So do men.

MACK

Still. You've published more female authors than most other publishing houses. Maybe that's why your books fly off the shelves to housewives --

BOW

-- Women.

MACK

Because women are writing them.

BOW

Just as many men are writing them. And my male and female writers sell the same. It doesn't make any bit of difference who wrote them. There's no gender targeting when it comes to writing and if there is I'm not interested in it. Which is why you don't see me publishing *The Joy of Cooking* --

MACK

My wife's favorite. Couldn't get a decent home-cooked meal before that.

The audience laughs again.

BOW

It's the story people relate to. Not the gender of the writer. Gender doesn't factor into it. Men buy books written by women and women buy books written by men. The reason we're successful is because I don't believe men and women are hard-wired to read different things or write different things. You wouldn't know if the writer was a man, woman or chipmunk if there was no name on the dust jacket.

MACK

No. I think I'd know if a woman wrote it versus a man.

A beat.

BOW

Well let's try it? I'll recite a passage.

(MORE)

BOW (CONT'D)

You tell me if a man or woman wrote it. Best out of 3. If I win you buy me dinner.

MACK

Ha. I don't think my wife would like that.

BOW

After that home-cooked meal comment I think she'd be happy to see you whooped.

The audience EXPLODES in laughter. Helena chuckles. Mack looks to the side, a little unsure.

BOW (CONT'D)

And if I lose I have to sing *Yankee Doodle Dandy* right here on air. I have a terrible voice.

The crowd cheers again.

MACK

All right then.

Bow rattles one off immediately...

BOW

"I suppose sooner or later in the life of everyone comes a moment of trial. We all of us have our particular devil who rides us and torments us, and we must give battle in the end."

MACK

Male.

BOW

Daphne Du Maurier, Rebecca.

Mack frowns. Bow doesn't wait...

BOW (CONT'D)

"Those who find beautiful meanings in beautiful things are the cultivated. For these there are hope."

A beat. Mack thinks.

MACK

Female.

BOW
Oscar Wilde. A Picture of Dorian
Gray.

The crowd whistles.

MACK
That's -- not really a fair one.

BOW
All right. I didn't know we were
factoring in sexual orientation. OK
we won't count that. Here's
another: "It is a narrow mind which
cannot look at a subject from
various points of view."

Mack thinks deeply for a moment. He nervously scratches his
thigh.

MACK
That's a man.

BOW
George Eliot.

MACK
(delighted)
Ah. 1-1.

BOW
The male pseudonym for Mary Ann
Evans. Middlemarch.

Laughter and applause come from the audience. Bow stares at
Mack, who shifts uncomfortably. He attempts to hide his
annoyance with a cheesy grin.

BOW (CONT'D)
Should I call your wife or do you
want to?

Helena laughs and shakes her head. She continues to stare at
Bow on the television. There is newfound life in her eyes.

INT. PUBLISHING HOUSE. BOW'S OFFICE. DAY.

Bow sits in a spacious corner office that's ultra-modern and
sleek, just like the woman who resides there. A beautiful
gold lighter with an insignia on it sits on her desk; she's
rarely without it. She reclines and smokes a cigarette while
reading a manuscript.

She flips through the manuscript very quickly, page by page -- no doubt taking in every word. There's a knock at the door.

BOW

Yes.

An assistant, DOTTIE (20's) enters hesitantly, like she does everything.

DOTTIE

Ms. Brooks, there's someone to see you. She's been waiting in the lobby for when you have a break in your day.

Bow doesn't look up.

BOW

I don't walk in to restaurants without a reservation. Writers should pay me the same courtesy.

DOTTIE

I know. I told her that. She swears she's not a writer.

BOW

How promising.

DOTTIE

She says she's from Vassar. Helli?

Bow lights up.

BOW

Helena? Send her in.

Dottie scurries out. Bow puts out her cigarette and shoots up from her desk. She smooths her skirt out, and straightens a vase on a side table. There's a light knock at the door, and it opens. Helena walks in. She stops after a few steps, and stares at Bow.

BOW (CONT'D)

Helena. How are you? It's so good to see you. It's been --

Bow stops, noticing the sadness in Helena's eyes. Helena attempts to smile and doesn't say anything. Bow approaches her.

All at once, they both hug one another like kids do; messily and entirely un-self-consciously.

After a few moments, Helena continues to hold on to Bow tightly. Bow notices, and doesn't move. She rubs Helena's back.

Bow lightly pushes Helena back and keeps her hands on her shoulders. She stares at her.

BOW (CONT'D)
Look at you.

HELENA
Me? Look at you.

Bow turns and walks to her desk.

BOW
It's the windows. Massive windows
give any idiot the appearance of
great importance.

Bow lights a cigarette and sits on the edge of the desk.

BOW (CONT'D)
Who are you now? Hm? Besides being
even more beautiful than you were
at school.

Helena doesn't respond. Instead she searches Bow, as if for the answer to the question she just asked. Bow watches her.

HELENA
I saw you. On TV.

Bow gets up and puts out her newly lit cigarette.

BOW
How about a drink? We'll catch up.

CUT TO:

INT. BAR. DAY.

Helena and Bow sit in a booth in the back, having martinis. The bar is mostly empty, and dimly lit. Bow smokes a cigarette and waits, as Helena stares down into her glass.

HELENA
It -- felt like I failed him.
Somehow.

BOW
He said that?

HELENA

No. But I can see it. The last couple years. The way he looks at me. Like I disappointed him. It's too hard on him.

BOW

Poor dear. And none of it happening in his own body.

Helena looks up at Bow. Bow frowns at her.

BOW (CONT'D)

How is it on you?

HELENA

To tell you the truth, it makes me feel worthless. And like I'm not a woman. I don't know.

A beat.

BOW

Am I worthless? Am I not a woman?

HELENA

What? God no.

BOW

Well. I haven't pushed out any babies. Thank Christ for that. They're your definitions. How's it different?

HELENA

You've done things. Look at you.

Bow studies Helena for a moment.

BOW

You know. There was a wildly successful female author. Her short story was published in the New Yorker. It was a sensation. Controversial, but a sensation. The editors received more mail about the story than any other story in the history of the magazine. She'd also written a novel. One day - after all that success - she went to the hospital to have her third child. When she arrived the clerk asked her, her name, then asked her to state her occupation. "

(MORE)

BOW (CONT'D)

Writer" is what she said. And you know what he said back? "I'll just put down housewife."

HELENA

Is that real?

BOW

Shirley Jackson. The Lottery. My point is, it doesn't matter what you've "done." It wouldn't matter if you were president of the country. They'll always define us the same way. Don't help them do it.

HELENA

So how did you do it? All this.

Bow narrows her eyes at her and takes a puff of her cigarette.

BOW

Do you want the real story or the pretty one?

HELENA

What do you think?

BOW

Well, it was still a boutique company, really. And I worked my way up the ranks. Made myself indispensable. But by the time I got to be a Vice President I knew that would be it. And the President had been basically asleep for years anyway. He wasn't doing anything. The board wanted him out and I was really running things --

HELENA

-- But you wanted more. You always want more.

BOW

You should try it.

Helena lights a cigarette now and waits.

BOW (CONT'D)

Anyway, the company needed money. At that point they were just doing hardcovers.

(MORE)

BOW (CONT'D)

But they wanted to move into paperbacks. No one was offering to absorb them. And one Christmas, against my better judgment I went home to visit my parents. And that was when the absolute best, most beautiful thing in the world happened to me.

HELENA

What?

Bow signals the waiter for another round.

HELENA (CONT'D)

Bow. What?

BOW

I walked in on my Dad having sex with a prostitute.

Helena gasps, and stifles a laugh. She stares at Bow in disbelief.

HELENA

What?

BOW

You should've seen it. It was -- just perfect. Anyway Dad has lots of money. What he doesn't have lots of is reputations or any sort of stamina for a divorce. People with loads of money never do. So I told him to give my company the big, beautiful investment they needed or I'd tell. The rest is history.

A WAITER comes with their drinks, he sets them down.

HELENA

Did you feel bad?

Bow shakes her head fiercely.

BOW

Bad? Absolutely not. It was between Dad, who has always been a bastard, and the masses of people who need to be able to afford books and good stories. We had to get into paperbacks, and I was sick of selling the rights rather than putting out those copies myself.

HELENA
(sheepishly)
I still like hardcovers.

BOW
Because you're a romantic. People don't want to just prop their books up in their libraries anymore like trophies. They want to carry them around in their back pockets. Lend them to friends. Buy them at newsstands and drugstores. Not to mention for a much lower price. Books should be on-a-whim purchases and everyone should be able to get them. Not just the snobs who can afford them. Or the snobs who sleep with prostitutes.

Helena snorts some of her drink out. Bow laughs too.

BOW (CONT'D)
Anyway why don't you come work for me?

A beat. Helena stares at her, unsure.

HELENA
Work for you?

BOW
That's what I said.

HELENA
I don't know --

BOW
-- How else are you going to spend your time? There's only so much silver you can polish. You can start off as my assistant. I need to fire Dottie. That poor girl. But really you'll be like a junior editor, and I'll pay you like one. Before you know it, you'll be my boss.

HELENA
Why are you doing this for me? We barely know each other.

BOW
Because I like you. I've always
liked you. You have a spark in you.
Don't let them kill it.

Bow reaches across the table and takes Helena's hand.

BOW (CONT'D)
And I think you need a friend.

Helena looks down, teary.

BOW (CONT'D)
Come on. Us worthless, non-women
need to stick together.

Helena takes another sip of her drink and draws in a breath,
then nods.

BOW (CONT'D)
Good.

Bow looks at her empty martini, then at her watch.

BOW (CONT'D)
Now, should we just get completely
messy at 3 PM on a Tuesday?

Bow looks around for the waiter.

HELENA
Do you really not care what gender
writers you publish?

BOW
What do you mean?

HELENA
On the show. You said the gender
doesn't matter. It's the story.

BOW
The truth is what women read and
write is what I care most about.
But the reason I get so many women
published is because I keep that to
myself.

INT. BENNETT APARTMENT. KITCHEN. NIGHT.

Ellis and Helena sit at the table adjacent to the kitchen in
silence. Helena looks down at her dinner, and pokes her fork
at a sad-looking piece of meatloaf. Ellis watches her.

ELLIS

What? I just think it's a bad idea.

HELENA

Why?

ELLIS

Because. An assistant job? What does that even mean? You'll be disappointed. And you don't need a job. I have a job.

HELENA

We could use the extra income --

ELLIS

-- Is that how you really feel about it?

HELENA

No. Honestly, I don't feel any way about it, I just want to do it. But you're making me feel like I have to have a reason.

ELLIS

OK. So what's the reason?

HELENA

I just want to. In some cultures, that's a reason.

Helena gets up and clears the dishes. She goes to the sink.

ELLIS

You're coming off of something.

HELENA

I'm not coming off of anything.

ELLIS

Well. That's bullshit.

Helena ignores him and starts to wash dishes.

ELLIS (CONT'D)

Look. You're giving up. We can try again, who cares what this one guy says? Mom knows a doctor --

Helena slams a dish down in the sink. A long beat.

HELENA

If I have to talk to your Mother about this one more time. There isn't a solution to every problem. You haven't had something die inside you four times. Stop. Just -- stop.

A long beat. Ellis stares at her.

ELLIS

Helli. What's gotten into you? I just want you to be happy. You know that.

Helena pauses. She turns to him.

HELENA

I don't want to disappear. I don't know if that makes sense. But can you just understand it? Please.

Ellis observes her for a moment, then looks down. He fidgets, uncomfortably. Suddenly, they are thousands of miles away again.

ELLIS

Sure. Sure, I understand it.

He gets up and goes to her. He gives her a quick kiss on the side of her head, then walks out of the room. Helena turns back to the dishes...

Music SWELLS

INT. RADIO STUDIO. DAY.

...Music continues during a commercial break, as Helena sits and watches Bow and a radio host, JERRY ROTH (30's), through glass. Bow bounces around to the music they're playing, completely lost in uninhibited joy. Jerry watches her, both amused and threatened.

The music fades into...

JERRY

And now ladies and gents, we are back with Bow Brooks. Book extraordinaire. On a particularly lavish publicity tour this month with - not two - but three books on the best-seller list. That's something, Bow.

BOW

Well I did not write any of them, Jerry. So honestly, this whole thing puzzles me.

JERRY

I'll bet. But we did have all of those authors on. Most memorable was Johnny Millane. That's star power right there.

BOW

He is something.

JERRY

Is it strictly professional?

BOW

Oh, come on. Would you ask Lincoln Schuster that?

Bow lights a cigarette and smokes it.

JERRY

Well you're seen quite a lot in public together. Not to mention at his casino. And you can't deny you're his type.

BOW

You forget he has to be my type too. Let's focus on the writing. *Amber Sky* is an important pivot for him from his last book.

JERRY

Truly a 360 --

BOW

-- That's a 180, Jerry.

JERRY

How about the rumors he's in with the mob?

BOW

That sounds like a question for the FBI. I'd cool it though, or you may find yourself floating face down in the east river. It's filthy.

Jerry laughs, a little uncomfortably: Is she kidding or serious? He pivots...

JERRY

Can I ask you the question every bachelor might be curious about? Why aren't you married?

BOW

Of all the things you could ask me -
-

JERRY

-- just indulge us this once. Have a lot of men listening to this show.

BOW

Well. I see marriage the same way I see lion taming. Sometimes things work out and the spectacle is brilliant, but many times someone gets mauled in the most horrific of fashions.

Helena stifles a laugh. Jerry chuckles, he's a little stumped.

JERRY

Uh. Are you the lion or the lion tamer in this story, Ms. Brooks?

BOW

Well luckily I'm just a shadow in the audience eating a popcorn. And I intend to keep it that way.

EXT. RADIO SHOW. SIXTH AVENUE. DAY.

Bow walks briskly down the sidewalk, as Helena tries to keep up.

BOW

I hate that fucking show. I've always hated that show.

HELENA

Are you joking? You were incredible
--

BOW

-- Don't know why they want me to talk. It's the authors that should talk.

HELENA
Isn't it obvious why?

Bow turns to Helena and takes out a cigarette. She lights it, then takes a puff thoughtfully. After a few moments...

BOW
No. Should it be?

HELENA
You're just --

BOW
What?

HELENA
I don't know -- I don't know what it is, no one knows what it is.

Bow furrows her brow and looks at Helena quizzically. Then she smiles.

BOW
I hate run on sentences.

Bow pivots and walks away. Helena rushes and catches up to her. Bow puts her arm around Helena as they walk.

INT. BOW'S APARTMENT. BEDROOM. DAY.

Helena stands alone by Bow's bed where gowns are laid out. The decor of the apartment is flawless, Danish Modern: It's sophisticated, yet subtle and no nonsense...just like Bow. She has perfected it before it was even fully in fashion.

Helena touches a few of the gowns, a little longingly. Then she notices one in particular, and she runs her fingers down its intricate beading. Bow chirps to her from the other room.

BOW (O.C.)
They do it every year. It's really just a high school reunion but well-funded.

Helena picks up Bow's cashmere sweater flung next to the gowns on the bed. She slowly brings the sweater up to her face. She glances towards where Bow's voice came from, then puts the sweater to her nose and smells it. We hear heeled footsteps, Helena drops the sweater to the bed.

BOW (CONT'D)
I was thinking this one.

Helena turns and stares at Bow, who looks disturbingly elegant in a chic, grey pantsuit.

HELENA
You look -- amazing.

Bow frowns and looks into the mirror at the side of the room, with a hint of boredom.

BOW
You think?

Bow walks by Helena and picks up a pair of earring from the bedside table before she can answer. She puts them on.

HELENA
I have to go home to change first.

BOW
Wear something of mine. What do you like?

HELENA
I can't do that.

Bow comes to the bed and puts her hands on Helena's back and peeks over her shoulders. Bow points at the beaded dress Helena was looking at.

BOW
That might be good.

HELENA
I feel bad borrowing it --

Bow picks up the dress and nudges Helena with it.

BOW
Scoot.

Helena goes to the bathroom with the dress and starts to unzip her skirt.

BOW (CONT'D)
There will be more like this. We'll go to Bergdorf Goodman and get you some things.

HELENA (O.C.)
I can't afford that.

Bow looks in the mirror again, absently.

BOW

You're not affording anything, I'm getting them for you.

HELENA

Don't be ridiculous. I'm not letting you do that.

BOW

I'm never ridiculous. Consider it a bonus for the grueling hours I'm about to put you through.

Helena comes out in the dress timidly. She looks down at herself then up at Bow, self-consciously. Bow stares at her, almost proudly.

HELENA

I don't know/

BOW (CONT'D)

/Come here.

Helena goes over to Bow, who zips up the back of the dress. She adjusts the straps at the top. She leans her chin on Helena's right shoulder and they both look in the mirror.

BOW (CONT'D)

(playfully)

Does he tell you how beautiful you are?

Helena blushes and turns her face to stare at Bow, whose head still rests on Helena's shoulder.

HELENA

James Stratton would tell me every day, right?

BOW

You remembered. He would! That sounds just like James Stratton.

Bow turns and goes to a jewelry box on the vanity. She takes out shimmering, art deco earrings. She comes back to Helena and stands in front of her. She puts the earrings on for her, then pauses.

BOW (CONT'D)

OK. You're ready.

INT. PIERRE HOTEL. BALL ROOM. NIGHT.

The publishing elite gathers in a lavish ball room. Martinis and champagne coupes are being passed around on trays as groupings of people mutter with one another restlessly. Everyone scans the room and searches faces, hoping to hop ship for someone more important.

Bow talks with a man, EARL SIMMS (50's), who has a particularly bitter demeanor. The two are flanked by a woman JEAN DUNN (32), who's whip smart and absolutely unforgiving. Helena stands a little ways behind Bow, unsure of whether to join the conversation or not. Her eyes dart around the room, curiously.

BOW

It sold 50,000 copies in just the first twelve days. The paperback will be 2 million in just the first year --

EARL

-- Roger is working on something new.

BOW

We need to focus on Evelyn and Graham's next books. Roger can barely string a sentence together. He got lucky when he was part of a scandal. He'll never write anything again unless I write it for him.

Jean laughs.

EARL

Always on her side.

JEAN

Well. She's right.

Earl rolls his eyes and walks away from them. Jean comes closer to Bow.

JEAN (CONT'D)

Such a frustrated man.

BOW

A frustrated, old man. There's a difference.

Bow looks over her shoulder and notices Helena.

BOW (CONT'D)

Jean did you meet Helena Beam?
She's my new pinch hitter. We went
to Vassar together. Helena, Jean is
my best senior editor.

HELENA

Bennett. Helena Bennett --

BOW

-- Freudian slip.

Jean shakes Helena's hand.

JEAN

She says that about every senior
editor. It's nice to meet you.

BOW

I'll give you the lay of the land,
Helena. When the board made me
President, Earl was also a Vice
President and very angry he didn't
land the job. So the board told
Earl - in this case - the Vice
President would oversee the
President because god forbid the
company had a female leader.

JEAN

Like Nixon bossing Eisenhower
around.

BOW

Exactly. The setup didn't take
though. How could it? And Earl's
been a grouch ever since.

Bow notices a regal woman, LILLIAN BARNES (40's), across the
room drinking heavily at the bar. Lillian has been in one too
many rooms like this one, and she's tired of it.

BOW (CONT'D)

Lillian's here. I better --

JEAN

-- Yes. Go, go.

Bow walks away from them. Jean sips her drink and side-eyes
Helena.

JEAN (CONT'D)

Some coattails to ride.

HELENA
I'm just helping.

JEAN
Believe me, she doesn't hire
someone she's not serious about.

HELENA
Well. Dottie didn't last.

JEAN
Dottie was Earl's niece. So. I'm
afraid you have a big, fat target
on your back.

Helena looks at Jean, a little worried.

JEAN (CONT'D)
You're fine. The safest place is
under Bow's wing. Where were you
before?

HELENA
Nowhere really.

JEAN
Really?

Helena doesn't respond. Jean lights a cigarette and inspects
her.

HELENA
What about you?

JEAN
Shrift. I wasn't happy there and I
found a manuscript in a "maybe"
pile. It was taking too long to
convince them to publish it. Bow
came to me at exactly the right
time, no clue how she knew. I
brought it here. Sold 30,000 copies
in the first ten days.

HELENA
Wow. Were they angry? Shrift.

Jean shrugs.

JEAN
I don't know. Bow worked it out.
She works everything out.

We follow Helena's gaze to see Bow talking with Lillian across the room, closely. Helena notices Bow touching Lillian's arm.

INT. PIERRE HOTEL. BALL ROOM. SAME.

Bow and Lillian speak in somewhat hushed voices at the bar. We get the sense Bow is talking Lillian off a ledge, and quite used to doing so. Lillian smokes a cigarette, a little nervously.

LILLIAN

I sent you the first six chapters.
Nothing.

BOW

I told you what I thought.

LILLIAN

I want to publish this one. I've
had three best sellers for you --

BOW

-- Exactly. And now you're writing
for the market. Not for you. This
new one isn't you.

LILLIAN

I'll bring it somewhere else, Bow.
I'm loyal to you but only to a
point.

BOW

Here's what you're going to do.
You're going to go to that big
house of yours in Long Island.
You're going to rip your phone
cord out of the wall, and sit and
relax for the weekend. You're going
to eat, sleep, drink and have lots
of sex.

LILLIAN

Tom will be there.

BOW

Another weekend then. Then you're
going to take those first six
chapters you sent me and bury them
in the sand somewhere. Somewhere
you know you can find them.

(MORE)

BOW (CONT'D)

So if I end up being a kook and this was your most brilliant work, you still have them. But for the time being you're going to bury those chapters. Then you're going to go back to your typewriter. You're going to sit and pretend you're a girl who's never written a book in her life. Nobody knows your name. Nobody knows you from Eve. Nobody's read a word you've ever written. Nobody cares what you have to say...yet. And you're going to start writing. And if in two weeks you're not on to something, knock the sand off those six chapters and send them to another publisher. How's that?

Lillian studies Bow.

LILLIAN

I hate sand. It gets everywhere.

BOW

Well good because you won't need to dig them out.

Lillian tries to laugh, then looks down. She takes another sip of her drink. She starts to walk away, Bow stops her.

BOW (CONT'D)

Have I ever given you the wrong advice? I know you trust me. You're brilliant.

Helena is crossing to the bar nearby, Bow motions for her to come over. Helena approaches and smiles at both women.

HELENA

Ms. Barnes -- it's so nice to meet you. I have to tell you, I'm such a fan of your work.

BOW

Ah. See.

Lillian takes another sip of her drink and eyes Helena, a little cool-y.

LILLIAN

Thank you.

BOW
This is Helena. My new protege.

LILLIAN
(jealously)
A writer?

BOW
No. We were in English together at
Vassar. She has unparalleled taste.
She should be a book critic.

LILLIAN
The enemy.

HELENA
I don't know about all that.

BOW
I was just telling Lillian to go
bury her head in the sand and write
her next masterpiece.

Lillian eyes Helena.

LILLIAN
This isn't the time to talk about
it.

BOW
(playfully)
What? Because of Helena? I trust
her with my life.

LILLIAN
You're in publishing. Do you need
to trust someone with your life?

BOW
I run into some types.

A man, JOHNNY MILLANE (30's), floats over to the three women
as if he owns the room: Somehow he believes he does.

BOW (CONT'D)
Someone's ears were ringing.

JOHNNY
Bow. Lillian, you look lovely.

LILLIAN
Go to hell.

Lillian walks away. Bow raises her eyebrows at Johnny.

BOW

This is Helena. Helena, the brilliant author Johnny Millane. He wrote *Amber Sky*. Helena just started working for me.

HELENA

(meaningfully)

It's a pleasure, Mr. Millane. That book was truly beautiful. I read it twice --

JOHNNY

-- Thank you.

BOW

Oh it's Johnny, Helena. They reserve "Mr." for gentlemen.

JOHNNY

Uh, Bow. Can we talk somewhere?

BOW

Sure.

Johnny turns, Bow whispers to Helena...

BOW (CONT'D)

If I don't come back in seven minutes, come with the National Guard.

Helena chuckles and nods. Bow squeezes her arm. Johnny turns and holds his arm out for Bow to pass.

INT. PIERRE HOTEL. LIBRARY. NIGHT.

Bow and Johnny enter a majestic, old world library adjacent to the ball room. Bow pokes at an intrusive-looking globe...

BOW

Poor Lillian. Her too? Is there anyone you're not sleeping with?

Johnny eyes her.

JOHNNY

Yes.

Bow sits down in a leather armchair. Johnny goes to a bar in the corner and pours himself a scotch. Bow looks around the room, absentmindedly.

BOW

My Grandfather had a library like this.

JOHNNY

Beautiful, isn't it?

BOW

I hate it. I hated his too.

Johnny comes and sits on the arm of the couch.

JOHNNY

So. I'm not your type, huh?

BOW

Is that what you dragged me in here to talk about? You've been on the best seller list for a month straight. You should be thanking me.

Bow gets up and goes to the desk. She picks up a book and starts to leaf through it, indifferently. Johnny watches her, then gets up from the arm of the chair.

JOHNNY

I think about you.

Bow sighs, and doesn't turn around.

BOW

One time. Was I that memorable?

JOHNNY

I know it's not an every day thing for you. I see the way you look at men. When did you stop sleeping with them?

BOW

When they became predictable.

JOHNNY

Predictable.

BOW

Like you. Right now. Anyway, you write one book that resonates with a female audience and you think you know from a glance who a woman sleeps with.

Johnny stands behind her, he reaches out and touches her arm and strokes her elbow, eyeing her up and down. Bow doesn't move.

BOW (CONT'D)

Please don't kill your five minutes of fame, with sentiment.

JOHNNY

That wasn't sentiment.

BOW

I was trying not to be depraved.

JOHNNY

I think, when it comes down to it, you are very, very depraved...

Johnny puts both hands on her waist now, a little roughly. Bow immediately takes a letter opener from the desk and casually slices his hand with it. Johnny draws backwards, stunned. Bow puts the letter opener down.

BOW

That's why I hate this room.
Because men have been harassing
women in rooms - just like this one
- for hundreds of years.

Johnny goes to the bar and picks up a napkin. He puts it on his bloody hand and looks at Bow contemptuously.

JOHNNY

You need me, you know?

BOW

I need you? You need me --

JOHNNY

-- You prance around New York like
you're a fucking Hollywood movie
star.

BOW

And you haven't come to terms with
the fact that The Rat Pack is full.
So you prance around thinking
you're an author. But really you
are a dirty little rich boy with
stupid little ties to the mob that
you just love to publicize. You
wrote a few tell all books about
your casino and the socialites
you've collected.

(MORE)

BOW (CONT'D)

I published them because they sold as fast as two-bit pornography. Did I say they were good, then? They weren't. Let's not mix up good prose and a tell all. America always spreads its legs for a tell all.

JOHNNY

Well. I have a new book now. Good prose is exactly what they're calling it --

BOW

-- Who will make your next one happen? Touch me again and lightning won't strike twice.

Johnny walks over quickly to her, Bow moves back. Johnny stops a few feet from her, and smiles.

JOHNNY

It's like when Arnold Rothstein fixed the World Series. My dad used to tell me about it. This shiny pillar of America became such a joke. Just exposed to be all rotten inside. That's you. Because one day someone's going to reach up, and tear you down from that ivory tower everyone cannot stop looking at. And talking about. I cannot wait to see it.

The door to the library opens, it's Helena. She looks at Bow, then notices the bloody napkin in Johnny's hand. Bow walks briskly to the door.

BOW

Are they finally serving dinner?
I'm starving.

Bow walks out. Helena gives Johnny one last look, then follows Bow out.

INT. PUBLISHING HOUSE. HALLWAY. DAY.

Helena sits at a desk outside Bow's office reading part of a manuscript. Bow walks up.

BOW

You're here early.

Helena holds up the manuscript.

HELENA
This is amazing.

BOW
Isn't it?

HELENA
Only the first few chapters but --
I'm dying to read the rest.

BOW
Don't worry she works fast.

HELENA
What did you say? To Lillian.

BOW
Nothing at all, really.

HELENA
Well it worked. How was the trip --
what is in Idaho, anyway?

BOW
Potatoes. Lots of potatoes.

Bow eyes a room down the hall.

BOW (CONT'D)
I meant to ask, do you want that
office?

HELENA
Are you serious?

BOW
It's been sitting there empty for
months.

HELENA
Dottie sat out here.

BOW
Let's give Earl something else to
be angry about, hm?

Bow walks into her office, briskly.

INT. PUBLISHING HOUSE. HELENA'S OFFICE. DAY.

Helena straightens a few things on her desk, procrastinating. She picks up a discarded manuscript and tries to read a page. Then she sighs and tosses it, a little aggressively to the other side of the desk. Bow comes into the door frame.

BOW
It's the worst, isn't it? Bad writing.

HELENA
(laughs)
Yes.

BOW
Take a break from the dreaded agent pile.

Bow walks over to her desk and throws a large folder down.

BOW (CONT'D)
I want you to take a look at these.

Helena opens up the folder and starts shuffling through the papers.

HELENA
College journals -- Community college journals? Local newspapers --

BOW
Find the female writers that stick out to you.

HELENA
Why?

BOW
Market research, I think they call it? I get as much information about what people want to read, from what they write.

Helena looks back down at the pile.

HELENA
Bow, these are all from --

BOW
-- Middle of nowhere, south of everywhere. Exactly where America is.

HELENA

All right. Just women?

BOW

That's the audience I prioritize.
Want to do 21 next weekend?

The phone on Helena's desk RINGS.

HELENA

Uh...yes --

BOW

Look at you. Conversations
interrupted with phone calls.

HELENA

It's for you. I'm your assistant
still, remember?

BOW

Right. Well. I'm going to hire
someone to sit out there outside my
office. I'm promoting you. Your
notes on Evelyn's chapters were
brilliant.

Bow turns on her heel and walks out, before Helena can
answer. Helena stares after her. She suddenly notices the
phone is still ringing. She picks it up.

HELENA

(into phone)

Rollins and Henson.

ELLIS (O.C.)

Hey you.

INT. OFFICE. ELLIS' CUBICLE. DAY.

Ellis sits in a grey cubicle surrounded by cubicles that look
just like it. He leans back in a chair, with his feet on his
desk.

We intercut between them.

HELENA

Oh. Hi.

ELLIS

Disappointed? Expecting someone
else?

HELENA
No, no of course not.

ELLIS
Look it's Friday night, I want to
take my girl out in style. Pay day.

HELENA
Are you sure?

ELLIS
Of course I'm sure. Where do you
want to go? Sky's the limit.

HELENA
Um --

ELLIS
-- Your time's almost up Mrs.
Bennett.

HELENA
La Cote Basque?

ELLIS
I just felt a hole in my pocket --

HELENA
-- You asked.

ELLIS
Meet you there at 7.

Helena beams with excitement.

ELLIS (CONT'D)
Love you./

HELENA
/Love you too.

INT. LA COTE BASQUE. BAR. NIGHT.

Helena sits at the bar, slightly annoyed, but it becomes clear that annoyance doesn't fit in here. There is a casual and effortless luxuriousness to every patron, and it vibrates throughout the room. This is the warm little center of the universe tonight; the place to see and be seen.

Helena tries to relax. She sips a martini and checks her watch. An elegant, well-mannered male HOST (60's) comes over to her.

HOST
Mrs. Bennett?

HELENA

Yes.

The host looks down at a note in his hand.

HOST

Apologies from a Mr. Bennett. He got caught up at work for another hour or so. He asks that you...

The host pauses and looks down again at the note.

HOST (CONT'D)

...Meet him at that-place-by-his-office-you-went-that-one-time-after-bowling at 9. He tried but could not get a reservation here.

Helena looks down, embarrassed.

HELENA

Thank you.

The host nods graciously and walks away. Helena stares at her drink for a moment, then pays the tab. She gets up and heads to the door. Before she reaches it, she scans the restaurant insecurely. Suddenly, she spots what looks like the back of Bow sitting at a corner table, next to a young woman.

They sit very close, and Bow has her hand on the woman's hand. Bow whispers something, playfully, in the woman's ear. Helena walks through the restaurant over to their table...

HELENA (CONT'D)

Bow?

Bow turns and jumps -- we don't often see her flustered.

BOW

Helena. Hello.

HELENA

Hello?

Bow eyes the young girl next to her.

BOW

This -- this is Mary. Mary this is Helena. She works for me.

Mary smiles warmly. She stands up and shakes Helena's hand.

MARY

It's a pleasure to meet you.

HELENA
You as well.

Bow has managed to compose herself.

BOW
Mary is -- a writer.

Mary side-eyes Bow a little skeptically.

MARY
Right. Yes -- hoping to be. Bow's
been nice enough to put me up this
weekend --

BOW
-- Helena and I went to Vassar
together.

MARY
That's a far shot from Boise State.

A beat.

HELENA
You went to school in Idaho?

MARY
Shocked you know it. My parents
never would have let me study out
of state. They had about fifty
dollars for education and it was at
the bank that's taped behind their
toilet. I'm still chained to their
house.

An awkward beat. Helena looks at Bow, a little confused.
Mary's eyes dart between them, picking up on the awkwardness.

HELENA
Anyway I'd better go. I'm meeting
Ellis.

BOW
You're not eating here?

HELENA
The poor guy couldn't get a
reservation.

BOW
You should have told me!

Bow gets up and gives Helena a kiss on the cheek. She sits back down.

MARY

It was nice meeting you.

HELENA

(to Mary)

You too.

Helena shoots Bow one last look, then goes.

INT. BOW'S APARTMENT. FOYER. MORNING.

Helena lets herself in with a key, through the front door.

HELENA

Bow?

BOW (O.C.)

I'm back here! I had - like - a fit of inspiration and decided to take the day off. Come see the damage I've done.

Helena follows Bow's voice through the grand hallway.

INT. BOW'S APARTMENT. LIVING ROOM. CONTINUOUS.

Helena reaches a large, majestic living room with double-high ceilings. Bow stands, perspiring, looking at an enormous multimedia wall; it's a stunning mixture of contemporary photographs, abstract art and framed, Bauhaus posters. A towering ladder sits at one side of it. One large framed photograph leans against the wall, waiting to be hung. Bow turns to Helena.

BOW

What do you think?

HELENA

It's incredible.

Bow looks back at the wall and cocks her head.

BOW

I think so.

HELENA

You hung that whole wall yourself?
How?

BOW
I don't know. I become sort of
possessed I guess.

HELENA
(cautiously)
Did Mary go?

BOW
Who? Oh. Yes, yes she went.

Bow picks up the photograph that's leaning against the wall,
and looks up, a little competitively. Helena sits on the
couch and watches her.

HELENA
Bow, I...

Helena trails off. Bow continues to scan the wall, then
frowns and leans the photograph against it again.

BOW
I won't figure out where to put
this. I have to step away. Want to
get lunch?

HELENA
Sure.

INT. P.J. CLARKE'S. DAY.

Helena and Bow sit across from one another at a booth having
martinis and barely-touched cheeseburgers. Bow smokes a
cigarette, while flicking her gold lighter open and shut
quickly and methodically. She seems restless. Helena watches
her.

Shake, Rattle and Roll by The Comets SWELLS up from the
jukebox across the room. Helena taps her fingers in time with
it, on the table.

BOW
You like this song?

HELENA
Who doesn't like this song?

BOW
I like Joe Turner's version better.

HELENA
I haven't heard that one.

BOW

Really? Turner was the first to record it. But he's a black artist. So they recorded The Comets version the very same week Turner's version topped the R&B charts. Turner's was doing just great. So why did they do it? I'll tell you. Because they're imperialists. The Comets' version made number 7 on the Billboard Charts. Turner's only 22. I think it's a crime.

A long beat. Bow continues to flick her lighter open and shut. Helena is unsure what to say, so she just watches her.

BOW (CONT'D)

I mean, what's next? A vanilla gumdrop version of Hound Dog?

HELENA

Hound Dog?

BOW

Big Momma Thornton. You haven't heard that song? Anyway, It's ridiculous. People don't respect artists in this country.

An awkward beat.

HELENA

What's Mary working on?

Bow's thrown by the change of topic.

BOW

Oh. I don't know really. Odds and ends that could turn into a book. Or the back of a cereal box. We'll see.

A long beat. Bow lights another cigarette.

HELENA

You know --

Helena stops herself.

BOW

What?

HELENA

I just -- you know you can tell me anything right? I wouldn't judge you.

BOW

Judge me for what?

They stare at each other.

BOW (CONT'D)

For what?

HELENA

Nothing. Never-mind.

Helena holds up her empty glass.

HELENA (CONT'D)

Should we get another?

Bow doesn't answer. She eyes Helena quizzically.

BOW

You know. You look jealous.

HELENA

Jealous? Of who.

BOW

Of Mary. Stealing my attention away.

HELENA

I'm not/

BOW (CONT'D)

/Mm hm.

A male WAITER comes over.

BOW (CONT'D)

We'll have two more martinis.

Bow gestures to Helena

BOW (CONT'D)

This one needs another round desperately. And you can even keep the third on ice.

The waiter chuckles and nods. He walks away. Bow smirks at Helena who looks down, sheepishly.

INT. BERGDORF GOODMAN. DAY.

Bow sits and waits in a grand, mirrored dressing room as Helena tries clothes on through a door in the corner. After a few moments, Helena comes out in a red pantsuit. She steps up onto a platform that faces the mirrors.

BOW

Oh. That's stunning on you.

HELENA

You like the red?

BOW

I think you need it in navy too.
Evelyn?

A Saleswoman, EVELYN (50's) emerges gracefully and all-knowingly from the corner of the room.

BOW (CONT'D)

Evelyn, do you have it in navy?

EVELYN

And in black.

BOW

We'll take all three.

EVELYN

Of course, Ms. Brooks. Just give me
a moment.

Evelyn walks to the door. Helena waits for her to exit.

HELENA

You can't keep doing this. You
should take it out of my salary.
Though then I'll be in debt.

BOW

I don't want to hear it.

HELENA

Then at least just get one. Not all
three. I don't need it in black.

BOW

When I die, you're wearing this to
my funeral. So yes, you do. Now,
scoot.

Helena walks back into the dressing room. Bow sits back in her chair, relaxed. Helena comes out in a slip.

HELENA
I almost forgot...

Helena hands Bow a folder.

HELENA (CONT'D)
The college journals. Local
newspapers. A lot of it was a poor
showing, but I found some great
ones.

BOW
(absentmindedly)
Oh. Perfect.

Helena pauses for a moment.

HELENA
Aren't you going to look through
it?

BOW
I'll look later. We're not working
right now. There's a silk dress in
there waiting for you.

We FOLLOW Helena as she turns and goes back into the dressing
room and closes the curtain. She starts to slip on the silk
dress.

BOW (O.C.) (CONT'D)
Helena I'm running to the Ladies.
Don't take the dress off till I
come back.

HELENA
I won't.

Helena zips up the dress, a little haphazardly then walks
out. She stands and looks in the mirror. Evelyn walks in with
the two pantsuits Bow requested. She hangs them up.

EVELYN
That's lovely on you.

HELENA
Thank you.

Evelyn comes over and helps adjust the straps.

EVELYN
Are you a writer, too?

HELENA
No. Definitely no. We work
together.

A beat. Helena turns to Evelyn, curiously.

HELENA (CONT'D)
Too?

EVELYN
I'm talking too much. Ms. Brooks
has brought a few writers here, I
just assumed. There. Now that is
perfect.

Bow enters.

BOW
Oh. You're Eva Marie Saint in *On
The Waterfront*. It's witchy.

Bow bounds towards Evelyn and Helena.

INT. BENNETT APARTMENT. BEDROOM. DAY.

Helena stands in front of a mirror in her new pantsuit in
navy. She looks at herself, and strokes the hem of the jacket
carefully. We hear the front door open.

ELLIS (O.C.)
Hey.

Helena looks to the door nervously, then back at herself self-
consciously. Ellis comes into the bedroom doorway.

ELLIS (CONT'D)
Wow.

HELENA
You like it?

ELLIS
I do. How many outfits does a girl
in publishing need?

HELENA
A few, apparently.

Ellis doesn't answer, he just watches her.

HELENA (CONT'D)
What? New partners at firms expense
their suits. What's the difference?

ELLIS

If she paid you that much more we'd be living at the Ritz.

HELENA

It doesn't work like that. I represent the company. She wants me to look the part.

A beat.

ELLIS

Yeah.

HELENA

What, Ellis?

ELLIS

It feels a little like a girl playing dress-up with her doll to me is all.

Ellis turns and walks out of the room. Helena stares, angrily after him.

HELENA

Ellis.

No answer.

INT. PUBLISHING HOUSE. HALLWAY. DAY.

Helena walks to the door of Bow's office, holding a manuscript. A new assistant, BETTY (20's) sits outside of it, obediently.

BETTY

She's not in today Ms. Bennett.

HELENA

Oh? Where is she?

BETTY

I don't know. Off on business, I guess. She said she'd be out all week.

Helena nods and starts to walk away.

BETTY (CONT'D)

Your suit. It's beautiful.

Helena looks at her, a little warily.

HELENA

Thank you.

Helena walks down the hallway, past a few rows of men and women at cubicles. She stops at a desk outside an office. An assistant SUSAN (20's) sits at it.

HELENA (CONT'D)

Is she in?

Susan nods and picks up her phone.

SUSAN

Ms. Dunn? I have Mrs. Bennett here.

Susan hangs up.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

You can go in.

INT. PUBLISHING HOUSE. JEAN'S OFFICE. CONTINUOUS.

Helena enters. Jean sits at her desk hovering intensely over sheets of paper. She holds a red pen and slashes at the pages, mercilessly.

JEAN

Yes?

HELENA

Sorry. I just wondered if you knew where Bow went this week.

Jean looks up.

JEAN

Uh, no. Why? Was she supposed to sign off on something?

HELENA

No I just -- was curious where she went. She didn't tell me.

Jean chuckles and looks back down at her manuscript.

JEAN

Get used to it. That's how she works her magic. She's high touch when it comes to the authors, she's probably gone to see someone. She'll do anything shy of holding their hand while they sleep at night.

HELENA

Right.

Jean looks up.

JEAN

Is that a manuscript?

HELENA

I was going to give it to Bow --

JEAN

-- agent, no agent?

HELENA

No agent. I usually only look at the agent ones, but this ended up in the wrong pile somehow.

JEAN

Lucky writer.

HELENA

Yes. The writer -- she really is extraordinary.

Jean holds out her hand.

JEAN

I can take a look.

Helena pauses, unsure.

JEAN (CONT'D)

Is there a problem?

HELENA

No. Of course not. Here.

Helena puts the manuscript on Jean's desk. She walks to the door.

JEAN

Don't crowd her.

Helena turns back around.

HELENA

Excuse me?

JEAN

No matter what she says she's a lone soldier. Believe me, I know.

Jean goes back to her papers. Helena lingers a moment, then goes to the door.

EXT. MONTGOMERY AIRPORT. TARMAC. ALABAMA. DAY.

Bow walks down the steps of an airplane onto the tarmac. It's hot, unforgivably hot. Other passengers coming off the plane wipe at their faces with handkerchiefs. Bow puts on a pair of sunglasses: She is somehow not at all wilted from the heat. She lights a cigarette, and scans the runway like it's new frontier.

INT. PRIVATE CAR. A DIRT PATH. DAY.

Bow sits in back as the car drives up a long, dirt path. At some point, the car stops. Bow looks out the window at a small, dilapidated farmhouse. The door is halfway off its hinge. The wood that covers the house is only partially painted and eaten away at all the corners. Bow looks down at a slip of paper in her hand, then back up at the house. She gets out of the car, then pokes her head in the open, front window.

BOW
Just wait here, please.

DRIVER
No problem.

Bow walks up slowly to the house. She puts the slip of paper in her purse, and takes out a page of a newspaper. She gets to the front door and knocks, lightly.

A beat.

A middle-aged man, JOE SMITTY (40) opens the screen door with a cigarette hanging from his mouth. His clothes are caked in mud, and he glares at Bow. He looks her up and down, bitterly.

JOE
Yeah.

BOW
Is Jessie Smitty home?

JOE
Depend what you want with her.

Bow pauses, then holds up the newspaper.

BOW

I saw her story in the paper. I
wanted to pay her my compliments.

JOE

Be better if you pay her somethin'
else. They didn't pay her shit. Ya
came here all the way from where
you from to say that?

BOW

I would've called --

JOE

-- they woulda paid her more for
that there fuckin' story maybe I
woulda gotten a fuckin' phone --

BOW

(a little stern)
-- Is she here?

Joe doesn't move, instead he looks Bow up and down again. She
doesn't shift her eyes from his gaze.

JOE

(to no one)
Jessie. Get in here girl.

Joe turns from the door and goes back inside, letting the
screen slam in Bow's face. Bow pushes it open and follows him
in.

INT. SMITTY HOUSE. CONTINUOUS.

Bow enters behind Joe. The house is dark, damp and utterly
dirty. Empty liquor bottles and beer cans litter the space.

Bow scans part of the floor covered in cigarette butts and
moth eaten newspapers, then lifts her eyes to see a young
girl, JESSIE SMITTY (18). Jessie wears a tattered dress and
apron: She stand and stares at Bow. Though there is a
defeated blankness to her face, there is also a flicker of
great sadness and depth in her eyes.

Joe stands next to Jessie and watches the two women, warily,
as if two women talking is never a good idea.

BOW

Jessie. I'm Bow Brooks. I'm in
publishing. I wanted to speak with
you about this story you wrote.

Bow holds out the newspaper for Jessie, but Jessie doesn't take it. She also doesn't answer.

JOE

She shy -- don't like talkin' much,
Ms. Brooks. You can talk to me
'bout what you came for.

Bow ignores Joe, and doesn't take her eyes off Jessie.

BOW

Maybe there's somewhere we could go
talk?

Jessie glances at Joe, who glowers back at her. Then, Jessie turns to Bow and nods. She walks to the back of the house. Bow follows her.

JOE

(after them)
Dinner best be on that table girl,
ya hear?

EXT. SMITTY HOUSE. BACK PORCH. CONTINUOUS.

Jessie walks out onto a small and slanted wooden back porch. She sits at the edge of a broken step. Bow sits down a few feet from her.

Bow stares and spots Jessie's arms, which are covered with bruises. Jessie notices Bow is looking at them, and pulls her sleeves down.

BOW

I really hope -- well I just hope
I'm not causing you any trouble.
The paper gave me your address.

No response.

BOW (CONT'D)

People spend their whole lives
trying to write like this. Where
did you learn to?

Jessie looks back at the house.

BOW (CONT'D)

Have you written anything else?

Jessie eyes Bow, a little distrustfully.

BOW (CONT'D)

See. That's what I do, Jessie. I publish good stories. So women, like you, are heard. Now -- you don't need to tell me you're a hungry reader because I know that you are. Do you know *The Diary of Ann Frank*?

Jessie shifts a little, then nods.

BOW (CONT'D)

That book was rescued from a reject pile by Judith Jones at the publishing house, Doubleday. When she brought it to her boss - a man - he said, "What? That book by that kid?"

Jessie half-smiles. Bow stares at her.

BOW (CONT'D)

That's good.

After a few moments, Jessie gets up and goes into the house. Bow waits.

Jessie comes back out and sits down. She takes a small, tattered pile of paper out from under her ragged dress, and hands it to Bow. Bow looks at Jessie, then down at the paper. She turns a page over.

BOW (CONT'D)

"The shattered remnants of the dregs of the living were all that were left. The woman stood upon a sea of ash that was once a world, a world that had turned to dust in an instant. When the dust came the men had thought they'd laugh, but they weren't there to laugh. Only she was left. So she listened carefully to what was now deafening silence, and smiled."

Bow stares at the paper, moved. She looks up at Jessie, then takes a deep breath in...

BOW (CONT'D)

Jessie. I'd like to tell you something I have never told anyone...

INT. PUBLISHING HOUSE. HELENA'S OFFICE. DAY.

Helena grabs some papers off of her desk. She walks to the door of her office.

INT. PUBLISHING HOUSE. HALLWAY. DAY.

Helena walks down the hallway and sees a woman, VIVIAN HARROW (20's), lingering outside Bow's office, like a lost puppy. She hovers by Bow's door, deciding whether or not to knock. Helena speeds up and eyes Betty's desk, which is empty.

HELENA

Excuse me. Can I help you?

Vivian swerves around, nervously.

VIVIAN

Oh. No I'm sorry. There wasn't anyone at the front so I just thought I'd see -- I was looking for Bow.

HELENA

She's been out of town. I'm sorry. Did you have an appointment?

VIVIAN

Sort of. I forgot she said she might be away.

Helena studies her skeptically.

HELENA

She should be back next week. Did you want me to tell her you came by? I didn't catch your name.

VIVIAN

No. It's fine -- I'll come back.

Vivian walks hurriedly by Helena. Helena watches after her.

INT. 21 CLUB. NIGHT.

Helena and Bow sit at the bar having cocktails. Businessmen flank them from either side, shooting the two curious glances periodically: Neither woman notices.

Helena's mind is clearly elsewhere and she tears at her napkin, while Bow is in the middle of a story...

BOW

-- that's when the woman stops doing ballet in the kitchen. She's five martinis deep, mind you. She's broken half the glasses. She walks into the living room where the party is and sees that the two boys from Newport have set off illegal fireworks inside. She screams bloody murder. They blew up the moose head hanging above the fireplace. You should have seen it. No one was hurt, thank god. Well - besides the moose.

Bow pauses, and watches Helena.

BOW (CONT'D)

Helena?

HELENA

Sorry.

Helena lights a cigarette.

HELENA (CONT'D)

(a little cynically)

What is that? *You Can't Take It With You?*

BOW

No, it was Jane Thompson's Christmas party, I told you. What's with you tonight?

A beat. Helena stares at Bow like she's trying to solve a math problem. Bow flicks her lighter open and shut.

HELENA

Nothing. Sorry -- nothing.

BOW

Anyway a toast is in order.

HELENA

To what?

BOW

We're going to publish *Feral Sons*.
3,000 copies.

Helena doesn't answer and continues to tear at her napkin.

BOW (CONT'D)

What? That was your pick. You're moving up. Drink. Drink.

The two women cheers, halfheartedly, and take a sip of their cocktails.

HELENA

Why only 3,000?

BOW

That's standard for a first-author hardcover, Helena. It's not a paperback. The thing is the size of Texas. You agreed with me on that.

A beat.

HELENA

I guess I did. Yes.

Bow flips her gold lighter open and closed a little aggressively, now.

BOW

Do you suddenly not trust my judgment? Is that why you showed Jean a manuscript first, behind my back?

Helena looks up at Bow, who stares at her very seriously now.

HELENA

That wasn't -- I was bringing it to you. I went to her to see where you were. What was I supposed to say when she asked to read it?

BOW

Well. You'll be happy to know it's staying right there in the pile forever-more. Until another publisher snatches it up.

HELENA

She didn't like it?

BOW

Her and Earl didn't think a salacious story like that from a housewife-from-nowhere would sell.

Helena looks down. She's disappointed.

BOW (CONT'D)

You show things to me first, do we understand each other? And anyway what are you doing in the non-agent pile? I've told you to let me handle that --

HELENA

-- it was in the agent pile by mistake. And shouldn't you start learning to delegate? Other people can make judgments besides you.

A long beat. Bow stares fiercely at Helena: This hit a nerve. Helena looks down, she knows she's overstepped.

HELENA (CONT'D)

(quietly)

Look. Can't you just go back to Jean and Earl about this? It might not be too late --

BOW

-- It isn't too late. But I got to where I am because I walk into things, Helena. I come in first. I do not back into them, last, after everybody else. Ever. So, no. You don't get my help on this.

HELENA

I'm sorry, Bow.

Bow breathes in, and stares at Helena a little guiltily. She softens, and composes herself.

BOW

Let's forget it, all right?

The two women sip their martinis. Bow's suddenly chipper again, but it's taking effort. She looks at her watch.

BOW (CONT'D)

Anyway I'm late for a dinner date with Peter Barnum.

HELENA

(impressed)

Peter Barnum.

BOW

He's been with me since the beginning. It's back-breaking.

HELENA
He's having a little dry spell --

BOW
-- Exactly. But apparently he has something for me. Something "different." I approach with caution.

Bow throws some cash down, then gets up.

HELENA
Bow?

Bow turns and looks at her. Helena searches her eyes, a little longingly.

HELENA (CONT'D)
I really am sorry.

Bow walks over and gives Helena a warm hug. Helena hugs her back.

BOW
Let's bury it, all right? You're part of something great now. Embrace it.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY. DAY.

A radio commercial for Shredded Ralston cereal PLAYS over quick aerial shots of Manhattan in a new season...

MAN (V.O.)
Hey, here's how to make breakfast as exciting as a circus and a three day rodeo rolled into one...

The jingle comes on....

SINGER (V.O.)
*Shredded Ralston for your breakfast
Starts the day off shining bright,
Gives you lots of cowboy energy
With a flavor that's just right...*

INT. RADIO STUDIO. DAY.

...jingle continues as Bow sits outside a radio show window looking in on two men.

There's the radio host, WES (30's) and author PETER BARNUM (50's) who drips with both ego and a massive chip on his shoulder. The two wait, awkwardly, for the song to finish...

SINGER (V.O.)

*It's delicious and nutritious
Bite size and ready to eat
Take a tip from Tom
Go and tell your mom
Shredded Ralston can't be beat.*

MAN (V.O.)

For better breakfast, it's Ralston.

Wes nods his head at Peter.

WES

If you've just tuned in, I'm here with four time best-selling author Peter Barnum, whose new book *Silent Remains* has been sitting there on that best seller list for five weeks straight. Peter is no doubt a cultural icon of sorts. And you know, Peter, this book - to me - has an almost Tennessee Williams kind of quality. It's a fresh perspective for you. Where did it come from?

PETER

Well I'm a writer, so I observe. I don't think cosmopolitan people really know what goes on in the rest of America. But we're all human. We all have the same tarnished families, Wes. The same wants and needs. So this one -- it resonates with everyone I think.

Helena enters the room where Bow is sitting.

BOW

Remind me to never use the word
"tarnished."

The two men continue to talk in the background.

HELENA

How is it?

BOW

He hates press.

Helena watches Peter puffed up, talking.

HELENA
He seems happy.

BOW
With the attention, sure. But
writers hate being asked about
their "process."

Bow and Helena watch the two men again.

WES
...I think people are struck by the
vulnerability. It's far darker than
your other books, almost raw --

PETER
-- Writing is a vulnerable process.
And a dark one.

Bow signals to a RADIO ASSISTANT inside the booth and points
to her watch; a signal to start wrapping it up. The radio
assistant signals to Wes.

BOW
I told them 15 minutes. This has
gone on for 22.

HELENA
If you have things to do I can --

BOW
-- He likes his hand held.

Bow goes up and knocks on the glass, Wes turns to her a
little taken aback.

INT. BENNETT APARTMENT. LIVING ROOM. NIGHT.

Ellis sits in an armchair with a whiskey reading *Silent
Remains* by Peter Barnum. He looks very bored and put out.
Helena enters from the kitchen. Ellis holds up the book...

ELLIS
This supposed to cheer me up?

HELENA
I told you. You don't have to read
it.

ELLIS
I like to have some insight into
your job. I liked his last one
more.

Helena looks around suddenly.

HELENA
Oh --

ELLIS
-- what?

HELENA
I was supposed to read something
for Jean, this weekend. I left it
at the office. I'll have to go in.

ELLIS
Now?

Helena gets her coat and purse from a hook near the door.

ELLIS (CONT'D)
You deserved that raise, that's for
sure.

HELENA
I won't be long.

Helena exits. Ellis throws the book on the coffee table and
turns on the TV.

INT. PUBLISHING HOUSE. HALLWAY. NIGHT.

Helena comes out of her office, manuscript in hand, and walks
down the hallway. She hears hushed voices coming from Bow's
office, the door is slightly ajar. She goes to it, and
listens.

We hear a woman, who sounds hysterical, and Bow talking...

WOMAN (O.C.)
You promised me --

BOW (O.C.)
-- Please. You need to be patient
with me, all right? I have only
done this with you. And that is
because you are special. And when
it is the right time for us, it
will be glorious.

WOMAN (O.C.)
When's the right time? You always
say this --

BOW (O.C.)
--Don't you care about me?

WOMAN (O.C.)
Of course. How can you ask that?

BOW (O.C.)
Then be patient.

WOMAN (O.C.)
I just -- I want a flight home.

BOW (O.C.)
You don't. You'll stay with me. I
made reservations tonight --

Helena backs up a little from the door, guiltily. She looks around then heads to the exit.

INT. SMITTY HOUSE. JESSIE'S BEDROOM. DAY.

Joe holds a half-empty bottle of whiskey, and stands in Jessie's room over her mattress, which he's pushed half off the frame. He holds a stack of new, glossy hardcover books. He looks down at them hatefully, inspecting each, one by one.

Jessie comes into the doorway. Joe raises his eyes to look at her, and holds the hardcover books up.

JOE
Where you get these -- where you
get the money for 'em?

Jessie stares at him, and doesn't answer. Joe takes a gulp of his whiskey bottle, and wipes at his face.

JOE (CONT'D)
You stealin' from me?

Jessie immediately shakes her head. Joe walks over to her...

JOE (CONT'D)
Then how you get 'em?

Joe strikes her across the face, hard. Jessie falls to the floor. Joe goes back to the mattress. He lifts the corner of the mattress and shoves it further off the frame. There are more books there, and he picks each of them up.

He proceeds to throw each one of them at Jessie's head in time with...

JOE (CONT'D)

Where. You. Get. These. Fuckin'.
Books.

Joe stares at Jessie drowsily, and throws one more for good measure...

JOE (CONT'D)

Don't got two cents to rub together
and this girl bastard go and dance
around that fuckin' bookstore.

Joe walks over to Jessie. She stands up. Her cheek - where he struck her - is searing red. She stares at him with hatred. Joe grabs her arm, violently.

JOE (CONT'D)

I'm bringin' 'em back, ya hear?

Jessie wrenches her arm away and looks towards the front of the house.

JOE (CONT'D)

Run an' I'll kill ya.

Jessie runs out of the room. Joe rushes after her but trips over a small desk and falls to the floor, we hear the screen door slam.

Joe gets back up. He stares at the desk, and opens some drawers. He throws things out of them haphazardly. After a few moments, he spots a weathered journal at the bottom of one of the drawers. He picks it up and stumbles as he opens it to the first page.

He looks down at the journal and squints, struggling to read: CLOSE on the same passage Bow read aloud on the porch: "The shattered remnants of the dregs of the living were all that were left. The woman stood upon a sea of ash that was once a world, a world that had turned to dust..."

Joe looks up from the journal, and wipes his face again.

EXT. PUBLISHING HOUSE. PARK AVENUE. NIGHT.

Helena waits across the street and smokes a cigarette. She stands, somewhat in the shadows, watching the glass entrance to the publishing house.

After a few minutes, Helena notices something. We follow her gaze to see Bow accompanied by who we now see is Vivian Harrow, walking through the lobby hurriedly. Helena's eyes widen, and she quickly throws down her cigarette and crosses the street to the entrance.

Bow and Vivian come out, and Bow takes Vivian's arm. Helena approaches them and feigns surprise.

HELENA
Burning the midnight oil?

Bow lets go of Vivian's arm and lights up, cheerfully.

BOW
Helena!

HELENA
I left a manuscript. You know Jean.
She'll quarter me.

Helena turns her attention to Vivian.

HELENA (CONT'D)
We've met once, haven't we?

Bow looks at Vivian, surprised. Vivian nods a little nervously, then side eyes Bow.

VIVIAN
(to Bow)
I came to see you. When you were
away.

Vivian turns back to Helena.

VIVIAN (CONT'D)
We never met properly, I'm Vivian
Harrow --

BOW
-- No one can blame you, I like to
come and go in secret you could
say.

HELENA
She does. Are you --

BOW
We're off to dinner. Vivian's a
fresh new voice I'm excited about.
I cajoled her into staying the
weekend. She'd rather be at Newark.

A beat. Vivian looks at Bow again, then relaxes a little.

VIVIAN
(to Helena)
You know Bow. You willingly,
longingly and heartily accept. Yes
is not enough.

BOW
Too true.

Helena stares at them, and doesn't answer.

BOW (CONT'D)
Helena?

Helena snaps out of a trance.

HELENA
Yes, Yes -- I'm definitely familiar
with that. Enjoy your dinner.

VIVIAN
It was nice meeting you --

BOW
We'll do drinks Sunday.

Helena nods. Bow studies Helena for a moment, with a touch of curiosity. Then she smiles, and her and Vivian turn and walk away.

CUT TO:

INT. BENNETT APARTMENT. FOYER. NIGHT.

Helena bursts into her apartment, already searching for something. She doesn't take off her coat, and heads quickly to the living room.

INT. BENNETT APARTMENT. LIVING ROOM. DAY.

Helena walks in and starts scanning the bookshelves.

EXT. BOOKSTORE. MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA. DAY.

Joe stands holding the stack of hardcover books he took from Jessie's room. He looks into the windows of the bookstore. He spits onto the street, then walks to the front door to go inside.

INT. BENNETT APARTMENT. LIVING ROOM. NIGHT.

Helena spots a book, then pulls it out. She tosses it: It's not the one she's looking for. She paces and continues to search the bookshelves. She finally spots a book and takes it out, quickly.

CLOSE on the cover: AMBER SKY, by JOHNNY MILLANE

Helena starts flipping through the pages...

INT. BOOKSTORE. MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA. DAY.

Joe arrives at the counter and throws Jessie's hardcover books down, violently. They land with a THUMP. The female CASHIER jumps, and looks up at him.

JOE

Wanna return every one of these,
girl. Don't give me no lower than
they were paid for. They brand,
goddamn new.

The cashier nods and starts to pick the books up one by one.

Joe looks, cynically at the cashier counter in front of him. He spots a book for sale, displayed, with a "Best Seller" label underneath it. He picks it up like it's an alien object.

JOE (CONT'D)

Fuckin' books. Can't get her to do
shit, that girl. She read all this
stuff.

The cashier eyes him, and doesn't respond. Joe opens the book up...

INT. BENNETT APARTMENT. LIVING ROOM. NIGHT

...Helena flips through *Amber Sky* and spots something. She points at a sentence and reads it aloud:

HELENA

"She willingly, longingly and
heartily accepted. Yes was not
enough."

Helena sits down, and stares ahead of her, lost in thought.

INT. BOOKSTORE. MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA. DAY.

Joe flips to the first page of the best-seller.

CLOSE on the text, which reads Jessie's familiar passage:
 "The shattered remnants of the dregs of the living were all that were left. The woman stood upon a sea of ash that was once a world, a world that had turned to dust in an instant..."

Joe narrows his eyes, remembering the same words written in Jessie's journal. He squints, and shoots the cashier a side-glance. He flips the book over.

CLOSE on the cover: Silent Remains, by Peter Barnum.

Joe lifts his gaze. After a few moments, he lets out a grotesque, loud laugh. The cashier jumps again and looks at him. Joe stares at her, then holds the book up.

JOE
 This one I'll take. Best seller an'
 all that...

INT. BOW'S APARTMENT. BEDROOM. MORNING.

Bow sits smoking in bed. We see the blankets shift, slightly, next to her. Vivian turns over to face her. We see she's not wearing anything.

VIVIAN
 You're up early.

A beat. Bow turns and looks at her.

BOW
 I have never been much for sleep.

VIVIAN
 Do you have to go in?

BOW
 I'm taking today, remember? I
 promised to bring you to the
 airport. I don't break promises.

Vivian breaks into a smile, and cozies into her pillow like a nester.

VIVIAN
 I can make something?

BOW
I've never been much for breakfast
either.

Vivian hops out of bed and puts on a silk robe.

VIVIAN
You have not tried my egg in a
hole. Just like my Aunt used to
make.

BOW
How very *Little House on the
Prairie* of you.

Vivian scowls playfully at her and skips out of the room. Bow
watches after her, a little bitterly. The phone next to the
bed RINGS, Bow picks it up.

BOW (CONT'D)
Yes.

OPERATOR (O.C.)
I have a collect call from
Montgomery, Alabama. May I put him
through?

Bow sits up in bed.

BOW
Yes.

Bow puts out her cigarette. After a beat, we hear a guttural
cough and then...

JOE (O.C.)
Ms. Brooks?

INT. TELEPHONE BOOTH. MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA.

Joe leans against the glass door of the telephone booth. He
has the book Silent Remains in his hand.

We intercut between them.

JOE
This Joe Smitty.

Bow doesn't answer.

JOE (CONT'D)
Hear me or what?

BOW
Yes I hear you. What?

Joe turns the book over in his hand.

JOE
Picked up a new book. Silent --
Silent Remains. Real hit. Sellin'
'em like hot cakes at the bookstore
here. Right front. Center.

Bow stares ahead of her and doesn't answer. She clears her throat.

BOW
Jessie. Can you have her call me?

JOE
Wish I could. But she ain't one for
phone conversations Ms. Brooks.
Jessie's a mute. Ain't said nothing
since she was 4. Guess you didn't
get into that -- woman like you
likes to do the talkin', right?

Bow takes in a deep breath: For the first time she looks frightened.

JOE (CONT'D)
Now uh, I never been much for
stories. But, big shot editor from
the city comes down 'ere an' steals
a book from a mute girl. Put some
famous writer-name on the cover.
Sounds like the front page of a
paper to me --

BOW
-- I don't know what --

JOE
-- Don't get fucking squirmy with
me. I got her journal. Same words
as this here hardcover. So let's
cut to it.

Bow flicks her lighter open and shut.

BOW
What do you want?

JOE
Thousand dollars should do it.

BOW
And then you disappear.

JOE
Yeah.

Bow breathes in and out, a little fiercely.

BOW
Jessie and I had very big plans.
You're killing that, you know --

JOE
-- You tell yourself whatever help
you sleep at night. Money ain't
sent I'm going to the papers.

Joe hangs up the phone. Bow slowly hangs up too. Vivian enters with a cup of coffee.

VIVIAN
You're still sitting there? Come to
the kitchen.

Bow stares ahead of her, angrily.

VIVIAN (CONT'D)
Bow?

BOW
I don't have time for breakfast.

Bow gets up and takes a suitcase from the corner of the room and puts it on the bed. Vivian watches her, hurt.

BOW (CONT'D)
Didn't you have a good weekend? I
have to go in at some point today,
OK? Start packing your things.

Bow walks briskly past her. Vivian watches after her, and her hurt swiftly turns to anger.

INT. PUBLISHING HOUSE. HALLWAY. DAY.

Bow comes out of her office.

BOW
Betty?

BETTY
Yes, Ms. Brooks.

BOW
Get Helena in here, would you?

BETTY
She called in sick today, Ms.
Brooks.

BOW
Sick?

BETTY
Yes.

A long beat. Bow searches Betty angrily. Betty shifts uncomfortably. Bow looks down at the floor, intensely. She is at her wit's end. Betty watches her, a little frightened.

BOW
People just come and go as they
please here, don't they?

BETTY
Ms. Brooks?

Bow briskly turns, and walks back into her office. She slams the door behind her.

INT. BOW'S APARTMENT. FOYER. NIGHT.

Bow walks in, exhausted. She throws her keys on a side-table. She walks through the dimly lit hallway.

INT. BOW'S APARTMENT. LIVING ROOM. CONTINUOUS.

Bow walks into the living room and goes to the bar. She pours herself a drink and looks up at her multimedia wall. She takes a sip...

HELENA (O.C.)
I still can't believe you built
that wall by yourself.

Bow jumps. She switches a light on. Helena sits on an armchair, with books scattered on the floor around her. She looks at Bow, indifferently.

BOW
Jesus, Helena. Don't sneak up on me
like that.

HELENA
I didn't think anyone could
surprise you./

BOW (CONT'D)
(stern)
/I thought you were ill.

HELENA
I'm fine.

Bow lights a cigarette and sits down on the couch.

BOW
Well. You look terrible.

Helena stares at Bow for a moment, like one would a science experiment.

HELENA
Weak, right?

BOW
Excuse me?

HELENA
I don't "look terrible." I'm weak.
That's why you like me so much. Why
I was lucky enough to be chosen by
the spectacular Bow Brooks.

BOW
It's been a day and I don't have
the strength to be in a Eugene
O'Neil play. Why don't you have out
with what you're upset about --

HELENA
Vivian Harrow wrote *Amber Sky*. Not
Johnny Millane.

A long beat. Bow eyes Helena and smiles, amused.

BOW
Excuse me?

HELENA
I know she did.

BOW
Go home. A key doesn't mean you get
to live here --

HELENA
-- No.

Bow cocks her head at Helena, mockingly.

BOW

I didn't know you said "No."

HELENA

How many of our company's books are written by women? Invisible women whose writing you use, and then put one of your famous male authors' names on the cover? The liberator of female voices. What a crock of shit.

Bow breathes in, and studies Helena for a moment. Then makes a decision...

BOW

Is it? Lillian Barnes - who you admire so much - was one of those "invisible women." Look at where she is now. That is because of me.

HELENA

You're proud?

BOW

(pragmatically)

Of course I'm proud. I deliver great stories. The market isn't always ready for every female voice. But those women's stories still need to be heard, not by the few but by the many. That's how change occurs. Those male authors don't use us, Helena. We use them.

HELENA

By "we," you mean you.

BOW

Ever heard of male pseudonyms for female writers? Or are you that new to publishing?

HELENA

If your cause was really fighting for female writers, you would have those women use a male pseudonym so the story was still their own. So they'd still be paid for it, even possibly later credited for it. It would still belong to them.

BOW

Or I could have the guarantee that millions of people are reading it. By hitching it to a famous male author. It's the story --

HELENA

-- Stop. You give their stories away, Bow. And you only target powerless, young women. "South of everywhere, middle of nowhere, that's where America is, Helena."

BOW

Well, it is. Been to Glasgow? Bet you haven't.

HELENA

What do you even tell to them to get them to agree?

BOW

A great story --

HELENA

-- told at the correct moment.

BOW

Yes. And they do get something. Maybe I pay a small fee, or give them perks sometimes --

HELENA

-- your affection other times.

BOW

And I make a promise to publish them down the line.

HELENA

I don't see Mary's name on the bookshelves, or Vivian on a radio show. And I'd imagine there's countless more. So really -- do you keep that promise?

BOW

It's a long term investment on their part. But of course I have before, and I will.

HELENA

How?

BOW

The same way architects build things that small people like you never think they can.

HELENA

They don't know even know about each other do they? Each one thinks they are your beautiful chosen one. I'm familiar with that.

Bow smarts a little, she's actually hurt.

BOW

(softer)

Don't compare what we have, Helena -
- Of course they don't know about each other. Do you think they'd do it if they did? Do you realize the chance these women are getting by doing this? No one else will ever give them that chance. That's the world we live in.

HELENA

You're lying to them.

BOW

(firm)

It's not lying. It's what they need to hear. It is an all-around victory. I dip my toe in, and see how their book does. The market unknowingly is warmed up for their future first book. Most importantly, the story gets out there. That is what matters.

HELENA

Peter Barnum's new book, who was that? Was that one of my picks from that sorry pile you gave me?

Bow stares at her and doesn't say anything. Helena shakes her head.

HELENA (CONT'D)

(disbelief)

And he agreed to that.

BOW

The men don't need any convincing. Believe me.

(MORE)

BOW (CONT'D)

They're taking credit for a woman's work, you think that's new?

Helena gets up.

HELENA

You really inspired me once. That is the sad part.

BOW

Please sit. For a minute. Please.

Helena stares at her, hesitantly. She slowly sits.

BOW (CONT'D)

Did I ever tell you what happened to Clara Bow? The actress my parents named me after.

HELENA

Another story --

BOW

-- she stopped acting when she was 28. Had a nervous breakdown and got married. She tried to commit suicide while we were at Vassar. Now she lives alone as a recluse. America's discarded toy. People think it was all because they switched from silent films to talkies. It wasn't. It was because no matter what, she could not win. She was controlled and corrupted. By her Father, by the studio executives, by the public. When she was too brazen and outspoken they called her a harlot. So then she was shy and demure and they yelled at her to come on out of her shell. When she stayed out all night they praised her as the ultimate flapper out of one side of their mouths, then called her a drunken whore out of the other side. They begged her to be real, because no one loves a rags to riches story more than a studio executive. So she wrote a tell all about her gritty beginnings, and got crucified for it. That's what happens when you're shiny and talented and new in this country. You don't win. You are marked.

(MORE)

BOW (CONT'D)

Destined to rise in glorious fashion, then fall, in even more miserable fashion. That's why lasting power is not made up of talent. Because we find as much pleasure in finding talent as we do in tearing it down. I never wanted to have talent. I never wanted to be gifted. I wanted to harness those who do. The ones who do that, are the ones who can change the world. If the stories I tell move the world, I've won.

A long beat. Helena watches her, indifferently.

HELENA

So how are you any different than the people who controlled and destroyed her?

BOW

These women were invisible before me.

HELENA

Most of them are still invisible. You will never catch up.

Helena gets up, for good now.

BOW

What are you going to do?

HELENA

I don't know.

Bow gets up and walks to Helena, more emotional than we've seen her.

BOW

I've never let anyone in. Helena, I was going to tell you. I really care about you. You need to know that.

HELENA

When I came to you, after my miscarriage, you told me I had a spark. And then you said, "Don't let them kill it."

BOW

I meant that.

HELENA

Something tells me you say that all the time. But it's you that kills it.

Helena heads to the door. Bow watches after her, both heartbroken and angry. For the first time, there's a tear streaming down her cheek: It's brief. She wipes at it...

BOW

You aren't weak, you know. You are a victim. And you love being one.

Helena turns back to her.

HELENA

And you love that I am one. So what does that make you?

INT. BOW'S APARTMENT. BEDROOM. NIGHT.

It's dark, and we can only see Bow's shadow in bed. We hear the shrill sound of the phone RING off the hook. Bow switches the light on and picks up.

BOW

What?

(a beat)

Yes...

A beat.

JOE (O.C.)

Need more money.

Bow sits up, and picks up her gold lighter. She flips it open and closed.

BOW

You are not getting another cent. We had a deal.

JOE (O.C.)

I don't make no deals -- ya got more money than God.

Bow stops flicking her lighter, abruptly. She takes a cigarette from her bedside table and lights it. Then she stares ahead of her, calmly, and exhales.

JOE (O.C.) (CONT'D)

Ya still there? Listen here --

BOW

(fiercely)

-- It's my turn to talk. So shut up. You're a drunk from dirt who can't string a sentence together. Like you said I have more money than God. I know you beat your daughter. Who will society listen to? Get that through your head. You are what people don't want to look at. And it will stay that way. Do yourself and your daughter a favor, and fall in a fucking ditch somewhere --

We hear Joe is laughing, hard.

JOE (O.C.)

-- Woo. She ain't no fucking lady. Man who keep you know you a poisonous slut, Ms. Brooks?

BOW

Never contact me again.

Bow hangs up.

INT. PHONE BOOTH. ALABAMA. NIGHT.

Joe is still laughing, he takes the phone from his ear and hangs it up. He chuckles to himself once more, as he exits the phone booth.

INT. VIVIAN HARROW'S APARTMENT. DAY. CHICAGO

Vivian sits, reading the newspaper, in a tiny one-room apartment. Instead of furniture, the space boasts a sea of books and magazines that clutter every corner.

Vivian shifts, comfortably, and we see she's wearing an elegant gown that is a stark contrast to her bland, small surroundings. She has no shoes on, and smokes a cigarette while drinking scotch from a water glass.

Suddenly, a newspaper article catches her attention...

INSERT ARTICLE: Pictured are Bow and Johnny Millane walking out of a radio show together. The text reads: *Rumors swirl about the hot-blooded romance between America's most wanted bachelor and bachelorette!*

Vivian stares at the photograph like she's just been struck. She breathes in and out, then slowly stands up. She walks mechanically to the corner and takes a coat from a hanger, then puts it on. She steps into a pair of slippers lying under the kitchen table, and walks out of her apartment.

INT. LOWER EAST SIDE BAR. DAY.

Johnny Millane plays pool against himself. He is bent over the table, pool stick in hand. He stares at a lone striped ball and shuts one eye. He's being competitive: Who with, we don't know.

A young msn who works for Johnny, TIM (20's) comes in and wavers a little on the threshold before...

TIM
Package for you, Mr. Millane.

Johnny puts the pool stick down, annoyed. He walks over and snatches the package out of Tim's hand. He motions to his empty glass.

JOHNNY
Get me another.

Tim walks out. Johnny opens the package, and takes out a copy of *Amber Sky*. He looks at it, confused. He flips to the front page and stares at...

CLOSE on the author name, which has been violently scratched out and replaced with the name VIVIAN HARROW, in scribbled and frantic handwriting.

A slip of paper falls out of the book. Johnny picks it up and reads...

After a few moments, he crumbles it in his fist, violently. Tim comes in and hands Johnny a drink. Johnny takes it and immediately throws it against the wall. It shatters to pieces. Tim draws back fearfully, and Johnny stares at him.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)
Get me a fucking phone.

INT. PUBLISHING HOUSE. BOW'S OFFICE. DAY.

Bow sits at her desk. She smokes, and looks out the window, pensively. The intercom rings. She hits the button

BETTY (O.C.)
I have a Vivian Harrow on the phone
for you, Ms. Brooks.

BOW
All right.

Bow picks up the phone.

BOW (CONT'D)
Darling. My day is a migraine -- I
have to tell you.

There's no response.

BOW (CONT'D)
Vivian?

VIVIAN (O.C.)
(whispers)
I'm telling everyone. I told him.
I'm telling everyone. I'm not doing
this anymore.

INT. TELEPHONE BOOTH. CHICAGO.

Vivian sits, looking defeated. Her eyes are blank and her
face is tear-streaked.

We intercut between Vivian and Bow.

BOW
Please calm down. Who's him?

VIVIAN
You know who.

Bow looks down at the desk, like she might be sick.

VIVIAN (CONT'D)
You promised me after the last one.
And then after this one. I decided.
I told him. Tomorrow I'll make a
statement to the paper. *Amber Sky*
was the right one for me. It was.
You were wrong, Bow.

Vivian starts to cry.

VIVIAN (CONT'D)
And instead that greasy, asshole
gets to go down in history for it --

BOW

-- I'll fly you back to New York
and we'll talk about this.

VIVIAN

I'm not coming to you.

BOW

Vivian you don't have a phone. I
have no way to reach you --

VIVIAN

-- I don't want you to. You are the
worst thing that has ever happened
to me.

BOW

I'm coming there, all right? Don't
do anything else until I get there.
Please.

We hear a CLICK, and then the DIAL TONE. Bow immediately
hangs up and hits her intercom.

BOW (CONT'D)

Betty, get me Johnny Millane on the
phone. Now. It's urgent.

BETTY (O.C.)

Yes, Ms. Brooks.

BOW

And book me a ticket for the next
flight to Chicago.

BETTY (O.C.)

Yes, Ms. Brooks.

Bow lights a cigarette and watches her phone. It rings, she
picks it up.

BOW

Johnny?

There's no response, but we hear light breathing on the other
side of the line.

BOW (CONT'D)

I'm taking care of this. I promise.
I have this under control.

A long beat.

BOW (CONT'D)

Johnny?

JOHNNY (O.C.)

Sure. You work everything out,
don't you?

The phone goes dead.

Bow hangs up her phone. She stares ahead of her, worried.
Betty's voice comes again on the intercom...

BETTY (O.C.)

Ms. Brooks the soonest flight is
tomorrow at 11 AM. Should I book
it?

Bow takes out her gold lighter. She flips it open and shut a
few times, focusing hard on it.

BOW

Yes. Book it.

INT. TELEPHONE BOOTH. NEW YORK CITY. DAY.

Johnny's employee, Tim, steps into the telephone booth. He
dials a number and waits. After a few moments...

TIM

(into phone)

Yeah -- Ready?

Tim looks down at a piece of paper in his hand and reads...

TIM (CONT'D)

Vivian Harrow. 321, West Walnut
Street...

EXT. VIVIAN'S APARTMENT. LANDING. CHICAGO. NIGHT.

Vivian walks up some steps and goes to her apartment door.
There's a small lamp fixture on the wall next to it. She
reaches up and fingers for something on top of the lamp. A
shadow of someone comes into frame...

WOMAN (O.C.)

Ms. Harrow.

Vivian jumps, startled. We see the shadow is MRS. WALLACE's
(60's), the building's perpetually ill-tempered landlady. She
stands on the other side of the landing and sweeps the
hallway.

VIVIAN

Mrs. Wallace. You scared me.

Vivian smiles at Mrs. Wallace. Mrs. Wallace frowns at her.

MRS. WALLACE

Rent?

VIVIAN

Tomorrow morning. I promise.

Vivian inspects the lamp again, and stands on her tip toes to try and see the top of it.

MRS. WALLACE

This is the third time I've come out and seen you hunting for that key.

Vivian continues to push and prod at the lamp...

VIVIAN

No -- no this time I really know I left it here...

Mrs. Wallace watches her reproachfully, as if this confirms her belief that young people are hopeless. Vivian gives up. Then, she side-eyes Mrs. Wallace and attempts to turn the knob on her front door. The front door opens with no key. Vivian looks at Mrs. Wallace again, sheepishly.

VIVIAN (CONT'D)

I guess I forgot to lock it.

Mrs. Wallace frowns and walks down the steps.

MRS. WALLACE.

You young girls. Always asking for trouble.

Vivian watches her go, then hears the door SLAM to Mrs. Wallace's apartment. Vivian rolls her eyes. She goes into the apartment and shuts the door behind her. We hear the lock CLICK.

After a beat, We TRACK slowly towards Vivian's closed door. The dull sounds of a struggle begin as we hear small CRIES from Vivian being muffled, and the THUMP of a piece of furniture hitting the floor.

INT. SMITTY HOUSE. JESSIE'S BEDROOM. DAY.

CLOSE on the back of Jessie's head as she sits, quietly at her typewriter. After a few moments, we hear the CLICK of a gun cock. The frame slowly widens to REVEAL a revolver aimed at the back of Jessie's head, held by Joe.

Jessie's face is bruised and bloody. Tears stream down her cheeks.

JOE

Now. You gonna write it nice and pretty, like you do them stories. Don't leave out nothin'.

Jessie lets out a small sob.

JOE (CONT'D)

...This what happen when you trust people who know they better than you, girl. Write what this woman do to you. She evil.

Joe nudges the gun against the back of Jessie's head.

JOE (CONT'D)

Get goin'.

EXT. VIVIAN'S APARTMENT BUILDING. CHICAGO. DAY.

Bow looks up at the dilapidated walk-up. A MAN comes out, and she rushes up the steps to catch the door, as he exits.

EXT. VIVIAN'S APARTMENT. LANDING. CONTINUOUS.

Bow runs up the steps to the landing of Vivian's apartment. She goes to the front door and sees that it's half open. She touches the door and slowly walks in.

INT. VIVIAN'S APARTMENT. CONTINUOUS.

The one-room apartment is completely empty. Bow walks inside and looks around. After a few moments, Mrs. Wallace enters out of the bathroom. She looks shaken.

MRS. WALLACE

Can I help you?

BOW

I'm looking for Vivian. Vivian Harrow. She lives her, doesn't she?

Mrs. Wallace eyes Bow, a little sadly.

MRS. WALLACE

They just took her -- this morning.
She...

Mrs. Wallace trails off and takes a handkerchief out of her pocket. Bow watches Mrs. Wallace, a little fearfully.

BOW

She what?

MRS. WALLACE

She hung herself last night. That's
-- how we found her. I came for...

Mrs. Wallace trails off and shakes her head, a little ashamedly.

MRS. WALLACE.

I came for the rent, this morning.
And...

Mrs. Wallace can't finish her sentence. She blows her nose in the handkerchief. Bow stares at Mrs. Wallace, dumbfounded.

After a beat, Bow walks to the kitchen counter, and sweeps some dust off of it with her hand.

MRS. WALLACE

(more to herself)

Awful. It's -- I saw her just last night. Just standing right outside that door. Right outside that door. She was there and then -- she seemed fine. Just fine. She always seemed fine.

Bow goes to the window, slowly, and looks out of it.

BOW

(to no one)

People can surprise you.

EXT. BUSY STREET. CHICAGO. DAY.

Bow walks away from Vivian's apartment. She smokes a cigarette, and has no clear purpose or plan; but rather moves slowly and aimlessly down the street.

Suddenly, we hear the quick BEAT of a small drum. Bow looks ahead of her.

We follow her gaze to see a TEENAGE BOY leaning against the wall of a building, playing a tiny drum with his hands. A hat lies at his feet, with a few sad cents in it.

Bow shifts her gaze a little ways away from the teenage boy. She spots a SMALL BOY (9) standing in front of the window of an appliance store. He stares at a television displayed in the front. The TV is on, and ELVIS PRESLEY performs on a show.

The boy is lost in his own world: He mimics the television screen, and moves his legs like Elvis.

We hear the drum beat THUMP louder, as we are CLOSE on Bow, entranced by the small boy imitating Elvis. Bow's eyes look vanquished, as if she knows what comes next...

"Hound Dog" by Elvis Presley SLAMS on, and plays through the following...

MONTAGE -

- Newspapers being printed cleanly and quickly, in a flurry. We see the headline reads "LOCAL MONTGOMERY GIRL COMES FORWARD WITH PUBLISHING SCANDAL"

- New York Street Corner - A Newsboy lifts a stack of newspapers off a truck and throws it on the sidewalk near a newsstand. The vendor comes out and slices the rope with a knife that holds the stack together.

- Jean Dunn's Apartment - Jean sits over an elegant-looking breakfast. She holds a fine china teacup and reads the paper. Quite abruptly, she spots an article and drops her cup. It SHATTERS shrilly on the floor.

- Earl's Library - Earl reclines in an armchair eating a biscuit and reading the newspaper. He chokes at reading the headline, and begins to cough violently. A MAID IN UNIFORM rushes over and starts slapping his back.

- Lillian Barnes's Beach House - Lillian Barnes sits on her back porch overlooking the bay. She reads a paper while massaging her legs with SPF. Suddenly she shoots up and clutches the newspaper with both hands.

LILLIAN

Shit.

- New YORK CITY STREET - Peter Barnum comes out from a building and is flooded with JOURNALISTS and PAPARAZZI, he puts his hands over his head as he makes his way to a car while pushing through the media frenzy.

JOURNALIST
Ever met Jessie Smitty, Mr.
Barnum?/

JOURNALIST 2
/Did you know the girl was a
mute?

- Mary's Family Home, Idaho - Mary sits at a particularly drab and crowded kitchen table with her MOTHER, FATHER and YOUNGER BROTHER. She notices something on the back of the newspaper her Father is reading. She snatches it out of his hands and stares. She lets out a primal, angry scream. Her brother claps his hands over his ears.

FATHER
Jesus. Mary, what/

MOTHER
/Mary!

Mary shoots up from the table and heads to the door, grabbing a coat on the way with a vengeance...

- CLOSE on newspapers being printed, the cover headline reads: LOCAL GIRL FROM IDAHO REVEALS HER STORY IN THE BOW BROOKS PUBLISHING SCANDAL

- GLIMPSES of more newspaper articles from all the women coming forward...

* "Bow Brooks promised to publish me after I'd written two books for her male stars..."

* "Rollins and Henson owes me money!"

* "The "I WROTE THAT!" Bow Brooks scandal continues as more women come forward..."

* "...A setback for women everywhere who admired Ms. Brooks' modern approach..."

- New York Times Headquarters - A GIRL sits at a desk talking to two eager MALE JOURNALISTS. She yells hysterically...

GIRL
She gave me 100 dollars. She told
me I was special, you see? She's a
liar. She is a LIAR.

- BENNETT Apartment - Helena sits in an armchair, reading the newspaper. Ellis walks in and stares at her, a little reproachfully. He walks to the bedroom and shuts the door.

- STREET - Johnny Millane glides down some steps out of a building. GIRLS rush up to him to ask for his autograph, and JOURNALISTS and PAPARAZZI flood him from his other side. He signs autographs, and smiles contentedly.

JOURNALIST
Anything to say about the Bow
Brooks scandal, Mr. Millane?

JOHNNY
It's a travesty really. Those poor girls. Doesn't surprise me, though/

JOURNALIST (CONT'D)
/Yeah, why's that?

JOHNNY
Excuse my blunt language girls, but Ms. Brooks was no lady. I half-suspected she didn't conduct her business honestly. And she tried to talk me out of *Amber Sky*. Didn't think it was something a man could write. Let's just say: She got what was coming.

Johnny nods at the women with a wink, then heads to his car as journalists continue to shout questions.

END OF MONTAGE

CUT TO:

INT. BOW'S APARTMENT. BEDROOM. DAY.

..."Hound Dog" CUTS out, abruptly. We see the back of Bow, sitting quietly on her bed. She stares ahead of her, frozen.

After a few moments, she gets up and walks out of frame. There is a long beat, and at some point she walks back into frame with a suitcase. She places it, carefully, on the bed.

EXT. BOW'S APARTMENT. FRONT DOOR. DAY.

Helena stands outside the door to Bow's apartment. She hesitates, then knocks. No response. She knocks harder.

HELENA
Bow. Bow it's me.

Helena takes out her key and let's herself in.

INT. BOW'S APARTMENT. FOYER. CONTINUOUS.

Helena stares down the vast hallway and notices the apartment is exactly as it was.

She breathes in, then walks slowly down the hallway. She brushes the wall with her finger, and makes her way to the grand living room.

INT. BOW'S APARTMENT. LIVING ROOM. CONTINUOUS.

Helena enters the living room, and looks around. We follow her gaze to the sweeping multimedia wall. Helena stares up at it, with both reverence and remorse. Something leaning against the wall in the corner catches Helena's eye: A folder. She goes and picks it up.

CLOSE on the writing on the front of the folder: **FOR HELENA.**

Helena opens the folder, and leafs through. CLOSE on letters addressed from Vivian Harrow to Bow Brooks, and visa versa. Helena continues to shuffle through, CLOSE on telegrams between Johnny Millane and Bow...

EXT. STREET CORNER. DAY.

Helena holds the folder Bow gave her. She looks up at a building that reads NEW YORK TIMES on the front. She stares up at it for a moment, then walks to the entrance to go inside...

EXT. STREET. DAY.

Johnny Millane walks out of a bar with two men. He is immediately swarmed by journalists and paparazzi. The journalists scream.

JOURNALIST
Why'd you do it, Mr.
Millane?/

JOURNALIST 2
/Was it just Amber Sky, or
others?

Johnny and his men attempt to fight the mob off as they make their way to a black car on the street, waiting for them. Johnny struggles to barrel into the car, and quickly SLAMS the door behind him. He looks out the window.

FADE OUT.

INT. BENNETT APARTMENT. LIVING ROOM. DAY.

The living room is empty, and we hear a teapot WHISTLE as a news broadcast plays on the television...

NEWSCASTER (O.C.)

...The quiz show Dotto has officially been canceled. This comes amidst a recent number of inquiries into allegations of match-fixing on other quiz shows such as *Twenty-One* and *The \$64,000 Dollar Question*...

A toddler, EMMY BENNETT (1), crawls into frame. Helena walks in and turns off the television. She picks Emmy up, and gives her a kiss. Then she carries her towards the kitchen...

INT. BENNETT APARTMENT. KITCHEN. DAY.

Helena enters with Emmy and puts her in a high chair. She puts applesauce in front of her and gives her a kiss. She sits down at the table, where a typewriter sits. There is a small stack of typed pages next to it. Helena picks one of the pages up and briefly reads it.

She pauses, and lights a cigarette. Then she puts a blank page in the typewriter, and starts to type...

HELENA (V.O.)

Dear Ms. Friedan, I have heard from many corners of this country, stories of the interviews you are conducting with women, for research for a book that I'm told will be called *The Feminine Mystique*. I've heard you want our stories. And I also hear your book may just challenges the notion that we housewives and Mothers are contented with being just that.

INT. VASSAR COLLEGE. CLASSROOM. DAY.

A male PROFESSOR walks through a classroom of girls. He moves down the aisles handing out a book to each girl sitting at their desks...

HELENA (V.O.)

Enclosed is a story about a certain woman I knew. I'm confident you have heard of her. I knew this woman, for a time...

EXT. GREENWICH VILLAGE. STREET. DAY.

Helena walks Emmy down the street in a stroller. She spots a bookstore at the corner, and walks towards it.

HELENA (V.O.)
She was every terrible thing
society called her, and more. But I
cannot help but feel, they had as
much of a part in creating her as
she did in her own self-
destruction.

Helena arrives at the front window of the bookstore.

HELENA (V.O.)
She did con. She did lie. She did
want power. I am certain of all of
that.

INT. VASSAR COLLEGE. CLASSROOM. DAY.

The professor passes a book to one GIRL, who immediately raises her hand.

HELENA (V.O.)
But I am also certain of this: She
was awake to something so many of
us women were asleep to. It is
something so many of us are still
asleep to. And something tells me
it's the very thing you'll bring to
light in your book.

The professor sighs and turns towards the girl who raised her hand...

PROFESSOR
Yes, Miss. Phillips?

EXT. GREENWICH VILLAGE. STREET. DAY.

Helena stands and looks up at the window displays. Rows of a certain book catch her eye. Her eyes widen, and she stands frozen in place...

HELENA (V.O.)
But as each year passes, I think we
wake up more and more to it. And
that is because of women like
you...

INT. VASSAR COLLEGE. CLASSROOM. DAY.

The professor shifts impatiently, and the girl holds up the book...

HELENA (V.O.)
...And women like her.

...CLOSE on the cover: **Fleeting Fireworks By JAMES STRATTON.**

GIRL
Another book by a man?

The girls in the class turn to the professor, curiously.

HELENA (V.O.)
That's why I know, that - at this
point in time - you may find her
story interesting.

INT. GREENWICH VILLAGE BOOKSTORE. DAY.

Helena enters the bookstore with Emmy. She stops at the table in front. Helena picks up the best-seller she saw in the window: ***Fleeting Fireworks, by James Stratton.***

HELENA (V.O.)
Sometimes that's all a great story
is, after all. One that's told at
the correct moment.

Helena stares at the book and grins, with a certain relief. A female STORE CLERK approaches from behind her.

STORE CLERK
I've read it three times already.
The man is a genius.

A long beat. Helena doesn't look up from the book.

HELENA
Yes. I've heard that too.

FADE TO BLACK.

HELENA (V.O.)
Sincerely, Helena Bennett.

THE END