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Little Children



NEW LINE CINEMA

Little Children

Screenplay
by
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Based on the novel
by
Tom Perrotta

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FADE IN:

SIGHTS & SOUNDS OF WINDING MOVEMENTS ON VARIOUS TIMEPIECES.

Tick Tock, the rhythm overwhelming: Ansonia shelf, wall, mantel, long-case, table, and bracket. Each movement open escapement.

THE HARD SCREAMING OF A RAIL ENGINE

HOUSE AFTER HOUSE - TOWN AFTER TOWN - AS SEEN FROM A TRAIN.

The strains of a NEWSCAST.

An ANCHOR WOMAN front and center, super-imposed images behind her.

ANCHOR WOMAN

It has only been two weeks since an East Wyndam man, Ronald James McGorvey returned home from prison after serving a two-year sentence for indecent exposure to a minor. And already a grassroots movement is clamoring to remove him from the community.

News B-Roll: BADLY XEROXED FLYERS on TELEPHONE POLES depicting a plump man with wiry, thinning hair and an anxious expression. In bold script it reads: *Are your children safe?*

ANCHOR WOMAN

The group is called *The Committee of Concerned Parents*.

A CLOSER DETAIL on the BOTTOM EDGE identifies the supplier of the flyer as *The Committee of Concerned Parents*.

ANCHOR WOMAN

Police are advising parents to...

The newscast continues as we WIDEN within a dark livingroom to REVEAL A MAN sitting in a LA-Z-BOY watching the broadcast. His hand grips a glass of soda and ice. He takes a sip.

BLACK. COMPLETE SILENCE. A LEGEND APPEARS: LITTLE CHILDREN

Then -

WOMAN'S VOICE

My husband and I had an actual spiritual experience...

EXT. WALKER STREET PLAYGROUND - DAY

This is THERESA, mid-thirties, a pale woman, but in her time a real beauty.

THERESA

...we were on our vacation in Cabo with eight other couples, and this Mayan woman... a goddess, just a goddess...

CUT TO:

MARY ANN, mid-thirties, toothpick-thin, uptight, and clad in CATALOGUE CASUAL.

MARY ANN

She's due in September. She says she's gonna take three months off, and be back to work before Christmas. Please. Six months from now she'll be right here on this bench with us...

CUT TO:

CHERYL, a woman who has the unfortunate habit of ending her sentences with an upwardy teenagery question mark.

CHERYL

Well, my friend Beth said the way she did it, was to just take him with her every time she went to the bathroom.

MARY ANN

I find that strange.

CHERYL

That's what I said to Beth.

MARY ANN

It's oedipal.

THERESA

What's the rush? Although, I will say when I was potty training Christian? I opened the diaper and it was huge, like a grown man.

Snatches of the women talking begin a slow diminuendo, as they shift to the subject of pre-schools.

On the bench opposite the women is SARAH PIERCE, 30. It is through Sarah's ears that we have been introduced to these ladies. And because of this, our idea of them may be less than kind.

As we PUSH IN on her - A NEW VOICE EMERGES. IT IS MALE, CALM, AND NON-JUDGMENTAL, IN SHORT, GROWN-UP.

VOICE

Smiling politely to mask a familiar feeling of desperation, Sarah reminded herself to think like an anthropologist. She was a researcher studying the behavior of typical suburban women. She was not a typical suburban woman herself.

CHERYL

John and I were having sex the other night, and I drifted off right in the middle of it.

THERESA

(chuckles sympathetically)
It happens.

CHERYL

I guess. But when I woke up and apologized? He said he hadn't even noticed.

MARY ANN

You know what you should do? Set aside a specific block of time for making love. That's what Lewis and I do. Every Tuesday night at nine o'clock.

VOICE

Whether you want to or not, Sarah thought, her eyes straying over to the play area...

CHRISTIAN, Theresa's son, pummels Mary Ann's cowering TROY and - Cheryl's COURTNEY shows Mary Ann's ISABELLE her DORA THE EXPLORER underpants.

VOICE

Even at such a tiny playground as this, Lucy didn't interact much with the other children.

Sarah's three-year-old daughter, LUCY, stands alone near the top of the slide. She appears to be talking to herself.

Sarah takes her in.

VOICE

Sarah didn't really know why they even bothered coming here, except that she'd probably go crazy, trapped in the house all day with this unknowable little person.

CLOSE ON a watch face. The second hand sweeps past twelve...

VOICE

Morning snack time was ten thirty on the dot. A regimen established and maintained by Mary Ann...

MARY ANN's face fills the screen as she turns and soundlessly barks toward the playground.

VOICE

...who believed that rigid adherence to a timetable...

The children all turn toward Mary Ann in SLOW MOTION and start running in her direction.

VOICE

...was not only the key to a healthy marriage, but to effective parenting as well.

CLOSE ON HANDS DIGGING THROUGH A DIAPER BAG.

LUCY (O.C.)
Mommy?

All the kids, and their mothers are gathered around a picnic table, shoveling CHEERIOS and GOLDFISH into their mouths -

Except for Sarah who is crouched down on the grass a few feet away rummaging through a diaper bag. Lucy stands facing her mother, an anxious look on the child's face.

LUCY
Where my snack?

SARAH
(digging through bag)
I'm sure it's in here somewhere.

LUCY
Where it went? Where my snack?

SARAH
I'm sorry, honey. Mommy can't find it.
(to other mothers)
I forgot the rice cakes. I must have left them on the counter.

AT THE PICNIC BENCH the three women, and their offspring watch the drama that is playing out on the grass before them.

CHERYL
Poor thing.

LUCY (O.C.)
I want my snaaaack!

MARY ANN
(pointed)
That's the second time this week.

THERESA
It's hard to keep track of everything.

LUCY (O.C.)
Bad Mommy, bad mommy, bad mommy.

BACK TO SARAH & LUCY

SARAH
(pleading)
Just calm down.

LUCY
No! No calm down!

SARAH
It's not here.

Sarah hands her the bag.

SARAH
Alright, here. See for yourself.

Lucy looks into the bag, and then throws it at her mother's head.
Sarah winds up with the strap dangling around her neck.

MARY ANN
Wait!

This single word radiates with such undeniable adult authority that
everything stops.

MARY ANN
Troy, honey? Give Lucy your Goldfish.

TROY
No!

He turns his body, forming a barrier between Lucy and his snack.

MARY ANN
Troy Jonathan. Give me those Goldfish.

TROY
(whimpering)
But mama, they're mine.

MARY ANN
No backtalk. You can share with your
sister.

With no further word of protest, Troy hands the BAG to Mary Ann.

SARAH
(to Lucy)
Go and sit down. Troy has goldfish for
you.

Lucy runs over to join the others at the picnic bench.

SARAH
(to Mary Ann)
Thank you. You're a lifesaver.

MARY ANN
It's nothing. I just hate to see her
suffer like that.

Sarah gets down on one knee and begins refilling the diaper bag.

MARY ANN
Maybe you should make a check list, tape
it to the door so it's the last thing you
see before leaving the house. That's what
I do.

Sarah looks up, forcing a smile.

SARAH
Thank you. That's a really helpful
suggestion.

INT. BRAD'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - DAY

The blond man from the playground rises in and out of frame. This is BRAD ADAMSON, 30. He is sweating, and breathing heavily, at the end of a long circuit of daily push-ups.

BRAD
... One hundred.

KITCHEN

Brad, wearing PLAY-TEX GLOVES, stands at the sink doing dishes.

HALLWAY

Brad vacuums.

LIVING ROOM - LATER (MAGIC)

Brad and Aaron sit on the floor engrossed in their favorite activity: Train Wreck, a brutally simple game. GORDON and PERCY, two characters from *Thomas the Tank Engine*, move in opposite directions around a circular track, making happy CHUGGING SOUNDS right up to the moment of an inevitable collision.

AARON
(shouting)
Splang!

This is the sound effect that always accompanies the crash.

AARON
Take that, Gordon.

BRAD
Ouch! That hurt, Percy.

Aaron laughs uproariously at Brad's pain.

AARON
Again! Again!

They set-up for another go, and repeat the game.

The game ends abruptly though, as Aaron scrambles to his feet and stares toward the The SOUND of someone coming through the FRONT DOOR.

AARON
Mommy!

He rips the Jester cap off his head and flings it away.

Brad watches the haberdashery make a wide arc in the air. He cannot take his eyes from it. Time seems to momentarily stop.

VOICE
The Jester's cap was something that truly disturbed Brad. All day long The boy ate, played, and napped in it. He would burst into tears if his Father had so much suggested it be removed.

VOICE (CONT)

But the moment his Mother stepped in the house he had no more use for it, as if the entire day up to that point had been a pointless and somewhat useless charade.

Aaron flies into the arms of KATHY, 30, and lovely. She drops to one knee, and holds her arms out wide.

KATHY

I missed you so so so so much.

He buries his face against her chest; she strokes his head.

KATHY

You got some color, didn't you? Did daddy forget the sunscreen again?

Brad stares down at the engine he still holds. Gordon's peevish expression feels like it's mocking him.

INT. BRAD'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - MAGIC

Brad, Kathy & Aaron sit around the table at the tail end of dinner.

BRAD

I think I'm gonna finally break down and get a mobile phone.

KATHY

Really? Why?

BRAD

I have no way of reaching you when I'm out with Aaron.

KATHY

(to Aaron)
You're done, right?

She rises to clear the boy's dish, and carries it over to the sink.

BRAD

...you've got one. Don't you think it's strange I don't?

KATHY

Yeah, I do. You just never wanted one before.

She wets a towel, and heads back over to Aaron.

BRAD

Yeah, I know. There's a family plan. We can talk for free.

Kathy cleans the dinner from Aaron's face, and in the process turns her back on an uncomfortable fiscal conversation.

KATHY

Let's see where we are at the end of the month.

EXT. MAIN STREET - TWILIGHT

Carrying a briefcase, Brad walks alone along an empty street. He passes an SUV swathed in graphics for the *National Guard*: A recruiting vehicle, and handy piece of mobile advertisement. A TRIO OF DRAB GREEN CLAD SOLDIERS stare back at him: defiant and brave.

VOICE

As was her custom, each weeknight after dinner, the boy's mother sent Brad down to the Municipal library to study for the bar exam...

EXT. MUNICIPAL LIBRARY - TWILIGHT

VOICE

...but he never quite made it through the door of the building.

Brad settles in on a bench. About twenty yards away, FOUR SKATEBOARDERS, ages thirteen to sixteen, dressed in knee-length shorts, baggy T-shirts, and fashionably retro sneakers - jump stairs, metal railings, and retaining walls around a square granite building. They are all armed with IPODS & MOBILE PHONES.

VOICE

Brad had been watching the boys for weeks now, sometimes for as long as an hour at a stretch, but he'd never received the slightest acknowledgement from any of them.

Brad stares longingly.

VOICE

He had been the same age as these boys when his mother died.

ONE OF THE BOYS, the one the others call G, ramps off a wall and sails into the air. He possesses an almost mystical connection to his board. G returns to the group, who congratulate him on his last ride.

VOICE

I must have been like this, Brad sometimes thought. I must have been one of them.

MARY ANN (O.C.)

He should just be castrated.

EXT. WALKER STREET PLAYGROUND - DAY

CLOSE ON the same handbill from the news broadcast, with the addition of a stepped-up headline: *Decent people Beware!!! There is a Pervert Among US!*

The MOTHERS all stare down at the FLYER on the picnic table.

MARY ANN

Quick and clean. Just chop it off. Then you wouldn't have to worry about notifying the neighbors.

SARAH

You know what else you should do? Nail his penis above the entrance to the elementary school. You know, as a warning to other perverts.

Cheryl and Theresa chuckle politely at her sarcasm. Mary Ann is not amused, and fixes Sarah with an icy glare.

MARY ANN

You think this is funny?

SARAH

I just can't believe you want to castrate a man for indecent exposure.

THERESA

My brother used to expose himself, when we were teenagers. He'd do it in my bedroom, or in the backseat of the car, even at the dinner table. He always figured out a way to do it so that no one could see what he was up to but me.

MARY ANN

(disgusted)

Didn't you tell anyone?

THERESA

(puzzled)

No. I didn't want to get him in trouble. It didn't stop until he went away to college.

SARAH

He should have been castrated.

MARY ANN

(snapping)

It's not the same thing. He wasn't doing it to strangers.

Cheryl's head swivels as if pulled by a magnet.

CHERYL

Oh My God, look! After all this time. There he is. Two days in a row?

Brad and Aaron have arrived at the playground gate.

SARAH

Maybe he just needed a vacation.

MARY ANN

(suspicious)

From what?

THERESA

From being the Prom King.

CHERYL
It's a dirty job.
(chuckling)
But someone's got to do it.

As Brad and Aaron pass the women on their way over to the far swing-set, the trio go completely silent - pretending not to notice.

Sarah watches them - amused.

SARAH
What's he do for a living?

The others look nervous, and ignore the question.

MARY ANN
(uncomfortable)
We've never actually spoken to him.

SARAH
You're kidding right?

THERESA
We don't even know his name.

SARAH
Really? I thought you said he was a regular here.

THERESA
It was awkward.

CHERYL
He made us nervous. You had to think about what you were going to wear in the morning? Put on makeup? It was exhausting?

Lucy leaves her position at the top of the SLIDE and wanders over to the SWING-SET right next to where Brad pushes Aaron. She calls to her mother.

LUCY
Mommy! Push me!

SARAH
Alright. I'll be right there.

Sarah smiles at the women, wondering how they'll react to her impending proximity to "The Prom King." As she rises to go, Theresa calls out.

THERESA (O.C.)
Wait!

Sarah stops.

SARAH
What?

Theresa holds up her WALLET, smirking like a schoolgirl.

THERESA

Five bucks if you get his phone number.

SWING SET - MOMENTS LATER

Aaron observes Lucy with a certain amount of skepticism as she swings in near-unison beside him. He turns to Sarah, his expression unexpectedly serious.

AARON

How old is she?

SARAH

(coaxing)

Lucy, honey. Tell the nice boy how old you are.

AARON

I'm three!

He jabs the corresponding fingers into the air.

AARON

My grandmother lives in New Jersey! She doesn't have a swim pool.

SARAH

(to the boy)

Do you like to swim?

AARON

I don't like sharks. They eat you up.

BRAD

Don't listen to him. We go to the town pool almost every day.

Brad smiles at Sarah.

BRAD

I'm Brad, by the way.

She smiles back.

SARAH

Sarah.

BRAD

You guys come here a lot?

SARAH

Only for the last few weeks. We used to go to the one over on Harris, with the big wood things, and the slide across.

BRAD

Yeah, we actually rent a place right around the corner from there on Ashforth. But that ice cream truck never leaves - what a nightmare.

SARAH
Tell me about it.

BRAD
...you know, you're the first person here
who's ever talked to me.

SARAH
You make them nervous.

BRAD
Oh, right. I guess they don't see too
many fathers here during the weekdays.

They keep pushing the children.

BRAD
You don't have to be polite. Go ahead and ask.

SARAH
What?

BRAD
What the person who wears the pants in
the family does for a living.

SARAH
Alright, what does your wife do?

BRAD
She makes documentaries.

SARAH
Oh, wow. Like, *Michael Moore*?

BRAD
Like, PBS.

SARAH
Oh... well, I think it's admirable that
you're here. There's no reason men can't
be primary caregivers.

BRAD
I finished law school two years ago. But
I can't seem to pass the bar exam. Failed
it twice now.

SARAH
Maybe you just don't want to be a lawyer.

Brad looks momentarily startled by this suggestion.

BRAD
I'll take the test one more time. If I
mess up now, I'm just going to have to
find something else to do with my life.

They go back to their swinging.

VOICE

Sarah was shocked by how Brad delivered this confession, with no apparent sense of being in the least bit embarrassed by his failure. Most men weren't like this. Her husband, Richard, certainly wasn't. She wondered if Brad was always this forthcoming. If anything, he seemed a little lonely, all too ready to open his heart at the slightest sign of interest, like a lot of young mothers she knew.

Sarah breaks the silence.

SARAH

I couldn't help noticing your stroller. Do you have another child?

BRAD

Just Aaron. We got that at a yard sale. The extra seat comes in handy for the bear.

SARAH

Lucy refuses to be put into a stroller, or a car seat. We have to walk everywhere. It takes us half an hour to go three blocks, unless I carry her.

AARON

Daddy finish.

BRAD

You sure? We just got here.

ARRON

Daaady, I finish right now.

BRAD

Alright. One, two, three.

He stops the swing, leaves Aaron, and attends to the bear. He pulls it out of the swing, and straps it into the stroller. Then comes back for Aaron.

Sarah watches in silence as he cups Aaron by the armpits and attempts to lift him out of the swing.

The boy's foot gets caught in one of the apertures, and she hurries over to free it before Brad has a chance to ask for assistance.

BRAD

Thanks.

SARAH

No problem.

Sarah watches as Brad buckles Aaron into the stroller.

VOICE

It was then, while watching Brad kneel down at his son's feet, that Sarah found herself gripped by an unexpected pang of sadness.

She looks toward the opposite end of the playground - The women leaning forward on their bench, completely riveted.

VOICE

Don't go, she thought. Don't leave me here with the others.

Brad stands and turns toward her, as if he'd read her mind.

BRAD

(curious smile)
Well, it was nice talking to you.

SARAH

Yeah, you too.

He starts to leave.

SARAH

(suddenly)
Hey.

Brad stops and looks at her, confused.

BRAD

Yes?

SARAH

(conspiratorial)
Come here.

BRAD

What?

SARAH

Just...come here.

He does as he's told.

SARAH

You see those women over there?

He glances in the direction of the PICNIC TABLE. All of the women suddenly look in the other direction

SARAH

Yeah. Don't look. Don't look. You know what they call you?

He takes a small step toward Sarah, intrigued.

BRAD

What?

SARAH
The Prom King.

BRAD
Ouch. That's awful.

SARAH
They mean it as a compliment. You're a big character in their fantasy lives.

BRAD
Wow.

SARAH
One of them bet me five dollars I couldn't get your phone number.

BRAD
(smiling)
Five bucks, huh?

SARAH
Yep.

Brad shoots another look at the women.

BRAD
(teasing)
Could we split it fifty-fifty?

SARAH
(right back at him)
It could be arranged.

A moment.

SARAH
Doesn't have to be your real number.

BRAD
Well, in that case, sure.

Brad pats himself down, looking for a pen. Nothing.

BRAD
You got a pen?

Sarah doesn't. She glances toward the table where her diaper bag is. She doesn't want to go there. She looks back to him.

SARAH
Oh, shit. No, no I don't.

BRAD
Well, maybe next time.

He turns to go, but Sarah reaches out and grabs his arm.

SARAH
No, listen wait...just wait.

He's waiting. She's thinking. Then -

SARAH
You know what would really be funny?

BRAD
What?

SARAH
...if you gave me a hug.

BRAD
(smiles)
You think?

SARAH
...yeah.

Brad grins. He's game.

BRAD
Well, alright come here.

Brad opens his arms, and Sarah steps into them. They hug.

MARY ANN (O.C.)
Oh, My God!

Mary Ann's reaction makes them both start to giggle.

SARAH
(whispers)
You wanna really freak them out?

Brad looks at her a moment. Then -

BRAD
...Yeah.

He leans down and gives her a tentative kiss, half-serious, as if they're acting in a play.

A COLLECTIVE GASP travels from the ladies at the picnic table to our couple. Followed by a panicky chorus call from the mothers, summoning their children from the play structure.

Brad & Sarah part... But they somehow can't take their eyes off each other.

SARAH
(glancing at the exodus)
I think that worked.

Both of them are blushing.

BRAD
(per panicky mothers)
...yeah, I think so.

BRAD
Well, it was nice meeting you.

SARAH
...yep, mmm hmmm.

He sets off without another word. Sarah watches his broad back recede as he pushes the stroller past the other mothers, and out of the park gates.

She turns to Lucy, sitting motionless in the swing, watching the same sight as her mother, her feet kicking dreamily in the air.

SARAH
Let's go.

She gathers Lucy from the swing, and carries her like a piece of oversized luggage back to the bench to retrieve her things. Her face burning with pride and with shame.

Cheryl and Theresa huddle with their children, staring at Sarah in complete bewilderment. Flanked by Troy and Isabelle, Mary Ann looks furious.

MARY ANN
I'm sure your daughter found that very educational.

Sarah reaches down for the diaper bag, and turns to go.

SARAH
His name's Brad. He's a lawyer. And he's really very nice.

Sarah picks up Lucy and heads home.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Sarah sits under a tree trying her level best to read Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. After a moment, she puts it down, and gazes off, distracted.

VOICE
For the past few days, Sarah hadn't been able to concentrate on anything but the Prom King...and the curious thing that had happened between them on the playground.

She glances the other direction, where, some distance away -

LUCY squats on the grass, her back to Sarah, playing alone, and talking to herself.

Sarah looks away from the child, and away into the expanse.

VOICE
She didn't feel shame or guilt, only a sense of profound disorientation, as if she had been kidnapped by aliens, and then released, unharmed, a few hours later.

Mother and child under the shade of the tree. In the distance, an amphitheater of sorts, a white wing which resembles a flying saucer.

EXT. MUNICIPAL LIBRARY -- NIGHT

As the skateboarder does a series of spectacular jumps. The SOUND of wheels on concrete is deafening. A slow diminuendo into -

VOICE

As he had so often in recent days...

BRAD sits on his usual bench under the beech tree. But instead of watching the skateboarders, he closes his eyes. We PUSH IN ON his dreamy face.

VOICE

...Brad mentally re-enacted the kiss by the swingset. He still couldn't believe it had really happened, and with all those women and children watching.

WE SEE AARON in his stroller at the playground that day looking up toward Brad and Sarah.

VOICE

Aaron had been particularly curious about what he'd seen.

IN BRAD'S LIVING ROOM he situates a BLOW-UP PUNCHING CLOWN. Aaron stands opposite his father.

AARON

Why you hugging that lady?

BRAD

Well, see now, that's what I'm trying to show you here with Bozo.

Brad kneels down in front of the clown.

BRAD

Sometimes it's a game grown-ups play when their friends.

He spreads his arms in an exaggerated way.

BRAD

See?

Brad mechanically embraces the clown.

BRAD

Hi, I'm your friend.

The boy's face wears a dubious look.

VOICE

Aaron was skeptical.

VOICE

They returned to the playground the following morning...

BRAD and AARON arrive to an empty PLAYGROUND.

VOICE

...but no one was there.

BRAD AND AARON at the TOWN POOL. Brad scans the other FACES.

VOICE

Sarah hadn't shown up at the town pool, either, though Brad remembered telling her that he and Aaron could be found there most afternoons. It didn't seem to matter that Sarah wasn't his type...
...wasn't even that pretty, at least not compared to Kathy...

IDEALIZED VISIONS of KATHY, in the way the voice describes.

VOICE

...who had long legs, and lustrous hair, and perfect breasts.

BRAD continues his daydreaming.

VOICE

Sarah was short, and boyish - and had eyebrows that were thicker than Brad thought necessary.

All that is described above is seen.

VOICE

But even so, she'd walked into his arms that day, as if she was fulfilling a secret wish he hadn't remembered making.

MAN (O.C.)

Hey, pervert!

Brad's eyes open, startled awake from his fantasy.

MAN (O.C.)

Yeah you, pervert!

Brad cringes, as he looks toward -

A VAN parked by the curb directly across from him. A man gestures toward Brad from the vehicle's dark cab.

MAN

Like little boys, do you?

The teasing note in the Man's voice is clearer now, and Brad drops his guard and squints into the van.

Meet LARRY HEDGES, 30. He wears a T-SHIRT with the word *GUARDIANS* across the chest, and GRAY ATHLETIC SHORTS. He leans across the passenger seat into the street-light, and grins at Brad.

BRAD

Larry?

LARRY
Yeah, it's fucking Larry.

BRAD
Jesus, don't even joke about that.

LARRY
What are you doing right now? You busy?

BRAD
Uh, actually, I'm supposed to be studying.

Brad lifts his briefcase.

BRAD
I'm taking the bar exam next month.

LARRY
Didn't you do that last year?

BRAD
Yeah. See how well I did?

Larry laughs. He pops the lock on the passenger side.

LARRY
Get in. I got a better idea.

Brad hesitates.

LARRY
C'mon, c'mon, c'mon.

Brad does as he is told.

INT/EXT. LARRY'S VAN - NIGHT

As Brad climbs in, Larry clears off the passenger seat. He tosses a FOOTBALL and a pair of BINOCULARS into the back, and lifts up a fat stack of BLUE PAPER.

LARRY
You mind?

He drops the stack onto Brad's lap.

LARRY
I'm trying to keep them nice.

Brad glances at the top sheet. It's the same flyer we've seen throughout the story. His eyes stray to the bottom of the page: PAID FOR BY THE COMMITTEE OF CONCERNED PARENTS.

BRAD
You part of the committee?

LARRY
I am the committee.

BRAD
Wow, that's quite a commitment.

LARRY
(proud)
Yeah.

BRAD
Aren't you full time on the force
already?

Larry puts the van into gear, and pulls into the street.

LARRY
(uncomfortable)
...I'm taking a little time off.

INT. LARRY'S VAN, MOVING -- SAME

BRAD
(somewhat impressed)
How'd you find out about this creep?

LARRY
There's a web site. The state's required
to disclose the whereabouts of convicted
sex offenders. Don't you check it?

BRAD
(covering)
Not on a regular basis.

Larry's expression darkens.

LARRY
They should just castrate the bastard and
be done with it.

Brad nods as noncommittally as he can.

A moment. In the silence, a familiar tune plays softly on the van's
stereo system.

BRAD
You a Raffi fan?

LARRY
(startled)
What?

BRAD
That's Raffi, right? *Big, Beautiful
Planet?*

LARRY
Ah, shit.

Larry punches the eject.

LARRY

After a while I don't even know what I'm listening to anymore.

Larry stares at Brad, a lingering appraisal.

Brad tries to ignore how uncomfortable this feels.

LARRY

You look good. Been going to the gym?

BRAD

Push-ups, crunches. A little running.

LARRY

(to himself)

The guys are gonna love this.

BRAD

(a bit anxious)

What guys?

EXT. EAST WYNDAM BOMBERS' FIELD - NIGHT

Brad and Larry head across a running track, passing A SURLY-LOOKING GUY IN A WHEELCHAIR. This is BULLHORN BOB, a fixture at the stadium.

Brad pauses at the edge of the field, a taut blue-green skin of ARTIFICIAL TURF glowing with Caribbean purity beneath dazzling lights. Crisp WHITE LINES and NUMBERS run from one end zone to the other. Between the forty yard lines, a half-dozen men toss FOOTBALLS to each other, and do warm-ups.

BRAD

Wow. This is something.

LARRY

It's pretty. But it doesn't have a lot of give. Like playing on cement.

They approach midfield. Some players strut up to greet them - TOMMY CORRENTI, a drill-sergeant of a man, with an off-kilter nose, and A COMICALLY NASAL VOICE, DEWAYNE ROGERS, a squat, bald African-American man, BART WILLIAMS, a no-neck white guy with thinning hair wearing a KNEE BRACE, RICHIE MURPHY, a powerful man with red hair, and PETE OLAPFSON, a scrawny man whose uniform is intentionally one size too small.

Larry steps away from Brad and button-holes DeWayne, corralling him away from the others.

LARRY

Hey, DeWayne, I really need to talk to you about the committee. It'd mean a lot to have your support on this thing.

DEWAYNE

I told you already Larry. None of us are gonna get involved with that shit - we're here to play ball. If that's your thing, fine. But leave us out of it man. We can't -

LARRY
(cutting him off, pissed)
I get it, I get it.

Larry makes a piercing whistle. The guys all turn toward him.

LARRY
Bring it in. C'mon, hustle it up.

The men all gather around Larry.

LARRY
Guys. I want you all to meet our new
quarterback.

Looking slightly out of place in his cargo shorts and polo shirt,
Brad stares at Larry in bewilderment.

BRAD
Quarterback?

CORRENTI
He better not be a pussy.

LARRY
He played in college.

BRAD
I'm a little behind the curve. Who are
you guys?

LARRY
We're *The Guardians*.

DEWAYNE
We're cops.

PETE
Welcome to the Tri-County Touch Football
Night League.

BART
Our old quarterback's wife made him quit.
Too many concussions.

Brad's glance strays to Bullhorn Bob, who stares back from his
wheelchair.

BRAD
I thought you said it was touch.

The Guardians laugh knowingly.

CORRENTI
It's tackle. We just call it touch for
insurance purposes.

LARRY
Why don't we work on some simple pass
patterns?

Brad hesitates.

VOICE

Brad waited for his good sense to kick in. There were lots of excuses available to him.

He takes in his surroundings, and the faces of the other men.

VOICE

But it felt so good to be standing here beneath the bright lights. And he was filled with a feeling similar to the one he'd had right before kissing Sarah, like his world had cracked open to reveal a thrilling new possibility.

His face fills with certainty.

BRAD

Alright. Just let me warm up a little.

CUT TO: IMAGE OF BRAD TAKING THE SNAP AT PRACTICE.

He drops back to pass, and zips a bullet to DeWayne, totally oblivious as Correnti enters from his blind side and smashes him to the turf with a VICIOUS CHEAP SHOT. Brad bounces up, angry and confused, to confront his attacker.

BRAD

What the fuck? That was a late hit.

CORRENTI

This isn't Pop Warner, Ace.

BULLHORN BOB TAUNTS BRAD FROM THE SIDELINES.

BULLHORN BOB

(amplified)

You fucking faggot. You call yourself a quarterback?

EXT. MCGORVEY HOUSE - NIGHT

Larry's van pulls up in front of a well-tended Cape.

BRAD

This isn't me. You turned too soon. I'm on Ashforth.

Larry doesn't answer. He just stares out the window at the house.

BRAD

What're we doing here?

Larry presses on his horn three times, Brad startles to attention.

BRAD

Why'd you do that?

LARRY
I want this scumbag to know I'm keeping
an eye on him.

They sit for a long moment. It suddenly dawns on Brad whose house
this is.

BRAD
Oh, God...I don't think we wanna be here,
Larry.

LARRY
It's not a question of want.

Larry reaches into the back seat for his BINOCULARS and trains them
on the house.

LARRY
Joanie thinks I'm obsessed with this
creep. She thinks if I had a job I
wouldn't be driving past his house five,
six times a day. But you know what? I
kinda feel like this is my job.

Larry puts down the binoculars and turns to Brad.

LARRY
There's a roll of duct-tape in the glove
compartment. Could you grab it for me?

INT. BRAD'S HOUSE, HALLWAY - NIGHT

Brad closes the front door removes his shoes, and makes his way on
soft feet up the stairway. One of the stairs creaks. He cringes.

KATHY (O.C.)
Honey?

He's busted.

BRAD
(like a teenager)
....hi.

BRAD & KATHY'S BEDROOM

KATHY
Where were you?

Brad stands in the doorway, and musters what bravado he can.

BRAD
I, uh, joined this group, the *Committee of
Concerned Parents*. We're distributing
flyers about that creep on Woodward Court.

She stares at him: his torn collar, scraped knees, scratched cheek, and
sweat-stained armpits.

KATHY
(concerned)
Were you attacked?

BRAD
These guys play a little touch football
after.

KATHY
This late?

BRAD
...it's a night league.

Kathy looks confused.

KATHY
So it's going to be a regular thing?

BRAD
No...just once a week, after I'm finished
at the library. That okay?

KATHY
Who are the guys?

BRAD
(gaining momentum)
You remember Larry Hedges from the
sprinkler park? The guy with the twins?
It's his organization.

KATHY
I thought you didn't like him.

BRAD
He's okay. But this committee makes a lot
of sense. It's pretty scary having a guy
like that living right by the playground.

Kathy gazes lovingly at Aaron.

KATHY
I know. I hate to even think about it.

She looks back up at her husband.

KATHY
Well, you better take a shower.

INT. BRAD'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Brad's in the shower, frantically soaping himself.

VOICE
Brad showered quickly, sensing a rare
opportunity to have sex with his wife.

Brad brushes his teeth at twice the normal speed.

VOICE

*This is just what I need, he thought.
Something to take my mind off that kiss.*

INT. BRAD'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

He emerges from the bathroom, wearing only boxers and his most romantic smile. He crosses to the bed and places his hands under Aaron, preparing to transfer him to his own room.

KATHY

Please don't.

BRAD

(trying to stay calm)
Come on, Kathy. How many times do we have to argue about this? He needs to start sleeping by himself.

KATHY

I know. But he just looks so comfy.

BRAD

He'll be just as comfy in his own bed.

KATHY

I know...I just miss him so much.

BRAD

I'm getting a little tired of waking up with his foot in my face.

KATHY

But it's a perfect foot. Look at him.
Just look at him.

Brad ponders his sleeping child.

BRAD

He is a handsome devil.

KATHY

He's perfect.

Brad sighs and climbs into bed. Before turning off the light, Kathy leans over Aaron to give him a kiss.

KATHY

Good night.

BRAD

Good night.

EXT. SARAH'S HOUSE - DAY

A formidable colonial on a hilly double lot.

VOICE

Number two Hillcrest was an impressive piece of real estate.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, VARIOUS EMPTY ROOMS - SAME

Space and windows. A beautiful floor plan, somewhat grand. Looking around you will notice a kind of dead beauty to the place. All dressed up and no place to go.

VOICE

Even so, Sarah was ambivalent about the house that she occupied. She wasn't involved with it's purchase or design. The place was a hand-me-down of sorts from Richard's mother, and the furnishings were left-overs from his first marriage.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, UPSTAIRS ATTIC UTILITY ROOM - SAME

A small dark narrow space with a single window at the end. An old MATTRESS & BOX SPRINGS rest against the wall.

VOICE

By the time Sarah arrived here, Richard wasn't all that interested in redecorating. And so she decided to leave it as it was...

A YOUNGER and VERY PREGNANT SARAH sorts through a gaggle of moving boxes adorned with her name. She lifts out stack after stack of BOOKS.

INT. SARAH'S DOWNSTAIRS STUDY - DAY

Shelves full of books. From highbrow to lowbrow: Faulkner, Yates, Dubus, Diet, Feminine Literature, Romantic Poets, Stein, Tuscany, Travel, White, Whitman, Wolff, and *What's Your Birth sign?* - seasons in a reader's life.

VOICE

...with the exception of a single room that she staked out for her own, and gradually began to populate it with the remnants of her former self.

Sarah, wearing reading glasses, sits at a writing table situated directly under a window, transcribing passages from *Working With Feminist Criticism* by Mary Eagleton. She makes notes into a MT. TOM 6X4 NOTEBOOK from BOB SLATE.

Lucy, carrying her own book, wanders over and stares up at her mother. Sarah is oblivious.

LUCY

Read me story.

SARAH

In a minute.

Lucy pulls at Sarah's notebook.

LUCY

I sit on your lap.

Sarah pulls back.

SARAH
I said in a minute. Now go on, finish
your program. Go.

The child retreats. Sarah returns to her studies.

VOICE
From the moment Lucy was born, Sarah had
refused to hire someone for child care.
She wasn't exactly sure why she had taken
this stance. The truth was she spent most
afternoons marking time...

Sarah glances impatiently at her watch.

She spots a toy left behind by Lucy - She rises from the writing
table, bends down to pick up the item, moves to the doorway, and
places it on a side-table outside the room. She steps back into her
study, and closes the door.

VOICE
...waiting desperately for the moment when
her husband returned from work and she
could finally have a moment to herself.
But even this was not something she could
rely on.

INT. SARAH'S FRONT ENTRY WAY - MAGIC

Sarah opens the door to reveal JEAN, a vigorous 60 year-old woman,
pumping her arms and legs on the front stoop.

JEAN
Ready to roll?

SARAH
Could you wait a few minutes? Richard's
barricaded in the upstairs office
finishing up some stuff for work.

JEAN
No problem. I have a little surprise for
someone anyway.

Jean steps into the house.

SARAH
She's a terror tonight. I couldn't get
her to nap again.

JEAN
Poor thing.

SARAH
Poor Mommy is more like it.

Sarah closes the front door.

INT. SARAH'S FRONT ENTRY WAY - CONTINUOUS

Jean cups her hands around her mouth.

JEAN

Hellooo? Is there a cute little girl in the house?

LUCY runs in from the other room, jumps up and throws herself into the older woman's arms as if they're lovers meeting in an airport.

Jean rotates her JUMBO FANNY PACK and tugs slowly on the zipper.

JEAN

Oh my goodness. Look what I found.

With the flair of a magician, Jean produces a TINY STUFFED DOG from the pouch and hands it to an awestruck Lucy.

LUCY

A Beanie!

SARAH

Jean, you didn't have to do that.

JEAN

This dog needed a little girl to take care of him. And I knew a little girl who needed a dog.

LUCY

Thank you, Jean.

INT. SARAH'S STUDY - LATER (MAGIC)

Sarah sits at her writing table, her impatience growing by the second. LUCY & JEAN play in the next room at the kitchen table. Sarah extends her leg, and gently closes the door. She turns and We MOVE IN on her annoyed face -

VOICE

Sarah was beginning to get angry. Her evening fitness walk was the one thing she looked forward to all day, and Richard knew this. She didn't care how busy he was, it was a simple matter of equity.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, UPSTAIRS OFFICE - SAME

A SILVER-FRAMED PHOTOGRAPH of Sarah and Lucy rests on a desk.

A distinguished looking MAN in his mid-forties sits behind the desk, focusing on the COMPUTER SCREEN in front of him.

VOICE

If there was one thing life had taught Richard, it was that it was ridiculous to be at war with your own desires.

RICHARD opens his desk drawer and removes a small rectangular UPS shipping box.

VOICE

He could easily imagine what people would say if they could see him now...

With trembling hands, he breaks the seal on the box, and withdraws a MANILA ENVELOPE decorated with STICKERS, RED HEARTS and STARS.

VOICE

...exactly the same thing they'd say if someone had told them that Ray...

Richard glances at A BOX that appears over HIS RIGHT SHOULDER. In it - RAY, a man in his 30s, dressed in sweats, under-hands a ball to his son who swings for a hit.

VOICE

...from next door was a transvestite...

Alone now, in Ray's imagined bedroom, he gazes into a MIRROR applying LIP-STICK.

VOICE

...or that Ted from work had anonymous gay sex at highway rest stops.

Richard glances at A NEW BOX that appears over HIS LEFT SHOULDER. In it - another man, TED, stands at a bank of URINALS, he gives a side-long glance to a SKINNY MAN using the next one over.

As Richard looks back down at the envelope in his hands the BOXES disappear. Richard takes out a LETTER OPENER and slices through the packing tape on the envelope.

VOICE

But we want what we want, Richard thought, and there's not much we can do about it.

Before removing the contents of the envelope, Richard takes the photograph of his wife and daughter and turns it face down on the desk.

INT. RICHARD'S PLACE OF BUSINESS - DAY - ELEVEN MONTHS AGO

VOICE

He had stumbled on the site eleven months ago, while doing research for a consulting firm.

A SQUARE ROOM with dozens of MANNED CUBICLES, through the maze on the other side of the place is -

A 600 square-foot office with a window, where -

RICHARD sits at his desk, his attention focused on his FLAT-SCREEN.

VOICE

His office door was wide open.

Richard glances up from the monitor furtively.

He takes a breath, and his eyes go back to the monitor.

His HAND holding the MOUSE hovers with anticipation.

VOICE

But he clicked on the link anyway.

ON the MONITOR is the HOMEPAGE of SLUTTY KAY, a BLONDE WOMAN, in her thirties. There's something graphically homegrown about the design. It looks authentic, and not put together by a consortium in Glendale. In large friendly quotes it says "actively pursuing a swinging lifestyle, and my God-given sexuality."

His hand moves the mouse. The cursor clicks on *Read More About Me*. A long Q & A appears next to a new image of Kay bending over a table. She wears a SHORT TARTAN SKIRT with NO PANTIES.

VOICE

He was deeply engrossed in his discovery when Ted knocked on his door...

TED, Richard's imagined REST STOP CRUISER stands in the doorway.

VOICE

...taking orders for a lunch run.

Richard looks up.

VOICE

Casually, but with great haste,

Richard's hand invisibly moves his mouse.

VOICE

Richard banished Slutty Kay from his screen...

Kay's homepage collapses, the monitor now shows a spread sheet of another kind.

VOICE

...told Ted that he'd like a Chicken Caesar...

Ted nods, and departs.

VOICE

...and re-entered the flow of an ordinary day...

Richard refers to some papers, and inputs data into his machine.

VOICE

...it wasn't until several months later that Richard gave the slightest thought to the site he had stumbled upon...

INT. RICHARD'S PLACE OF BUSINESS - NIGHT - SEVERAL MONTHS LATER

The overhead lights are off for the night. The only illumination in the place emanating from an office on the other side of the room, where -

RICHARD sits at his desk, shuffling papers, pretending to be busy. A middle-aged SECRETARY pokes her head into the room.

SECRETARY

Do you need me for anything else?

RICHARD

No, why don't you head home? I'm gonna catch up on some e-mail.

SECRETARY

Well, don't stay too late. Your dinner'll get cold.

Richard smiles and waves goodbye. He lets a couple of seconds pass, then gets up and locks his office door.

Richard returns to his desk, his attention now refocused on his flat-screen.

VOICE

Lately, Slutty Kay had become a problem.

The cursor highlights a BOOKMARK in his preferences entitled - *Slutty Kay positions & implements*.

VOICE

He thought about her far too often, and spent hours studying the thousands of photographs available to him.

Richard's CURSOR flies across the SCREEN and launches his BROWSER.

Kay appears in various positions, outfits, and as the bookmark title indicated, utilizing all kinds of implements.

VOICE

Some of Kay's practices struck him as bizarre, even off-putting. She had a thing about kitchen utensils, spatulas, barbecue forks, and dressing up like a little girl and playing with balloons. But who was Richard to judge?

He pulls a box of KLEENEX from the BOTTOM DRAWER, and licks his lips. His eyes dreamy, and hungry. He pulls down his trousers and gets down to business.

VOICE

Though, as close as Richard sometimes felt to Slutty Kay - as much as he believed that he *knew* her...

Richard keeps yanking, a desperate impatience on his face.

VOICE

...he could never get past the uncomfortable fact that she existed for him solely as a digital image.

He looks down at his lap. Things don't seem to be going well.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, UPSTAIRS OFFICE - BACK TO PRESENT - MAGIC

CLOSE ON: Richard's HANDS as they remove the contents of the HEART-COVERED MANILA ENVELOPE: three POLAROIDs of SLUTTY KAY wearing a POLKA DOT THONG in various poses. Each of them bear the greeting, scrawled in black sharpie, *Hi Richard!*

VOICE

The panties were an attempt to solve this problem.

His HANDS reach back in and pull out the actual THONG in the photos. He raises it a couple of inches from his face, tentatively giving it his nasal appraisal.

VOICE

Maybe a sniff or two would hurry things along, so he could get back downstairs to his real life...

He reaches down with his other hand, and jerks off.

VOICE

... where his wife and daughter were waiting for him, their impatience increasing by the minute.

SARAH stands at the bottom of the stairway staring up. Her patience at an end. She hesitates just a moment before making the long climb. Unaware that she is about to play her own version of Aaron's *Train Wreck*.

She arrives outside the office door, and gives a tentative knock. No answer. She reaches down and turns the knob. The door swings open to -

RICHARD jerking. He now wears the polka dot thong like a gas mask: over his mouth and nose. Inhaling its scent with gusto.

SARAH peers inside. Her expression wavering between revulsion and amazement. Richard is oblivious.

SARAH

Ahem.

Richard whips his head around, the thong still pressed over the lower half of his face. He scrambles to hide the evidence.

SARAH

Is this going to take much longer? I'd really like to go for my walk.

RICHARD

(pulling the thong off his face)
You could have knocked.

SARAH

I did.
(backing out of the room)
We need to talk.

SARAH'S STREET - MAGIC

Sarah and Jean at the end of their power walk.

JEAN
You're awfully quiet tonight. Everything
okay?

Sarah snaps out of it.

SARAH
What? Yeah.

JEAN
You'll have to walk without me tomorrow
night. I have a book group meeting.

SARAH
Okay.

Silence. Then.

JEAN
You're sure everything's alright?

SARAH
Yeah, sorry, I guess I'm just a little
tired... so, what are you reading?

JEAN
Crime and Punishment.

SARAH
Wow. That's pretty highbrow for a book
group.

They turn the final corner onto their own street.

JEAN
We have some very stimulating
discussions. You should come next month.
We're doing *Madame Bovary*. You could be
my little sister.

SARAH
Little sister?

JEAN
We're trying to get younger women
involved. We call them our little
sisters.

SARAH
I don't know. I read *Madame Bovary* in
grad school. It's a pretty misogynist
text.

Sarah slows, squinting at a shadowy figure on her front steps.

JEAN

Well, that's an interesting perspective.
You should come.

SARAH

Excuse me, Jean. Someone's at my door.
I'll call you.

Sarah hurries off, leaving Jean behind in the street.

THERESA from the playground sits on Sarah's front steps, smoking a cigarette. She smiles stiffly as Sarah approaches.

Sarah stops at the base of the steps.

SARAH

(a bit flustered)

Well, this is a surprise. I haven't seen
you since...

THERESA

I hope you don't mind. Your husband said
you'd be back any minute.

SARAH

Not at all.

She smiles at Theresa.

SARAH

It's good to see you. Can I make you a
cup of tea or something?

THERESA

I can only stay a minute. I just wanted
to warn you. You know that guy? The
pervert? He's been riding his bike near
the playground, checking out the kids.

SARAH

Oh, God. Do the police know?

THERESA

Nothing they can do. He's not breaking
any laws. I guess they're waiting for him
to kill someone. I just thought you
should know.

SARAH

Thanks. That's nice of you.
(then, plaintively)
You sure you don't want some tea?

THERESA

I'm sorry.

Theresa stands up.

THERESA

I don't think it's a good idea.

SARAH
(after a beat)
I didn't mean to kiss him. I don't even
know how it happened.

She pats Sarah gently on the arm.

THERESA
I better go. Mike's gonna worry.

She leaves Sarah standing there alone. Sarah turns and stares at the front door, stealing herself for what she knows is waiting for her on the other side. She lets out a groan, reaches for the doorknob and heads into -

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, FOYER - SAME

The front entry-way, where Richard stands wearing a hangdog expression. He stares at her pathetically, like a child waiting to be forgiven.

RICHARD
...you want to talk?

Sarah brushes past him and heads upstairs.

SARAH
I'm tired.

Richard looks both disappointed and relieved.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - MORNING

Sarah peeks into Lucy's room. The child is still asleep. THE SOUND OF A CAR STARTING brings Sarah over to the window at the top of the stairs. She looks down at -

THE DRIVEWAY

To see Richard's car pulling away, on his way to work.

UPSTAIRS OFFICE

Sarah closes the door to Richard's office, moves over to the window, pulls up the shade, and scans the room. She moves over to the desk, and begins to investigate - looking at paperwork, rifling drawers, and examining computer disks. She glances down at a small WASTEBASKET topped with WADDED UP TISSUES. She grimaces, disgusted.

INT. BRAD'S HOUSE, DINING ROOM - SAME

Brad sits at the dining room table going through credit card bills from five different companies. A YELLOW POST IT is attached to the outside of one of the envelopes. In a neat feminine cursive is scrawled "Brad! Please look this over." His hands obey, and pull out an itemized report, that has multiple items highlighted *Sports Illustrated*, *Men's Fitness*, and *Mothering Magazine*. In the margins the same cursive asks "Do you really need these?" The phone rings, and Brad answers it.

BRAD

Hello? No, he's still sleeping...yeah,
I'm going through them now...No, I guess
I don't need them...alright have a good -

She's already hung up. Brad hangs up, closes his eyes, and steels himself. He looks utterly defeated.

SARAH'S STUDY - MOMENTS LATER

AN UNTOUCHED MUG OF TEA on the writing table in front of her, Sarah sits there with a thousand mile stare on her face. Finally, she picks up her notebook, and book of essays on *Feminist Criticism*, and tries to get interested. It's no use. She sets them down abruptly, and moves over to -

A SIDE-TABLE stacked with periodicals. She rifles through and discards: *Ad Busters*, *Mother Jones*, *The Utne Reader*, *The Paris Review*, before finding the object of her desire - the latest catalogue from J-CREW.

She moves to an old HIGH-BACK CHAIR with her prize, and starts browsing the pages. She takes a huge gulp of tea, her left hand absently reaches for the television remote, and turns on the set. An infomercial for Nature-Bra preaches "the joys of perky breasts." Sarah focuses on a J-CREW Model clad in a RED ONE PIECE BATHING SUIT, as the seductive spokeswoman for Nature-Bra points out the possible benefits of using this product "post breast feeding." Sarah turns her attention from the catalogue to the screen, just in time to "learn how to order."

EXT. SARAH'S HOUSE - MORNING

A FED-EX TRUCK pulls away after making it's appointed rounds.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, KITCHEN TABLE - DAY

A KITCHEN KNIFE rips through a CARDBOARD BOX past a shipping label from J-CREW.

EXT. TOWN POOL - DAY

Wearing an unbuttoned MEN'S SHIRT over her BATHING SUIT, Sarah peers through a CHAIN-LINK FENCE, Lucy at her side.

An enormous rectangle of water framed by a CONCRETE WALKWAY, set at the bottom of a grassy hill.

A SLY SMILE OF RECOGNITION passes across Sarah's face.

In the middle-distance BRAD AND AARON SIT SHADED BY A TREE.

Sarah flashes her ID at a BORED-LOOKING TEENAGER reading a Stephen King novel. The kid waves them in. Sarah takes Lucy straight to

THE WADING POOL. She attaches a pair of INFLATABLE WATER-WINGS to Lucy's arms, and sits her on the edge of the pool. She sneaks a glance up the hill toward Brad & Aaron's tree, hoping to catch a certain someone's eye. She does.

BRAD, shirtless, sits on a beach towel in a patch of shade. He looks in her direction. Then looks away quickly.

SARAH sets LUCY into the WADING POOL, and makes a show of playing with her daughter, throwing the occasional glance up the hill to make sure he's still there -

He is, pretending to read a magazine.. Aaron in his JESTER'S CAP, stages collisions with TOY TRUCKS. But the boy grows bored and toddles over to his father, pulling on Brad's arm.

AARON

Daddy. I go in pool now.

Brad's not sure he's ready for that.

BRAD

...in a minute.

AARON

Daddy, now!

IN THE WADING POOL, Sarah watches Lucy, but she's clearly distracted. She steals another look.

LUCY

Mommy? I havta to go pee pee.

SARAH

Just go in the pool.

Lucy shakes her head no.

SARAH

Really? Okay, c'mon.

She grabs Lucy, and they head to the LADIES'S LOCKER ROOM.

UNDER THE TREE, Brad sees his chance to avoid an encounter, and satisfy Aaron at the same time. He stands, picks up his son, and heads down the hill toward the pool.

IN THE WADING POOL, Brad & Aaron roughhouse and play. Brad is more engaged with his child, but like Sarah, he can't help wishing he had eyes in the back of his head. He keeps scanning the area, on the lookout for her. His eyes fixate on the LADIES'S LOCKER ROOM DOOR. Women and children come and go, but no Sarah or Lucy.

Finally Brad begins to relax, allowing himself to become completely absorbed in play.

LATER

Brad and Aaron squint into the sun as they trudge up the hill toward their tree. It's not until they have almost reached the shady place that they discover -

SARAH & LUCY spread out on towels right next to their own.

SARAH

(mock surprise)

Oh my God, it's you.

Brad stares at her, somewhat surprised, and worried at the same time.

BRAD

Wow. Hey.

Sarah removes a BOTTLE OF SUNSCREEN from a bag. She squeezes a gob of it into her hand and begins slathering it all over Lucy, who submits like a good soldier. She turns to Brad.

SARAH

I hope you don't mind. Lucy has sensitive skin. She's better off in the shade.

BRAD

(polite)

Not at all. It's nice to see you again.

He sets Aaron down on their blanket, and begins drying the boy off.

After finishing with Lucy, Sarah removes the MEN'S SHIRT; revealing her RED ONE PIECE. She begins to rub lotion on her arms.

SARAH

(casually)

I'm sorry, could you get my back?

Brad turns around.

BRAD

...um, okay, sure.

He squirts lotion into his hand and begins RUBBING IT INTO HER BACK in a POLITE and BUSINESSLIKE MANNER. Sarah closes her eyes and leans back into the massage. After a few seconds, she smiles over her shoulder.

SARAH

Thanks alot. Lucy? Say hi to the little boy from the playground.

LUCY

Hi.

ARRON

Hi.

SARAH

Remember him?

VOICE

The pool became a ritual.

EXT. TOWN POOL - ANOTHER DAY

Sarah & Lucy arrive at the entrance. Sarah waves to Brad who has already arrived, and sits with Aaron under the tree. He waves back.

VOICE

Day after day, they sat together in the shade, getting to know each other...

Same spot, DIFFERENT DAY. Now Sarah's doing Brad's back.

VOICE
distributing snacks...

SARAH DISBURSES GOLDFISH CRACKERS TO EACH CHILD

VOICE
...and brokering occasional disputes.

AARON AND LUCY ENGAGE IN A FIERCE STRUGGLE FOR POSSESSION OF ONE OF SARAH'S FLIP FLOPS

VOICE
Having little choice in the matter, Aaron and Lucy formed a fragile friendship.

LUCY LISTENS TO BIG BEAR'S HEART WITH A TOY STETHOSCOPE. AARON ADMINISTERS AN INJECTION WITH A TOY SYRINGE

VOICE
Sometimes Brad and Sarah traded offspring.

IN THE POOL, BRAD TEACHES LUCY HOW TO DOG-PADDLE

ON THE BLANKET, SARAH HOLDS A SLEEPY AARON IN HER ARMS, HIS HEAD ON HER SHOULDER, THE TENDRILS OF HIS HEADGEAR DROOPING OVER HER BACK AND CHEST. HER FACE BREAKS INTO A GRIN AS...

...MARY ANN, wearing SUNGLASSES AND A FLOPPY HAT, spots her from the walkway. Mary Ann puts on a painfully fake smile and waves to Sarah.

Sarah waves back triumphantly.

VOICE
It was the most fun Sarah had had in years.

Fresh from the pool, Brad leans back and soaks up the sun, his body glistening with luminous droplets of water.

Sarah devours him with her eyes.

VOICE
But there was always that longing to touch, to be touched by Brad. And as badly as she wanted this, she wanted just as badly to hold on to the innocent public life they'd made for themselves out in the open, with the other parents and children.

DAMP AND TIRED, BRAD AND SARAH GATHER UP THEIR THINGS.

VOICE
So she accepted the trade...

With a bittersweet expression, Brad extends his hand to Sarah.

VOICE
...the melancholy handshake at four o'clock...

They shake and part ways.

VOICE
...in exchange for this little patch of
grass, some sunscreen and companionship.

Late light rakes an empty pool, and its now deserted surroundings.

VOICE
One more happy day at the pool.

INT. BRAD'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - MORNING

Aaron sits in his highchair shovelling oatmeal into his mouth. Kathy marks up some copy with a red pen as she finishes with her breakfast. Brad watches the two of them, waiting to be noticed or acknowledged in some way, shape, or form. Finally, Kathy speaks.

KATHY
No pasta for dinner, okay? We eat way too
much pasta around here.

BRAD
I thought you liked pasta.

KATHY
I do. That's the problem. Pretty soon
I'll be able to sell advertising space on
my ass... I better hurry. I've got a nine
o'clock at TAPS.

She rises, gathers up paperwork and the breakfast plates.

BRAD
What is that?

KATHY
Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors.

BRAD
I thought you were already editing.

She carries the dishes over to the sink.

KATHY
So did I. But this family's story just
got me... the father was killed in a
mortar attack on his base. Left behind a
a little boy, and a baby girl.

She starts rinsing plates.

KATHY
I spoke with his wife on the phone
yesterday... said she didn't know what
she was gonna do next Christmas.

BRAD
Oh jeez, I bet.

She shakes her head.

KATHY
(reflective)
No, it wasn't like that. It was more wondering if she should keep a tradition with her son that she began with the boy's father... said her husband had had a knack for requesting odd Christmas gifts. A scuba suit one year, rappelling gear the next...said he wasn't afraid to try anything.

Over Brad's face -- THE NOON BELLS TOLL FROM ST. PAUL'S TOWER.

EXT. TOWN POOL -- DAY

It's hot, humid, and horrible. The children sit together on a towel occupied with their play. Sarah lies on her back BRAD'S T-SHIRT over her face.

Brad allows himself the pleasure of pouring his eyes over Sarah's body completely unobserved. Then --

SARAH
Hot enough for you?

For a moment, Brad thinks he's been caught, but then he realizes it's an innocent enough question.

BRAD
...yeah, it's so humid. I got Football practice tonight. Be like playing in a sauna.

SARAH
Watch out for that Italian guy. What's his name again?

BRAD
Correnti?

Brad smiles, pleased that she's taken an interest, and has even gone so far as to remember something he only mentioned in passing.

SARAH
Yeah. Remember what happened to your knee last week?

She lays the back of her hand surreptitiously on his chest.

SARAH
You should be careful, Brad.

He stares at her hand just as she moves it away.

BRAD
I'll be careful.

SARAH
Promise?

BRAD
(smiles)
Yeah. Yeah, I promise

A moment passes between them.

Brad breaks it by talking about - what else? The weather.

BRAD
(looks at the sky)
Weatherman said scattered showers. I
don't see any scattered showers.

A man in LOUD SWIM TRUNKS, with an ORANGE DIVING MASK on his forehead and a SCUBA FLIPPER in each hand, stands by the lifeguard chair. He scans his surroundings. He is -

The face from the flyers, RONNIE MCGORVEY.

McGorvey drops his towel and begins putting on his flippers.

He lowers his mask, slides feet-first into the pool, and begins exploring - participating in water play, and taking in the general scenery.

SARAH props her self up and reaches for her book. It is at precisely this moment that she sees him.

SARAH
Oh my God.

BRAD
What?

SARAH
It's him.

BRAD
(squinting)
Oh, Jesus.

At first, no one else seems to notice his presence in the water. BEACH BALLS float through the air. Kids keep CANNONBALLING and BELLY-FLOPPING off the diving board.

But then, not far from Brad and Sarah on the hill, an EXTREMELY AGITATED WOMAN stands up, and shouts.

AGITATED WOMAN
Jimmy! Jimmy Mancino! Out of the pool
this instant!

A SKINNY TEN-YEAR-OLD starts paddling uncertainly toward the edge of the pool.

AGITATED WOMAN
Jimmy, now!

ANOTHER ADULT VOICE rings out, followed by a PARENTAL CHORUS.

ADULT VOICE

Randall, Juliette! You too!

PARENTAL CHORUS

Grace! Pablo! Ruby! Tyler! Max! Rebecca!
Lilly! Zoe!

The SHALLOW END empties first, ANXIOUS MOTHERS wading out with FRIGHTENED TODDLERS in their arms. Before long, the OLDER KIDS are climbing out, too, standing in sullen confusion on the walkway.

All over the hillside, adults are whipping out MOBILE PHONES, dialing 911.

UNDERWATER - Ronnie McGorvey plunges toward the bottom of the deep end with the heavy grace of a seal. He rises slowly -

Breaking the SURFACE to find himself alone in the pool.

Ronnie's EYES dart around inside his MASK, absorbing the situation.

He ducks BACK UNDER, cutting through the water, moving his arms in wide lazy circles. He looks peaceful, unhurried.

He FLOATS on his BACK for a while, his pale belly rising out of the water like a deserted island.

MINUTES LATER

TWO COPS enter the pool area and approach McGorvey. Aaron and Lucy have taken notice, too.

LUCY

Why the police is here?

Sarah checks with Brad, uncertain.

SARAH

There's a man in the pool that didn't buy a ticket to get in, and the police are asking him to leave.

The cops speak to McGorvey. The exchange seems polite, almost friendly. After a moment, one cop reaches down and gives him a hand getting out of the water.

AARON

What's those? On the feet?

BRAD

Flippers. They help you swim better.

McGorvey grabs his towel, and begins trudging toward the exit, his flippers slapping wetly on the ground. He stops to pull them off, then strips off the mask, turning toward the hillside. He spreads his arms wide, addressing the public in a loud voice.

MCGORVEY

I was only trying to cool off!

EXT. TOWN POOL -- LATER

It seems like the whole town has crowded into the pool, the DECENT PEOPLE OF East Wyndam reclaiming it for their own.

The COLLECTIVE FUNK has broken. Adults get into giggly splashing fights. Everybody tries to keep a beach ball aloft.

THE SUN BEGINS TO DISAPPEAR BEHIND A CLOUD.

The DISTANT RUMBLE of THUNDER. The sky goes DARK. It begins to SHOWER.

It seems like good fun until the LIGHTNING FLASH. A LIFEGUARD speaks through a LOUDSPEAKER.

LIFEGUARD (O.C.)
Clear the pool, please.

The rain intensifies as Sarah and Brad gather their things.

A SAVAGE CRACK OF THUNDER SOUNDS. Lucy whimpers and latches onto Sarah's leg. Sarah lifts her up.

SARAH
We better get going.

BRAD
You're gonna carry her?

SARAH
It'll be faster.

BRAD
That's crazy. Put her in the stroller.

Sarah glances at the stroller. BIG BEAR stares back.

SARAH
She won't do the stroller.

BRAD
Hey, Lucy? Want a ride?

Lucy unlatches from Sarah's leg and runs right into Brad's arms, and he sets her up in the thing.

Sarah is both impressed, and envious.

SARAH
But it's out of your way.

BRAD
We don't mind, do we, Aaron?

A FLASH OF LIGHTNING

SARAH
Okay. Then run, quick.

EXT. SARAH'S STREET - LATER

Brad pushes the double stroller at a fast clip. Sarah, carrying Big Bear in her arms, leads him toward her house.

EXT. SARAH'S HOUSE (SUN ROOM) - SAME

Sarah kneels down to unbuckle Lucy. Both kids SLEEP LIKE ANGELS, Lucy's head lolling on Aaron's shoulder.

Sarah hesitates, uncertain whether to invite Brad in. This AWKWARD MOMENT is interrupted by a CLOSE LIGHTNING FLASH.

SARAH
You better come in. I can't let you walk home in this.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM, STAIRS - SAME

The two enter with the kids in tow. Sarah heads straight in, Brad a few paces behind, takes in the place: Expensive, tasteful, and a couple of notches up the food chain from what he is used to. Sarah heads upstairs carrying Lucy.

SARAH
We can lie them down in Lucy's room.

BRAD
Okay.

He follows her up the stairway.

INT. LUCY'S BEDROOM - DAY

The children, dry now, sleep on Lucy's bed. AARON clad in one of LUCY'S FLOWER COVERED NIGHTGOWNS. Brad and Sarah, still soaked, watch them in nervous silence.

SARAH
(whispers)
This is amazing. She never naps.

BRAD
(whispers)
Aaron'll be out for the next two hours. I'll have to get him out of that nightgown before he wakes up, or he'll never forgive me.

Sarah looks at him and smiles.

UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Brad waits on the stairs as Sarah secures the BABY GATE.

BOTTOM OF STAIRS/LIVINGROOM - SAME

Sarah & Brad head down the final stairs, and into the living room. The safety of the public arena removed, makes keeping each other's company clumsy.

BRAD
Nice place.

SARAH
You think so?

BRAD
Yeah.

SARAH
Richard does alright for himself.

The comment is not meant to intimidate, but it does.

BRAD
What's he do again?

SARAH
Lies.

They stand there staring at each other. Puddles forming at their feet.

SARAH
Um. Please, have a seat. Make yourself at home.

Brad laughs, and pulls at his soaked clothing.

BRAD
I better not. I'll ruin your furniture.

SARAH
(nervous)
Right. I'll just put the children's things in the dryer, and get us some towels.

She heads out of the room quickly, leaving Brad alone.

He looks off the main entry way to a succession of small rooms, an open door leads to the first room situated behind a back staircase, clearly what was at one time quarters for a maid. He steps inside. Nothing much to see. On the other side of the room is another door, slightly ajar. He wanders in that direction, and opens the door, finding -

SARAH'S STUDY

He steps into the room, and takes a quick inventory of the place, her place.

He moves toward her old high-back, and pushes a finger into one of the many holes in its torn fabric.

One of SARAH'S SCARVES is draped across the top of the chair. He places his palm underneath the garment - the material cascading over his hand.

At the base of a VASE full of FRESH FLOWERS lie Sarah's READING GLASSES.

The tips of his fingers glide across her writing table, past *Theresa Raquin*, to a book of *English Love Sonnets*. The book opens easily, marked by an, as yet, not fully dry rose, pressed against an oft read piece: Sonnet 147 by William Shakespeare. Specific lines appear to have been recently underlined:

My Love is as a fever, The uncertain sickly appetite to please,
Angry that his prescriptions are not kept, Past cure am I.

He turns the page to find a tucked-in SNAP-SHOT of BRAD, AARON, and LUCY at the town pool.

The book snaps shut.

He puts it back down on the table, like it may burn his hand.

His face a mess of conflicting emotions.

LAUNDRY ROOM - SAME

Sarah empties dry bedding and towels from a FRONT LOADER into an empty laundry basket. She grabs the children's wet things, throws them into the dryer and starts the cycle. She moves the basket to a folding table on the other side of the small basement room, pulls out two towels and begins folding them into thirds.

Slowly, A SHADOW begins to grow across her back --

Brad's shoulder, and head appear.

She continues folding. Oblivious to everything but the sound of the dryer.

He raises his hand, about to place it on her arm, when suddenly she turns, coming face-to-face with him. Startled, she gasps.

She looks genuinely frightened. What is he doing down here?

The two of them just stare at each other -- both appear unable to move. Finally, she lifts up the two towels she has folded, and offers one to him, there is something oddly formal about her gesture.

He takes the towel from her hand and drops it to the floor. She somewhat timidly drops the other one.

He pulls her into him, and begins to kiss her, gentle, then forceful.

Her eyes dart all over the place. Then instinct kick in, and she surrenders to the moment. The kiss becomes completely electrifying, the kind of kiss that would make perfect sense outside a dorm room at two in the morning. Their hands find each other for the first time, all bets are off -- the play is real.

LAUNDRY ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

SQUAUK -- The dryer announces that it has reached the end of its cycle. However, the silence is short-lived. Grateful moans accompany the view of Sarah perched on the edge of a STONE SOAP SINK, gripping Brad's backside as he thrusts himself into her.

Brad picks up the pace. They've reached a level of near-frenzy, when Brad SUDDENLY STOPS.

BRAD
Do you feel guilty about this?

Sarah thinks this over.

SARAH
No. I don't.

BRAD
I do. I feel really bad.

Sarah grimaces, steeling herself for disappointment. But the deliberate motion of Brad's body betray his words, putting her mind at ease, and her body on high alert. She begins to vocalize uncontrollably. The laundry room door is slightly open, and she looks toward the -

HALLWAY

Nobody's there, but us.

EXT. SARAH'S HOUSE, FRONT DOOR - SAME

The rain pours down on the DOUBLE STROLLER - standing sentinel over the front door.

INT. MCGORVEY HOUSE, UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

MOVE down an UNKNOWN corridor. Stop at the end, outside a closed door. MAY MCGORVEY, 70, small, frail, and fierce, leans in and listens. She reaches up and gently knocks. Nothing. She knocks again.

MAY
(gently quiet)
...son?

No answer.

MAY
...son?

She turns to go.

MAY
(almost to herself)
...dream well.

She pads back down the hallway.

INT. MCGORVEY HOUSE, MAY'S ROOM - NIGHT

May lies in bed reading, *THE FIVE PEOPLE YOU MEET IN HEAVEN*. She closes the book, and places it on her night table. She stares up at the ceiling towards the heavens. A change begins to come over her. She grabs the *EAST WYNDAM HERALD* lying next to her, and quickly sorts through the sections until she finds what she's after.

VOICE

May knew it wasn't natural for a grown man to be living with his mother, no hobbies, no diversions - It was like he was still in prison.

She folds the Herald so that it's manageable, grabs a RED FLAIR PEN from her bedside, and begins circling things in the newspaper.

VOICE

What he needed was a girlfriend, and May intended to help him find one.

TICK, TICK

INT. MCGORVEY HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - MORNING

TICK, TICK, TICK. ANSONIA clocks line every available table, side table, and shelf, in the room. Shelf space is at a premium though. Most are adorned with HUMMEL PORCELAIN FIGURINES: little boys in charming Bavarian garb depicting the gentle innocence of childhood: *Afternoon Nap, Under an Umbrella, Star Gazer, Newsboy, Playing with a Train, and A Flower for Mother*. Someone is a serious collector. That someone is -

MAY, who sits in a swivel BARCALOUNGER with a folded NEWSPAPER on her lap, a PAD and PENCIL in her hands. She stares across the room to where Ronnie sits sipping coffee from a mug, and reading *Soldier of Fortune Magazine*.

MAY

There are two whole columns of lonely women here, and only a handful of men. The odds are on our side. Why wouldn't one of these women want to meet a nice person like you?

RONNIE

I'm not a nice person.

MAY

You did a bad thing. But that doesn't mean you're a bad person.

RONNIE

I have a psychosexual disorder.

MAY

You're better now. They wouldn't have let you out if you weren't.

RONNIE

They let me out because they had to.

May looks nervous.

MAY

Well, maybe if you found a girlfriend closer to your own age, you wouldn't have the bad urges so often.

RONNIE
I don't want a girlfriend my own age
Mommy. I wish I did.

MAY
What're you gonna do when I'm gone? Who's
gonna take care of you?

Ronnie looks alarmed. He gets up and sits at his mother's feet.

RONNIE
Whatsa matter Mommy? You sick or
something?

MAY
I'm an old woman. I'm not gonna live
forever. Who's gonna cook for you? Who's
gonna wash the dishes?

RONNIE
I can wash the dishes.

MAY
You never washed a dish in your life.

RONNIE
I could if I had to. I'm not a retard.

She reaches out and takes his hand.

MAY
No, you're not... you're a miracle
Ronnie... we're all miracles. You know
why? Because as humans, every day we go
about our business, and all that time we
know - we all know, that the things we
love, the people we love - at any time it
can all be taken away... we live knowing
that, and we keep going anyway. Animals
don't do that.

A moment.

MAY
Now, I'm not asking you to get married
Ronnie. I'm just saying put an ad in the
paper. *See what happens.*

Ronnie sighs; she's worn him down.

RONNIE
Fine. I'll do it if it'll make you happy.
But just one date, alright?

May beams. She scribbles something on the pad.

MAY
You have a nice smile. Why don't we start
with that?

Ronnie seems pleased, but also hungry for more praise.

RONNIE

What else?

May seems to be at a momentary loss, then -

MAY

You always eat what I put in front of you. You never complain.

She writes down these things but before she can continue -

RONNIE

What else.

MAY

(confident)

You're trying to get back in shape. You exercise.

Ronnie beams. May steals a look at her son, then continues the list.

INT. MCGORVEY HOUSE, ENTRY WAY - LATER - MORNING

Ronnie walks his YELLOW SCHWINN ten-speed past the kitchen, and heads to the front door.

MAY (O.C.)

Wait right there, young man.

May comes into the hallway from the kitchen.

MAY

If you're going out for some exercise, you can post this now.

She hands him an envelope. He glances down the address -

The East Wyndam Register - ATTN: PERSONALS DEPT.

RONNIE

Hmmm.

He opens the front door.

EXT. MCGORVEY HOUSE - MORNING

Ronnie stands framed in the open threshold. The FRONT DOOR behind him is plastered with LARRY'S FLYERS affixed with DUCT-TAPE. He stares out toward something as yet unseen, and smiles. He continues to stand there a moment, and then walks his bike off the porch. He gets on and rides down the -

DRIVEWAY, across which is spray-painted a singular word - E V I L

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, ATTIC UTILITY ROOM - DAY

Brad stands nude, facing out the narrow window. A moment later, a nude Sarah rises up behind him, puts her arms around him, and reaches around to his crotch.

SARAH
(breathing hard)
C'mon. Let's do it again.

BRAD
Okay. Just gimme a second. It's hotter
than hell up here. What's wrong with the
laundry room?

SARAH
No mattress. C'mon lie down.

They fall onto a mattress on the floor, surrounded by long forgotten
attic storage. Boxes, and things once belonging to Richard's mother.

SARAH
You're nervous, aren't you?

BRAD
Whatta you mean?

SARAH
The game. Don't worry. You're gonna be
great tonight.

BRAD
I don't know, I haven't played in ten
years. It used to be such a big part of
my life. Then when I stopped, I just
stopped. I didn't even miss it. But now
that I'm doing it again... I feel... I
don't know I -

SARAH
(cutting him off)
You feel alive.

There is something about the certainty with which Sarah says this
that runs through Brad like a lightning bolt. He looks into her eyes,
and his face suddenly relaxes.

BRAD
... yeah.

SARAH
That's good. That's how you're supposed
to feel.

Brad smiles. They both roll onto their backs, and contemplate this
fact.

BRAD
You're right. It's just been a while.

SARAH
(to herself)
Yeah.

They continue to lie there together. Comfortable in silence.

EXT. MCGORVEY HOUSE, DRIVEWAY - DAY

CLOROX BLEACH is splashed onto the graffitied concrete. MAY, on all fours, scrubs and scrubs.

EXT. EAST WYNDAM BOMBERS' MIDFIELD - NIGHT

The two teams stand facing each other, BULLHORN BOB, in his ELECTRIC WHEELCHAIR, between them.

BULLHORN BOB
(grunts)
Shake.

No one moves.

BULLHORN BOB
(impatient)
Shake!

The Auditors stand stone-faced and utterly silent during the ritual, like heavyweight boxers trying to intimidate a challenger during weigh-in.

The Guardians refuse to be intimidated. Finally, Brad starts to extend his hand.

CORRENTI gives him a dirty look. Horrified by his lack of resolve.

But the Auditor directly across from BRAD, a MASSIVE BEARDED MAN, begins to smile, like someone who smells weakness. He extends his hand to Brad.

As if this is some kind of collective signal, the rest of the Auditors do likewise.

BULLHORN BOB looks up from his wheelchair at a ceilinged canopy of clasped hands, like the top of a rainforest.

BULLHORN BOB
(raising his bullhorn)
Toss!

The men step back, and lower their arms.

BULLHORN BOB
(to the Auditors)
Call it!

Somebody grunts, "heads." Bob flips a QUARTER high into the air.

It comes down heads.

The Auditor across from Brad points toward the Guardians.

BRAD looks terrified.

CLOSE ON: THE FACE OF A STOPWATCH.

BOB'S RIGHT THUMB hovers over the BUTTON.

ON THE FIELD

THE GUARDIANS are set to receive.

The Auditors' KICKER raises his hand, and brings it down in a chopping motion.

BOB'S FACE fills with the sadistic expectation of someone watching the beginning of a bloody cock-fight - BOB'S THUMB sends the TIMEPIECE'S SWEEPING HAND into MOTION. TICK, TICK, TICK...

INT. BRAD'S HOUSE, BRAD & KATHY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Kathy glances at the clock: 10:07 PM. She looks over at Aaron's cherubic face, asleep on the bed next to her. She settles back onto a pillow pile, grabs the phone, and hits speed-dial.

KATHY

Hi, Mom, I wake you?

SPLIT SCREEN - Meet MARJORIE, Kathy's Park Avenue mother, elegant, well read, and divorced. She's up late trying to finish reading Galway Kinnell's *Black Light*. She reluctantly puts the book down.

MARJORIE

No, dear. Is everything okay?

KATHY

I'm fine.

MARJORIE

You don't sound fine.

KATHY

There's nothing wrong. I just wanted to say hi.

MARJORIE

Well hi. So how's my little guy?

KATHY

Great he's sleeping right next to me. What a cutie.

MARJORIE

(like clock work)
So where's Brad?

KATHY

Out.

MARJORIE

I'm surprised the library stays open this late.

No she's not.

KATHY

He's not at the library. He's playing football with his buddies.

MARJORIE
Football? Honey. Nobody plays football
this time of night.

KATHY
These idiots do. He comes home with
scrapes and bruises all over his body.

MARJORIE
Do you remember when your father took up
golf?

KATHY
He's not like dad.

MARJORIE
Honey, they're all the same.

KATHY
Well, he's not.

MARJORIE
You work so hard. I could keep an eye on
the boys while you're at work, make sure
they're staying out of trouble. Do you
want me to come up for a visit?

KATHY
(firm)
Mom, don't come up here.

MARJORIE
I just worry about you guys. What are you
going to do if he fails the test again?

KATHY
He's not going to fail.

MARJORIE
That's what you said last time...how're
you doing for money?

KATHY
Fine.

MARJORIE
I'm gonna send you a little extra this
month.

KATHY
(losing patience)
Mom.

MARJORIE
(cheerfully)
It's no burden. I'm happy to help.

EXT. EAST WYNDAM BOMBERS' STADIUM, GANGBOX, - LATER

BULLHORN BOB inserts a KEY into a PADLOCK, and removes the cover of a
large ELECTRICAL MAIN. He reaches up and kills the stadium lights.

INT. "TALK OF THE TOWN" TAVERN - NIGHT

With the exception of two players, the entire *Guardian* team sits front and center at a table in the middle of the place. They turn in unison as Brad & Larry make an entrance through the front door of the establishment. Larry looks like shit.

VOICE

Although the Guardians lost by 26 points, Brad felt oddly exhilarated in the bar after the game.

Brad & Larry move across the bar room toward the *Guardians*.

VOICE

...he could feel a new respect in the way the cops looked at him...

PETE OLAFSSON stands, and grabs a couple of chairs for the guys. Brad & Larry sit. DEWAYNE slaps Brad on the back.

DEWAYNE

Big Brad! Whatcha drinking, buddy?

VOICE

...he wasn't on probation anymore; he was a member of the team.

TOMMY CORRENTI stands and moves behind Brad. He massages Brad's trapezoids, like an old-time boxing trainer.

CORRENTI

Oh man. You are gonna be one sore puppy tomorrow morning.

DEWAYNE

Advil. Advil and ice. Ice and Advil.

OLAFSSON

Don't forget the Ben-Gay.

WILLIAMS

And if all else fails, you can always consult our team physician.

WILLIAMS grabs a shot glass from a cork-lined tray in the center of the table, and offers it to Brad.

WILLIAMS

Dr. Daniels. His friends call him Jack.

Williams pours Brad a shot of Bourbon. Brad raises his glass.

BRAD

To the good Doctor.

He throws back the shot.

BRAD

I feel better already.

The men cheer approvingly, all except Larry, who stares sullenly into his beer.

INT/EXT. LARRY'S VAN - MOVING - LATER

Brad stares over at an uncharacteristically silent Larry, who holds an ice-bag to his eye while driving. Finally -

LARRY

I had no business being out on that field tonight. I let you down. I let the whole team down. I'm slow and I'm fat and I let those guys piss all over me.

BRAD

Oh, come on. That guy was off-sides the whole night.

A moment.

LARRY

Joanie left me. Took the kids and went to her mother's.

BRAD

Jesus, Larry. That's a tough break.

LARRY

I deserved it. Me and my big mouth. I called her a fucking whore. Right in front of the kids.

BRAD

Why did you do that?

LARRY

I don't know. I was in a bad mood or something? Now I'm fucked.

Brad watches his friend - worried. He tries changing the subject.

BRAD

Hey, you hear about the pervert? He went swimming at the Town Pool.

LARRY

What?

Larry whips his head in Brad's direction, turning his attention completely away from the road.

LARRY

Who told you that?

BRAD

(bragging)
Nobody. I saw him myself. During the heat wave.

LARRY
(erupts)
The Town Pool? That place is crawling
with kids. Sometimes my boys go there.

BRAD
(nervous now)
It was just that one time. He won't be
back.
(reassuring)
The cops came.

LARRY
(paranoid)
Any of the guys from the team?

BRAD
...no.

Larry starts shaking his head and muttering to himself, as if
something were very, very wrong.

Brad looks like he wishes he hadn't brought it up.

Larry STEPS ON THE GAS.

BRAD
Larry, slow down. SLOW DOWN LARRY!

Larry SPINS THE WHEEL HARD to the LEFT, pulling a cop-show U-turn. The
van does an about-face and SPEEDS STRAIGHT TOWARD US.

A HYPERACTIVE DOORBELL RINGS OVER -

INT/EXT. MCGORVEY HOUSE, FRONT DOOR - LATER

May answers the door after the fifth ring. She doesn't seem surprised
to find two men - one of them with a bruised and puffy eye, the other
with a bag of ice pressed against his cheek - standing on her front
stoop at two thirty in the morning.

MAY
(sharp and alert)
What now?

LARRY
Good evening, Mrs. McGorvey. We were
wondering if Ronnie was home.

MAY
(snapping)
You leave him alone.

LARRY
We just want a moment of his time, just a
little chat.

May turns toward Brad as if he were the one doing the talking. He
looks embarrassed and uncomfortable.

MAY
(firm)
This is my house. I pay the mortgage, and
I say who is and isn't welcome.

Larry cups his hands around his mouth.

LARRY
(shouting)
Yoo hoo, Ronnie! Get your perverted ass
down here!

May steps back inside and tries to slam the door, but Larry catches
it with his foot, and kicks it open even wider.

MAY
I'm calling the police.

LARRY
I hear they're well-disposed to child
molesters.

All the air goes out of the woman. RONNIE himself appears in the
hallway behind her, blinking and bewildered, clad in pajamas.

RONNIE
It's okay, Mommy.

He gently insinuates himself between his mother and the men.

RONNIE
Can I help you gentlemen?

Larry takes an aggressive step toward Ronnie, but May's maternal
instinct kicks in, and she steps in front of her son.

MAY
(a demand)
Ronnie, you go on upstairs.

He recedes back into the house.

RONNIE
(like a three-year-old)
Alright, Mommy.

Brad grabs Larry's arms and tries to restrain him.

BRAD
Come on, Larry. Let's go home. I think he
gets the point.

LARRY
You listen to me, you piece of shit. You
stay the fuck away from the Town Pool,
you hear me? Or I will personally fix it
so that you no longer have a dick to show
anyone, is that clear?

MAY
(fierce)
You're a **BULLY!**

May steps forward and gets right into Larry's face. She address the following directly to Brad.

MAY
My Ronnie would never do anything like
(pointing to Larry)
He did.

Larry looks scared for the first time.

MAY
(in for the kill)
That poor child at the mall -
(with disgust)
What you did to him.

It's his turn to have the wind knocked out of him. May steps back inside the house, and closes the door with no resistance.

INT. LARRY'S VAN, PARKED - MOMENTS LATER

A worried-looking Brad sits in the passenger seat staring at Larry. For once Larry is silent, and entirely still. He stares down at the steering wheel like a man who has fallen into the deepest possible abyss.

BRAD
Larry?

He doesn't respond.

BRAD
Larry?
(careful)
What did she mean by that?

Larry looks up, furious.

LARRY
Oh, don't pretend you don't know about me! Everybody knows! Everybody!

Larry looks like he may hit Brad.

Brad's hand slips down to the door, ready to jump out if he has to.

BRAD
(careful, but sincere)
Honest, Larry. I don't know anything. I mean I remember hearing something a few years ago when we first moved here. Something about a shooting at the mall, but that's about it. I didn't even know you then.

Larry looks convinced. Then embarrassed.

LARRY
I'm sorry...SORRY.

Brad just stares at him.

BRAD
(nods)
...okay, Larry.

Larry stares down at his hands. Then up to Brad.

LARRY
I still can still see that boy's face,
staring up at me.

A moment.

LARRY
(by rote)
Dispatch said there was a shooter loose
at the mall...It was the end of my shift.
Ten minutes - ten minutes and it woulda
been someone else.

Brad watches his friend disappear. All the air is out of him.

BRAD
But it was an accident. You were trying
to stop the guy, and the boy got caught
in the crossfire right?

LARRY
No. I panicked. There was no shooter.
Just the boy. Antoine Harris was his
name. Big for his age, only thirteen-
years-old. He was a good kid. Thought it
was a big joke, waving around an airgun
at his friend at the Big 5. They were
acting out a scene from some movie they
liked. Shop girl saw it from across the
way... called 911.

BRAD
Jesus, Larry - that's terrible.
But you didn't know. It coulda been real.

LARRY
But it wasn't.

Silence.

LARRY
His parents...uh..his parents. I had to -

Larry starts to choke up, and Brad looks away, uncomfortable with
this kind of intimacy.

LARRY
I was diagnosed with post-traumatic
stress syndrome by three different
psychiatrists. That's why I retired. I
couldn't do the job anymore... For a year
or two Joanie was okay with me hanging
around the house. But now she thinks I'm
lazy.

BRAD
Well, why don't you do something else?

LARRY
(snapping)
Like what? Drive a fork lift at Costco?

BRAD
Maybe you could go back to school.

Larry stares daggers into Brad.

LARRY
I loved my job. I don't want to do anything else.

Larry's gaze drifts back to the McGorvey's front porch.

LARRY
You ever think about the term *homeland security*? I mean really think about it?

INT. EDITING ROOM - DAY

A BOY of 8, TRAVIS, sits on the couch in his living room, his feet dangle over edge not touching the floor. He stares at his hands.

KATHY'S VOICE (O.C.)
The day you found out that you're father had been killed in Iraq. Do you remember that day?

The boy looks up from his hands.

KATHY'S VOICE (O.C.)
Can you talk about that? Do you feel comfortable talking about that?

The boy nods.

TRAVIS
...after the men came to tell my mom... I cried. But she didn't. She just went into her room... grabbed the pillows off the bed, and cut the tops off em with a pair of scissors... there were feathers all over the place.

KATHY'S VOICE (O.C.)
(gently)
That must have really frightened you.

TRAVIS
No. She was trying to find the crown.

KATHY'S VOICE (O.C.)
...the crown?

The boy nods to himself.

TRAVIS

The crown you leave in your pillow when
you've slept on it for a long time...my
father...

He looks up at an unseen Kathy.

TRAVIS

...my father had two crowns.

KATHY (O.C.)

Alright, let's stop there.

Kathy and her editor FRANK, 40s and overweight sit in a small dark room illuminated by two monitors. Frank looks at Kathy, who seems someplace else.

FRANK

You hungry?

KATHY

...no

FRANK

Mind if I get some lunch?

KATHY

No. Go ahead.

Frank leaves the room. Kathy stares at the frozen image of Travis' face. She reaches for the phone and dials. THE MACHINE PICKS UP.

KATHY

Brad?... Brad?... Are you there?... Pick
up. I know you're there. It's Aaron's nap
time

(hiding her concern)

...alright, guess you're out somewhere. I
love you both, bye.

She hangs up. Glued to the boy's face staring back at her from monitor.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, ATTIC UTILITY ROOM - SAME

All hills and valleys. The curve of a hip traced by a finger tip. It moves down the waist and continues to the shoulder. Sarah rolls onto her back, stares up at the ceiling, and smiles. Brad leans in and they gently kiss. Lovers who are sated, and comfortable lying in each other's presence. Sarah reaches up and strokes his face.

The SOUND of WOMEN'S VOICES IN ANIMATED CONVERSATION.

EXT. TOWNHOUSE - MAGIC

Jean, holding a large TUPPERWARE container of brownies, herds a reluctant Sarah up the stairs of a narrow two-story affair.

SARAH

You know, Jean, I don't think I'm up for
this.

JEAN
Now, don't be silly. It'll be fun.

The women cross the threshold and into -

INT. TOWNHOUSE, ENTRYWAY - MAGIC

A small foyer, flanked on both walls by large framed posters: The first from Chez Panisse, the other a typical country landscape from Provence.

SARAH
(dubious)
Really?

JEAN
Don't worry, you're not the only little sister here tonight.

SARAH
(relieved)
Oh. That's good.

Sarah peers into the living room, an airy art-filled space lit only by the early evening sun. Several women chat amiably around a coffee table - ONE OF THE WOMEN turns her head toward the foyer. Sarah's expression tightens, as if in sudden pain.

INT. TOWNHOUSE, LIVINGROOM - NIGHT

CLOSE ON Mary Ann's face. She looks offended.

MARY ANN
Did anybody like this book?
Because I really just hated it.

PULL BACK to reveal the BOOK GROUP, four OLDER WOMEN, plus two LITTLE SISTERS, Sarah and Mary Ann. They sit around a coffee table brimming with wine, cheese, fruit & crackers.

MARY ANN
It's so depressing. She cheats on her husband with two different guys, wastes all his money, then kills herself with rat poison. Do I really need to read this?

The book group is dismayed by this blunt declaration.

LAUREL, a youthful sixty year-old, ventures a response.

LAUREL
Well, there is a lot of good descriptive writing.

The other ladies nod in vigorous agreement. JOSEPHINE, short and plump, takes the baton.

JOSEPHINE
It's supposed to be depressing. It's a tragedy. Madame Bovary's undone by a tragic flaw.

Next we hear from BRIDGET, a Gertrude Stein look-a-like.

BRIDGET
What's her flaw?

JOSEPHINE
Blindness. She can't see that the men are just using her.

JEAN
She just wants a little romance in her life. You can't blame her for that.

BRIDGET
It's about women's choices. Back then a woman didn't have a lot of choices. You could be a nun or a wife. That's all there was.

JOSEPHINE
Or a prostitute.

Mary Ann fixes her gaze pointedly on Sarah.

MARY ANN
She had a choice. She had a choice not to cheat on her husband.

BRIDGET
Usually it's the man who cheats. I found it refreshing to read about a woman reclaiming her sexuality.

MARY ANN
Reclaiming her sexuality? Is that a nice way of saying she's a slut?

JOSEPHINE
(miffed)
Madame Bovary is not a slut. She's one of the great characters in Western literature.

An uncomfortable silence. Then -

LAUREL
I was a little puzzled by the some of the sexual references.

She opens her PAPERBACK, annotated with POST-IT TAPE FLAGS.

LAUREL
Like this one. "He abandoned every last shred of restraint and consideration. He turned her into something compliant, something corrupt."

Sarah's fallen into a kind of REVERIE.

INT. SARAH'S ATTIC UTILITY ROOM - DAY

Sarah leans back on the mattress. Brad's head buried between her legs.

INT. TOWNHOUSE, LIVINGROOM - BACK TO SAME

LAUREL
Does anyone know what that means?

MARY ANN
It means she's a slut.

LAUREL
Do you think he's tying her up or something?

BRIDGET
(sotto)
Anal sex.

Josephine nods, looking uncomfortable.

LAUREL
Did everyone get that but me?

JEAN
Let's set that aside for now.
(glancing at Sarah)
I'm really eager to hear what our other little sister has to say.

Jean raises her voice to get Sarah's attention.

JEAN
I'm not sure if you know this, but Sarah's got a Ph.D. in English Lit.

Sarah startles to the present, picking up her cue.

SARAH
Just a Master's. I never wrote my dissertation.

JEAN
Well, you still have a lot more expertise than the rest of us.

Mary Ann rolls her eyes at this. Then levels them at Sarah.

Sarah smiles at Mary Ann, as if the two of them are friends.

SARAH
I think I understand your feelings about this book. I used to feel the same way myself. When I read it in grad school, Madame Bovary just seemed like a fool. She makes one foolish mistake after another. But when I read it this time, I just fell in love with her. She's trapped. She can either accept a life of misery or struggle against it. And she chooses to struggle.

MARY ANN
Some struggle. Jump in bed with every guy who says hello.

SARAH

She fails in the end. But there's something beautiful and even heroic in her rebellion. My professors would kill me for even thinking this, but in her own strange way, Emma Bovary is a feminist.

MARY ANN

Oh, that's nice. So now cheating on your husband makes you a feminist?

SARAH

No. It's not the cheating. It's the hunger. The hunger for an alternative. And the refusal to accept a life of unhappiness.

The other ladies beam with approval and fascination.

Mary Ann just shakes her head in disgust.

MARY ANN

Maybe I didn't understand the book. She just looked so pathetic...

INT. SARAH'S ATTIC UTILITY ROOM - DAY

BRAD stands behind SARAH making love, reaching new heights of abandon, performing an ECSTATIC DUET of GRUNTS, GASPS, and WHIMPERS.

SARAH

(breathing hard)

Is she pretty?

BRAD

Who?

SARAH

Your wife.

INT. BOOK-GROUP TOWNHOUSE - BACK TO SAME

MARY ANN

...degrading herself for nothing.

INT. SARAH'S ATTIC UTILITY ROOM - ANOTHER DAY

Brad slips Sarah's bra straps off her shoulders.

SARAH

It's a simple question.

BRAD

(frustrated)

She's pretty, okay? Do we have to talk about this now?

INT. BOOK-GROUP TOWNHOUSE - BACK TO SAME

MARY ANN

I mean, did she really think a man like
that was going to run away with her?

Sarah is beginning to wonder about this herself.

SARAH

(uncomfortable now)

....possibly.

INT. SARAH'S ATTIC UTILITY ROOM - ANOTHER DAY

After sex, Brad leans back against the wall to catch his breath.
Sarah pokes his chest with her foot.

SARAH

How pretty is she?

He stares at her for the longest time. Then -

BRAD

(truthfully)

...a knockout.

Sarah winces as if she's been struck.

BRAD

(patiently)

Beauty's overrated, Sarah.

INT. SARAH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Richard dead to the world. Sarah WIDE AWAKE beside him.

VOICE

Brad had meant this to be comforting, but
at three in the morning it had precisely
the opposite effect. He had a beautiful
wife, a knockout, and she was sleeping
beside him right now.

MOVE IN on SARAH forcing her profile into the foreground.

VOICE

Only someone who took his own beauty for
granted would have been able to say
something so stupid, and with a straight
face.

MOVE PAST HER FACE TOWARD A WALL PAINTING WHICH DISSOLVES INTO -

EXT. BRAD'S FRONT PORCH - DAY

Brad steps out his front door, wearing swim trunks, and hugging a
PICNIC COOLER to his chest.

VOICE

Weekends were difficult for Sarah, forty-eight-hour prison stretches separating one happy blur of weekdays from the rest.

He lugs it down the steps and stows it in the trunk of a COROLLA. He glances out toward the street and -

INT. SARAH'S CAR - MORNING

Looking haggard, Sarah ducks down in the driver's seat, trying to see without being seen.

VOICE

Sarah sometimes let herself be carried away by fantasies of a future very different from the life she was living now. A future without obstacles, in which she and Brad were free to love each other in broad daylight...

EXT. BRAD'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Aaron comes out next, clutching a PLASTIC BEACH PAIL and SHOVEL, and heads to the car.

VOICE

...in which all the mistakes of the past were erased, and they had no one to answer to but each other.

KATHY emerges, wearing tight shorts and a black bikini top, looking taller, thinner and more glamorous than Sarah had let herself imagine in her worst self-loathing insomniac nightmare.

Kathy RAISES HER ARMS and STRETCHES, a vision so lovely it hurts.

INT. SARAH'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Sarah slinks even lower in the seat, biting her hand to keep from crying out.

EXT. BRAD'S STREET - CONTINUOUS

The Corolla backs out of the driveway and heads down the street, passing the apparently empty Volvo.

VOICE

It could happen, she thought. It had to. Because she wasn't sure she could keep living like this for very much longer.

Sarah resurfaces from the floor of the car looking completely devastated.

EXT. TOWN POOL - DAY

Brad and Sarah back in their usual weekday spot. They eye each other warily, as if something's changed.

BRAD
You okay?

SARAH
Yeah, fine. How about you?

BRAD
Me? Great. So, uh, how was your weekend?

SARAH
You really want to know? - it sucked. How was yours?

BRAD
Terrible.

Surprised, she turns toward Brad.

SARAH
Really?

BRAD
Yeah. Kathy and I went to the beach, but all we did was fight the whole time.

Sarah tries to look concerned rather than excited.

SARAH
You did?

BRAD
Yeah. It was an annual argument. About taking the bar exam, like our whole life depends on it.

SARAH
Just get it over with. You'll feel better.

BRAD
Yeah, but it's the whole thing...I gotta leave town on Wednesday, take a train - it's a two day ordeal...and I'm not even gonna pass.

SARAH
You'll do fine.

BRAD
No, I won't. I haven't cracked a book all summer.

In spite of themselves, they both laugh.

SARAH
...I missed you.

BRAD
I missed you too.

A moment.

SARAH
Don't... don't do it.

BRAD
What?

SARAH
Blow it off.

She turns to him suddenly conspiratorial.

SARAH
We should go somewhere, ya know just for
a night. Richard's out of town till
Friday, and I'm sure I can get a sitter
for Lucy.

Brad chews this over, then shakes his head.

BRAD
I can't... do that. I gotta take the
test.

Sarah tries to look understanding, but her face betrays her.

INT. BRAD'S HOUSE, BATHROOM -- MORNING

Brad puts on a clean dress shirt getting ready for a big couple of
days. Aaron sits on the sink watching his father prepare. Brad
reaches over and strokes the boy's mane.

INT. BRAD'S HOUSE, KITCHEN -- MORNING

Kathy & Aaron sit at the kitchen table, finishing their breakfast.
Brad has his head buried in a pile of law books - last minute
cramming.

KATHY
Well, I have a good feeling about this.
I'm gonna buy a bottle of champagne.
We'll put it in the fridge and open it
when we get the good news.

BRAD
Don't get your hopes up. We've been down
this road before.

She smiles at him as though he's a child returning to school after a
brief illness.

KATHY
This time it'll be different. I can feel
it.

EXT. EAST WYNDAM STATION -- MORNING

Kathy's Corolla pulls curb-side, Brad exits the passenger side
holding his briefcase & overnight bag and watches Kathy drive off.

He checks his watch, heads into the station and straight to the
ticket counter.

He shoots a look out the door of the station, then runs back outside just as Sarah's Volvo pulls up. He checks to see if the coast is clear - satisfied he jumps into the front passenger seat and the car takes off.

INT/EXT. SARAH'S VOLVO, MOVING/ROUTE 128 - MORNING

Brad stares out at the scenery.

SARAH (O.C.)
Can you believe it?

Brad glances at Sarah, who looks prettier than we've ever seen her, her eyes bright with adventure, stray ringlets and unruly corkscrews of hair blowing across her face.

Her hand moves lightly over his thigh.

SARAH
It's our first date. A date. Without the kids, I mean.

BRAD
How was Lucy? She cry or anything?

SARAH
You kidding? With Jean there? She just about shoved me out the door.

Brad glances back at Lucy's empty car seat.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, SUN ROOM - DAY

Jean, holding Lucy, tapes colored streamers back & forth across the room, getting ready for their party.

LATER. Lucy watches wide-eyed as Jean opens a tackle box. Step-like shelves emerge, stocked with FELT, GLITTER, GOLD STARS, COLORED CONSTRUCTION PAPER, SEA GLASS, BUTTONS, ROUNDED SCISSORS and PASTE, a cornucopia of crafts supplies.

JEAN
I thought today we could make something really beautiful. I've got so many things here. We could make a picture frame, or a jewelry box, a hat? Whatever you like.

Lucy smiles.

LUCY
(with certainty)
Something for my Mommy.

JEAN
Okay.

Lucy's hand reaches toward the items, hovering over each one, finally pausing over a small, unfinished, wooden picture frame.

INT. MCGORVEY HOUSE, BATHROOM - DAY

Shaved and showered, clad in beige Dockers and a new collared shirt, Ronnie stands in front of the bathroom mirror. May fusses from behind.

RONNIE
Stop it. Just stop it!

MAY
Hold on, Ronnie. Just hold on.

With a pair of scissors, she cuts a price tag off the shirt.

MAY
(bubbly)
There. You look handsome. She won't be disappointed.

RONNIE
Wait'll she hears about my criminal record.

MAY
I don't think you need to get into that just yet. Why don't you stick to small talk?

RONNIE
What if someone recognizes me?

MAY
That's highly unlikely. I made the dinner reservation at a restaurant over in Haverhill.

THE SOUND OF CHILDREN'S LAUGHTER

INT. STEAK HOUSE - NIGHT

RONNIE gazes across the place at a nearby booth, where A FAMILY with TWO YOUNG CHILDREN, a BOY & GIRL, ages 9 and 10, start on their dessert. The children laugh as their FATHER and MOTHER engage them in some kind of game.

Ronnie, with great difficulty, pulls his attention away from them, and takes the last bite of his food. He looks across the table at SHEILA, who stares down at her plate. She hasn't touched a bite.

RONNIE
Sheila?
(louder)
Sheila?

This produces the desired effect. She looks straight at Ronnie for the first time.

SHEILA
Yes?

RONNIE

What's the matter? Something wrong with the food?

SHEILA

...no.

RONNIE

Back at the house you mentioned you were on medication.

Sheila nods compliantly.

RONNIE

What kind?

SHEILA

Oh, all kinds. Mostly psychotropic.

RONNIE

So you had some kind of a breakdown?

Sheila nods.

RONNIE

When?

SHEILA

My junior year in college.

RONNIE

You were that young?

Sheila nods. Grateful for his interest and concern.

RONNIE

What happened?

SHEILA

...I'm not really sure.

RONNIE

Nervous breakdowns don't just come outta nowhere. Something musta caused it.

Sheila sits in front of her untouched meal, concentrating hard, as if responding to a therapist.

SHEILA

I guess. But I was fine when I left for college. Maybe it was the stress of being on my own. Maybe it was a chemical imbalance in my brain. Every psychiatrist I go to has a different opinion. This one guy, Dr. Farris, said I must have been sexually abused as a child. When I told him I wasn't, he just said I was repressing the memory.

Uncomfortable, Ronnie changes direction.

RONNIE

Right. So what happened after that? You drop out of school?

SHEILA

Not right away. My mother sent me to the campus counselling center. And they wanted the problem fixed. Like I could just snap my fingers and everything would be okay again.

RONNIE

(sincere)
Oh yeah. I know all about that.

SHEILA

You do?

Ronnie leans forward.

RONNIE

Yes. I do.

Sheila smiles.

SHEILA

(on a roll now)
Either that or leave school, get married, and have lots of kids like my sisters. But I can't take care of kids. I can't even take care of myself half the time. Besides, who's gonna marry me?

Ronnie takes her in.

RONNIE

You're not so bad.

Startled by Ronnie's complimentary tone, Sheila smiles, shyly.

SHEILA

...what?

RONNIE

(shy)
You're not...you're not so bad.

Sheila beams.

SHEILA

I haven't had a real boyfriend in six years... not since my second breakdown. Something happened to me on a Greyhound Bus. I ended up in -

The WAITER arrives, interrupting her.

WAITER

(to Sheila)
Do you want me to wrap that up?

SHEILA
(still staring at Ronnie)
What? Oh, no thank you.

RONNIE
(to waiter)
Yes. Wrap it up, please. I'll take it home.

WAITER
You folks gonna want dessert?

RONNIE
What do you say Shelia? You want to share something sweet?

Shelia just stares at Ronnie. Smitten.

EXT/INT. SHEILA'S BUICK, MOVING - NIGHT

Ronnie & Sheila ride in silence.

RONNIE
Let's make a little stop. Take the next left.

She suppresses a smile, enchanted by his take-charge attitude.

INT/EXT. SHEILA'S BUICK, WALKER STREET PARK - NIGHT

The Buick is parked on an empty street with its HEADLIGHTS still on.

RONNIE
Turn off the lights.

Sheila switches them off.

Shelia faces straight ahead, so does Ronnie.

The date seems to have had a positive effect on Sheila, or maybe the medication's wearing off. Her voice sounds livelier, a little less spacey.

SHEILA
I had a nice time tonight.

Ronnie doesn't reply.

SHEILA
The last guy I went out with, you know what he did? He ditched me. Got up to go to the men's room, and never came back. Stuck me with the check. Never said goodbye, never called to apologize.

Still nothing from Ronnie.

SHEILA
He wasn't my type anyway. He was this super normal guy, a big-shot CPA. He didn't want to be dating some psycho.

A smile plays at the corners of her mouth.

SHEILA

But you seem like a nice person.

She turns slowly, as if volunteering for a kiss. It is only then that she sees what he is up to.

His right hand begins moving up and down on his lap, and his breathing rapidly increases.

Shelia watches from the corner of her eye. She sort of hums to herself, like a child on a ride that they are frightened of, and hope will be over soon.

Ronnie looks up at her, his face fierce.

RONNIE

You better not tell on me.

Shelia continues to hum.

RONNIE

(louder)

You hear me?!

She nods - but begins to cry.

RONNIE

You better not tell, or I'll fuckin' get you.

Ronnie stares at her as he huff and puffs. His eyes stray slightly to the left, and just past her.

She turns away from him suddenly, and it is only then that the true focus of Ronnie's attention is visible out the driver's window -

THE PLAYGROUND

EXT. MCGORVEY HOUSE - NIGHT

Sheila's car pulls up at the curb. Ronnie gets out, holding his DOGGIE BAG from the restaurant. Without a word her car speeds away.

INT. MCGORVEY HOUSE, MAY'S ROOM - SAME

May stands at her bedroom window watching her son cross to the front door. The look on her face, tragically hopeful.

EXT. EAST WYNDAM STATION - MAGIC

The five-o-clock pulls into the station and commuters disembark, Brad among them. He crosses the platform and makes his way over to the family car -

Kathy sits waiting in the driver seat. Aaron, securely fastened in his car seat, oblivious to his mother's hopes and expectations. Brad arrives and gets in.

Kathy makes a quick study of her husband's demeanor.

KATHY
So?

BRAD
What?

KATHY
(laughing)
The test, dummy. How'd it go?

BRAD
...alright.

KATHY
I was worried. You never called home last night.

BRAD
Guess, I could really use that cell phone.

Kathy is caught off-guard by this response. She decides to ignore it.

INT/EXT. SARAH'S HOUSE, SUNROOM - MAGIC

Sarah grabs her overnight bag from the car and heads toward the sunroom. The place is transformed: STREAMERS, DRAWINGS on glass panes, and a HOME MADE SIGN on butcher paper running the width of the room: UPPER CASE letters written by Jean, and pictures of people with CIRCLE BODIES, AND LINES OUT OF THEIR HEADS by Lucy -

The sign reads: *WELCOME HOME MOMMY*

Sarah eyes the place warily, then turns from the room and heads outdoors. She rounds the side of the house, looking to make a more comfortable entrance through the kitchen door.

SARAH'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - MAGIC

Sarah enters to find Jean sitting at the table, knitting and listening to NPR.

JEAN
Look who's back.

SARAH
Thanks, Jean. You're a lifesaver.

JEAN
So how's your old roommate?

SARAH
Oh great, great. Thanks for doing this on such short notice.

Sarah reaches into her bag, and pulls out her wallet.

SARAH
I want to give you something for your time.

The woman looks surprised, and somewhat insulted.

JEAN
That's not necessary.

Sarah pulls some bills out.

SARAH
No, really. I insist.

Jean's face wears the look of someone who has just discovered what a person she thought was a friend, really thinks of her.

JEAN
(sharply)
Please don't.

SARAH
...okay.

Jean begins gathering up her knitting and her craft box.

SARAH
Any calls?

JEAN
No, it's been very quiet.

Jean heads to the kitchen door.

JEAN
She's asleep on your bed. We had a very busy day.

SARAH
(uncomfortable)
Well, that's great. Thanks again.

Jean heads out the door.

SARAH
Jean, is everything okay?

Jean turns around and looks at Sarah. She is about to honestly answer her question, but decides to bite her tongue instead.

JEAN
...yes. She's a wonderful child.

Without another word she makes for home.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, BATHROOM EN SUITE - MAGIC

Sarah enjoys a hot shower, mentally reliving her afternoon, while erasing any traces of it at the same time.

SARAH'S BEDROOM - SAME

Lucy lies asleep on her parent's bed, her tiny arms curled around a square object. After a moment the child wakes. Her ears perk to the sound of running water, coming from the bathroom.

LUCY
(muttering)
Mommy?

SARAH'S BATHROOM - SAME

Sarah shuts off the water, squeezes her hair, steps out of the shower, wraps her towel into a turban, and gazes into the mirror, trying to find that sweet spot, that perfect angle.

A tiny knock on the bathroom door.

LUCY (O.C.)
Mommy?

Sarah sighs, and closes her eyes, fantasy interrupted.

SARAH
...yes?

LUCY (O.C.)
Are you coming?

SARAH'S BEDROOM - SAME

Lucy stands on the other side of the bathroom door. In her hands, her *project for the afternoon*.

LUCY
I have something.

SARAH (O.C.)
What?

LUCY
I have something for you.

Silence, then -

SARAH (O.C.)
Give me a minute here, okay?

Lucy stands there a moment, then walks away - depositing her mother's gift onto the bed on her way out of the room.

The gift is something of rare value: *Buttons adorning a frame, within which rests a photo of Lucy herself.*

INT. BRAD'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Kathy and Brad lie back-to-back. Neither one of them can sleep.
Finally -

KATHY
Brad?...Brad?

BRAD
Hmmm?

KATHY
Aaron was telling me today all about his
new friend, Lucy.

Brad, still turned away, grimaces.

KATHY
She sounds like a sweet little girl...

Brad looks momentarily relieved. Then -

KATHY
...What's the mother like?

A moment.

BRAD
...Uh, nice enough, I guess...
(yawning)
I can't even remember her name.

KATHY
Isn't it Sarah?

Silence.

BRAD
...Sarah?

KATHY
Yeah. Sarah? From the pool? She has a
little girl named Lucy?

BRAD
Oh, Lucy's mom. I forgot, that's right,
her name's Sarah.

Kathy decides to push further.

KATHY
I think it would be nice for Aaron if we
all had dinner together.

Brad looks horrified.

BRAD
... okay.

INT. BRAD'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Nodding off, Aaron and Lucy lie side by side, surrounded by a warm
yellow canopy of light, and the drone of their parents conversation.

TWO TINY PAIRS of FEET protrude from a tent fashioned from polished
minature SAW HORSES draped with YELLOW SILK. Grown-ups in the middle-
distance.

INT. BRAD'S HOUSE, DINING ROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Kathy sits next to Sarah, both sipping their wine. They've made themselves comfortable with each other while secretly sizing each other up at the same time.

Brad listens to Richard - who's mid-story in an oft-told tale about his product consulting business.

BRAD

So, you're in adverting?

RICHARD

No. That's a common mistake. I'm in *branding*. And that's really very different.

SARAH

Richard's pretty high up in the company.

Kathy smiles at Sarah's seeming support of Richard. She shoots a look to Brad as if to say, "isn't it sweet how proud she is of this dolt?"

Brad smiles back at his wife.

This is not lost on Sarah, and she begins eating at a rapid pace.

RICHARD

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Like the other day these guys come to me, and they want to start a chain of Chinese restaurants.

He pause for dramatic effect.

RICHARD

And not one of them is *Chinese!*

Everyone at the table is sort of waiting for the punch-line, which never arrives.

Brad and Kathy force polite laughter. Sarah looks miserable. Fortunately, Brad tries to pick up the thread.

BRAD

Well, where were they from?

RICHARD

They're a bunch of fat cats from Tennessee. But they think they can create a chain of restaurants authentic enough to fool the average American boob.

More forced laughter from Brad & Kathy. Sarah wishes Richard would just shut up. She turns to Kathy, and tries to change the subject.

SARAH

(re: dinner)
This is delicious.

KATHY

Isn't it?

She looks across the table at Brad, and smiles.

KATHY
Brad's a *fantastic* cook.

Sarah is nearly at the end of her rope, and uncertain how much longer she can endure this very strange dynamic.

RICHARD
So, have you seen these flyers with the guy's face plastered all over the village? Lots of sturm and drang in our quiet little town, eh?

BRAD
It's crazy.

RICHARD
What I want to know is why they let a creep like that out of prison.

SARAH
Some of the people going after him are just as crazy.

KATHY
What do you mean?

SARAH
Well, just today I heard that some nut's been spray-painting the poor guy's house, lighting fires on his porch, and God knows what else.

Brad shrinks.

KATHY
Do they know who's doing it?

SARAH
They think it's *some* ex-cop.

Kathy glances at Brad.

SARAH
You know, that guy who killed the kid at the mall.

BRAD
(almost too fast)
I don't think it's him.

KATHY
You're biased.
(to Sarah)
Brad is friends with the guy. They're both on that *Committee of Concerned Parents*.

Sarah stares at Brad, perplexed.

SARAH
I didn't know you were on that.

BRAD
(nervous)
I play on his football team. And he asked
me to distribute some flyers.

SARAH
(wounded)
He's on your team? You never told me that.

Kathy looks startled. It's odd to hear such a possessive tone coming
out of another woman's mouth. She studies the dynamics of the table.
Every gesture, and every word, now viewed through a microscope.

RICHARD
You know what's weird? I've never even
seen this McGorvey guy.

SARAH
We did.

RICHARD
No, we didn't.

SARAH
(reclaiming her position)
Not you. Me and Brad. That day at the
pool, remember?

Brad is unable to mask his discomfort with this question.

BRAD
(to Sarah's question)
Oh yeah, I forgot.

Kathy stares at Brad.

VOICE
Sexual tension is an elusive thing, but
Kathy had pretty good radar for it. It
was like someone had turned a knob a
hair to the right...

Kathy's view shifts to the RIGHT - To now include SARAH IN THE FRAME
WITH BRAD for the first time in the scene.

VOICE
...and the radio station clicked in so
loud and clear it almost knocked her
over. Once she became aware of the
connection between them, it seemed
impossible that she'd missed it before.
On a hunch...

Kathy steals a look toward her own hand as it -

Inches toward her FORK.

VOICE
Kathy dropped her fork...

Her hand "accidentally" knocks the FORK to the FLOOR. It falls end-over-end in SLOW MOTION.

She slips under the table to retrieve the utensil.

VOICE
...in the hopes that while retrieving it
she would catch Sarah and Brad playing
footsie.

Kathy stares at the forest of legs beneath the table. No footsie of any kind is in progress.

VOICE
But she was mistaken.

Kathy looks frozen, like a deer in the headlights, not sure what to do next. She makes no move to join the others.

BRAD (O.C.)
Kathy? Are you okay?

Kathy's tries not to hyperventilate.

She stares dumbstruck at SARAH'S ridiculously PAINTED TOES.

KATHY
Yeah...just a sec.

INT. BRAD'S HOUSE, BATHROOM - NIGHT

Brad stares into the mirror with a big forced grin on his face. The image is absurd until his hand appears with a TOOTHBRUSH and he begins his nightly regime.

VOICE
Brad had convinced himself the dinner
party had gone well, that he and Sarah
had managed to put Kathy's suspicions to
rest, at least temporarily.

INT. BRAD'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

He emerges from the bathroom and heads over to join Kathy, who is already in bed.

VOICE
She certainly hadn't accused him of
anything, or behaved in a way that made
him think she'd noticed anything untoward.

Brad pulls the covers up and glances at Kathy. She smiles.

KATHY
I'm really glad they came over.

Brad smiles back, confident that his deception has been a success. He leans over, kisses her on the cheek, then reaches up and kills the light.

BLACK

VOICE
Two days later, however...

EXT. BRAD & KATHY'S HOUSE - DAY

A CHAUFFEUR opens the door of a TOWN CAR, and Kathy's mother emerges from the back. She scans the house with hungry anticipation.

VOICE
...his mother-in-law showed up for a "surprise visit" of ominously indeterminate length. And from that moment on, she accompanied Brad and Aaron everywhere.

EXT. WALKER STREET PLAYGROUND - DAY

VOICE
To the playground...

Brad pushes Aaron & Bear on the swings. He glances toward the picnic table formerly occupied by the busybodies, only to be met by the suspicious stare of his mother-in-law.

EXT. SHAW'S SUPERMARKET, CHECKOUT - DAY

VOICE
To the supermarket...

Aaron sits in a SHOPPING CART; Brad and Marjorie stand in a long checkout line, not speaking a word to one another.

Brad's eyes drift toward the magazine rack and land innocently on a bikini-clad model on the cover of *Fitness*.

As he turns his attention back to the line, he becomes aware of Marjorie's sternly disapproving face.

EXT. TOWN POOL - DAY

VOICE
...and to the town pool.

Brad & Aaron are in their usual spot, with the addition of Marjorie.

Brad cranes his neck, pretending to reach for something in his bag, stealing a melancholy glance at SARAH, who's sitting under a nearby tree.

VOICE
The worst of it was the pool.

Her LARGE SUNGLASSES make it impossible to tell if she's even noticed.

VOICE
Nevertheless...

INT. BRAD'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

VOICE

...after threatening all week to go the
football game...

Kathy and Marjorie sit next to each other on the couch, staring
across the room, like two people safely behind Plexiglas, watching a
venomous snake at the reptile house.

VOICE

... Brad's mother-in-law decided against
it at the last minute.

Across the room, Brad bends over to tie his sneaker.

BRAD

You sure?

He tries to keep the pleasure out of his voice.

BRAD

You're welcome to come.

MARJORIE

I'd like to, but I'm a little tired. You
and Aaron sure kept me hopping this
afternoon.

KATHY

Looks like you're on your own tonight.

Marjorie pats Kathy affectionately on the leg.

MARJORIE

Besides, I need to spend a little time
with my daughter. We've hardly said two
words since I got here.

The familiar SOUND of LARRY'S HORN interrupts her.

Brad leaps up and heads for the door.

BRAD

That's my ride.

KATHY

What time will you be home?

BRAD

Dunno. But pretty late, though.

MARJORIE

(forced smile)

Be careful. And stay out of trouble.

BRASS FANFARE & KETTLE DRUMS - AN INTRO WORTHY OF NFL FILMS

EXT. EAST WYNDAM BOMBERS' STADIUM - NIGHT

A PASSENGER TRAIN SPEEDS BY ON AN ELEVATED TRANSOM. THE VIEW SHIFTS AWAY FROM THE TRACKS & toward a darkened FOOTBALL STADIUM. Through the lens of NFL FILMS, we experience the following -

CLOSE ON AN AMERICAN FLAG wafting in the summer air.

VOICE

Winds whisper of high hopes, victory is
in the skies.

SLOW ZOOM OUT from the flag high above the stadium, as banks of PAR LIGHTS burst on, one panel at a time, illuminating -

The empty bleachers.

VOICE

One joins with many on Summer's green
field.

...on the field, the GUARDIANS are lined up for the opening kick-off. Their opponents, the CONTROLLERS, a bunch of spandex-clad, twenty-something gym heads, are set to receive.

VOICE

At 0-5, the Guardians were the basement dwellers of the Tri-County Touch Football Night League.

BART WILLIAMS, with his hand in the air, looks to the sideline, where -

BULLHORN BOB, stopwatch in hand, blows his whistle.

WILLIAMS boots the BALL, and the GUARDIANS charge downfield.

VOICE

The Controllers, a team of young hotshots from the financial district, were 4-1, with an explosive offense that regularly racked up 40 to 50 points a game. But from the opening kick-off...

The CONTROLLERS' speedy RETURN MAN is gang-tackled by FOUR ferocious GUARDIANS.

VOICE

...this ragtag group of law enforcement officers decided to crunch their own numbers.

DEWAYNE SAVAGES NUMBER 39.

CORRENTI CLOTHESLINES NUMBER 12.

BRAD SUBMARINES NUMBER 28.

WILLIAMS AND OLAFFSON SANDWICH NUMBER 39 AGAIN.

VOICE

But the Controllers scored first, after recovering a Bart Williams fumble deep in Guardians territory near the end of the second quarter.

Controllers' NUMBER 39 struts in the end zone, while BART clutches his head in dismay.

VOICE

The Guardians evened things up early in the second half...

BRAD completes a slant pass to DEWAYNE.

BART rushes up the middle, struggling for six yards.

VOICE

... moving methodically downfield...

BRAD pitches the ball to DEWAYNE, who turns the corner with CORRENTI and LARRY blocking.

VOICE

...on an 80-yard touchdown drive.

BRAD throws a short pass to DEWAYNE for the score.

VOICE

The Controllers regained the lead with a fourth quarter field goal.

The ball tumbles end over end through the goalposts.

BULLHORN BOB raises his hands, signalling, "It's good."

VOICE

With less than a minute to go, trailing by three, the Guardians faced the extinction of their hopes. It was their last chance, fourth and five on their own thirty-five.

CLOSE ON BRAD'S HANDS, opening like a clamshell against LARRY'S ASS as he takes the snap.

BRAD bootlegs right, looking first for RITCHIE MURPHY, his short man. Covered.

Ditto on BART, his middle receiver.

BRAD cocks the ball, ready to throw to -

DEWAYNE, his last and best chance, only to watch him slip and fall as he makes his cut.

BRAD loops back to avoid the pass rush. He looks up to see open field ahead. He tucks the ball and runs. Fifteen, twenty, twenty five yards, the field pitching toward him with each pounding stride.

THE CONTROLLERS begin to gain on him. Out of nowhere DEWAYNE pulls up beside him to run interference, but THE CONTROLLERS NUMBER 39 trips up DEWAYNE, leaving BRAD exposed to THE CONTROLLERS speed demon NUMBER 23. He's only inches away from the tackle when suddenly LARRY, screaming like a banshee, flies between the two men and flattens THE CONTROLLER.

THE CONTROLLERS, NUMBER 9 catches up to BRAD as he crosses the fifteen yard-line. BRAD slams on the brakes so drastically and unexpectedly that his pursuer simply goes zooming past him with a desolate cry of protest, stumbling out of bounds and leaving BRAD with a clear path to the end zone. He spins on his heels and jogs backwards into the end zone, the ball raised triumphantly overhead. He spikes the ball, his arms stretch wide, his chest heaving.

BRAD searches the STANDS for a witness to his glorious moment. To his surprise, he sees -

SARAH in the top row of the BLEACHERS - she's seen it all. The music crescendoes to a finale as their eyes meet.

The NFL FILM sequence morphs into our previous reality

EXT. EAST WYNDAM BOMBERS' STADIUM, BLEACHERS - LATER

Larry appears to be the only player remaining. He zips up his GYM BAG, and then looks out across the field, scanning it for his friend.

LARRY
(calling out)
Brad?

No answer.

Finally, he spots TWO SHADOWY FIGURES embracing in the END-ZONE.

Larry hesitates, then walks back onto the field, and makes his way toward Brad and Sarah. He stops near the ten yard-line.

LARRY
Brad?

Brad looks up, pissed.

BRAD
What do you want?

LARRY
All the guys are waiting for us at the bar. Are you comin'?

BRAD
Why don't you go ahead. I'll catch up later.

LARRY
You're gonna come, right? We need to celebrate.

BRAD
Yeah, yeah. I'll be right there.

LARRY
(desperate)
You promise?

BRAD
Jesus, Larry. I just told you.

LARRY
Well...you got a ride?

BRAD
YEAH.

Larry turns to go.

LARRY
Ok. I'll have a cold one waiting for you.

Larry stomps off.

INT. "TALK OF THE TOWN" TAVERN - NIGHT

The place is empty save for Larry, who sits at the bar, utterly alone. TWO BEERS, and TWO SHOTS lined in front of him waiting for Brad's arrival. Larry stares at the glasses with heartbreaking expectation. KEN, the bartender, stands directly across from Larry - looking every inch the man who is about to kick Larry's ass.

KEN
Larry? Larry!?

Larry finally looks up.

KEN
You need to go home.

LARRY
Just give me five more minutes he promised he was coming.

KEN
I don't care what he promised. I need to lock up. Now get your butt out of here.

Larry doesn't move.

KEN
NOW!

EAST WYNDAM BOMBERS' STADIUM, END ZONE - NIGHT

Brad and Sarah lie on their backs together looking up at the night sky. Still high from his triumph, Brad bubbles with an animated enthusiasm.

BRAD
When I looked up and saw you - it was just. Wow. Wow. Thank God you came. I don't want to go home. I want to stay right here forever.

BRAD (CONT)

For the first time in my life I feel like I can do anything. Like anything's possible. You know?

Sarah rolls onto her side to look at him. Her eyes are wet and puffy, her voice husky with emotion.

SARAH

What are we doing here?

BRAD

Whatta you mean?

SARAH

It's not real, Brad. It's wrong, and it's weird. How long are we going to sneak around together? How long can that last?

BRAD

No. Don't say that.

Brad looks like his high is very likely on the way to a terrible crash.

BRAD

I want you to listen to me, Sarah. As long as I know we're going to have this, as long as -

SARAH

(cutting him off)

Have what? What is *this*? Look if that dinner party at your house was any indication...you seem pretty happy with your wife. I mean you have *this* perfect life and I don't want to be the one that...

Something comes over him. He can't lose this ground. Not tonight. He immediately kicks into high gear. He leans in to her.

BRAD

Run away with me.

SARAH

What? You...you don't mean that.

BRAD

You *believe* in me.

His new confidence excites and frightens her.

BRAD

C'mon. We'll go away - figure this thing out... It's not weird. The kids are comfortable with each other. I know there's more to it than that, but let's do this. Please. Please, Sarah.

He kisses her deeply. Then pulls back slowly.

Sarah's face reacts with the force of someone who has just won the Lotto but has no idea where to redeem the ticket.

SARAH
(breathless)
...Okay.
(giggling)
Yes. Yes.

EXT. "TALK OF THE TOWN" TAVERN, PARKING LOT - LATER

Larry sits on the curb outside the entrance of the place, muttering.
His head buried in his lap, like a jilted lover.

LARRY
Brad.... Fuckin' Brad. I'm so sick of
hearing about that guy... OOOH Brad made
the Fuckin' touchdown.... Yeah, you know
why he didn't have the balls to show up
here tonight? Because I made the fuckin'
block... that's why he can't even look at
me. He's embarrassed to even see me.

Larry has worked himself into quite a lather. Then -

LARRY
(furious)
I hate everyone in this fuckin' town.

THE SOUND OF TIRES SCREECHING ON PAVEMENT

LARRY (O.C.)
(into a bullhorn)
WAKE UP!

INT. MCGORVEY HOUSE, MAY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

May lies in bed, her eyes open as if from a bad dream.

LARRY (O.C.)
WAKE UP! WAKE UP WOODWARD COURT!

May sits up in bed.

MAY
(as if to God)
Okay, I'm awake.

LARRY (O.C.)
OPEN YOUR EYES! GET YOUR GOD DAMN HEADS
OUT OF THE SAND!

MAY
(confused)
My heads? My God damn heads?

She stands too quickly, and has to sit back down to recover. She
takes a breath. Then slowly makes her way to the window.

LARRY (O.C.)
DON'T YOU PEOPLE LOVE YOUR CHILDREN?
DON'T YOU WANT TO PROTECT THEM FROM EVIL?

May pulls up the SHADE and looks down to see Larry standing in front
of her house.

LARRY
WOODWARD COURT! THERE'S A PERVERT IN YOUR
MIDST. THERE'S A GOD DAMN PERVERT IN YOUR
MIDST.

INT. MCGORVEY HOUSE, UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SAME

Larry's voice continues to emanate through the place.

The hallway light switches on. May crosses out of her bedroom,
throwing on a robe, while heading to the stairs.

Ronnie's head peaks out of his room.

MAY
It's okay, Ronnie. Just stay inside.

May hurries downstairs.

EXT. WOODWARD CT. - SAME

HOUSE LIGHTS up and down the street domino on. As Larry's rant continues.

EXT. MCGORVEY HOUSE, FRONT STOOP - SAME

The door opens on a very angry May, dressed in a NIGHTGOWN & ROBE.

MAY
You dirty son-of-a-bitch! Get off my lawn!

In a frenzy, she runs toward Larry in her bare feet.

MAY
Who the hell do you think you are? Mr.
High and Mighty?

Larry ignores her.

LARRY
(through bullhorn)
NO PERVERTS AT THE TOWN POOL! NO PERVERTS
AT THE TOWN POOL!

MAY
(shouting)
You think you're God? Far from it.

Larry inadvertently addresses her through the bullhorn.

LARRY
I KNOW I'M NOT GOD. I NEVER SAID I WAS.

MAY
You're the murderer. You killed the boy.

Larry lowers the bullhorn.

LARRY
I didn't murder anyone. Now why don't you
go back inside and put some clothes on.

MAY

You shot him through the neck.
I read it in the paper.

To his amazement, May lunges for the bullhorn, and tries to rip it out of his hands. She has no chance against his strength. He raises it into the air, and her along with it.

MAY

(angry)

Give me that. Just give it to me.

BIG GUY'S VOICE (O.C.)

Hey, Mister. You need to go home.

Larry glances over his shoulder, and sees two men standing by the curb - a BIG GUY in lightweight pajamas, and a LITTLE GUY dressed in a robe.

LITTLE GUY

The police are coming.

BIG GUY

You're scaring my kids. I wish you'd cut it out.

LARRY

(grunting)

Your kids need to be frightened.
They live across the street from a
pervert.

A SIREN BLARES IN THE DISTANCE

Larry's ears prick up at the threat, he looks down the street and then makes one last tug on the bullhorn. The momentum sends May tumbling backward onto her lawn. This goes unnoticed by Larry as he moves toward the sidewalk to see which direction the squad car will arrive.

The Big Guy and Little Guy run over to where May has fallen.

LITTLE GUY

Oh, My God! Mrs. McGorvey are you okay?

She's flat on her back, and unconscious.

BIG GUY

May!? May!? I think we better call and ambulance.

(shouting)

Karen! Call an ambulance right now!

KAREN (O.C.)

I'm doing it.

Larry finally sees what has happened, and tentatively makes his way over. He stares at May's twitching limbs and hears an AWFUL GURGLING NOISE coming from somewhere deep in her throat. Her eyes are WIDE OPEN, staring straight into his. Her lips are moving, but there aren't any words coming out. He looks scared.

LARRY

Oh, Fuck. This is all I need.

EXT. MCGORVEY HOUSE, FRONT YARD - LATER

GUMBALL LIGHT Rakes everything. People in nearby houses gawk from their porches. Other neighbors make their way down the street to get a better look at the scene.

MAY, attached to O₂ and an IV DRIP, lies supine on a GURNEY as she is loaded into a waiting ambulance by two EMT's.

LARRY sits in the back of a POLICE CRUISER watching it all.

A POLICE OFFICER leads RONNIE away from his mother's side, and back toward the front of the house. Ronnie turns his back on the cop. At this moment he is only interested in looking at one man -

LARRY - locked in the backseat of the squad car.

Ronnie's gaze is filled with an intensity we have never seen.

Larry, sees it too, and is the first to look away.

EXT. TAXICAB, EAST WYNDAM PRESBYTERIAN HOSPITAL - NIGHT

A cab pulls up to the curb. Ronnie gets out of the car, holding a WOMAN'S TRAVEL CASE, and heads toward the hospital entrance.

INT. ICU, WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

A TELEVISION mounted from the ceiling drones *Bloomberg*.

Other than a TEENAGE GIRL, reading *Time Magazine*, Ronnie is alone. A hand appears in front of him, holding a CUP OF COFFEE. He looks up in surprise to see -

A 30 year-old PUERTO RICAN WOMAN extending the beverage.

PUERTO RICAN WOMAN

Cafe con leche?

He nods, gratefully taking the cup from her hand. She sits down beside him and drinks from her own cup.

She opens her wallet and leans over to him, displaying its contents:

A Sears portrait of an older Puerto Rican woman.

PUERTO RICAN WOMAN

Madre.

Ronnie pats his pockets, and realizes he has no photo of May to share. He nods to the woman.

RONNIE

Me too. She's resting now.

INT. ICU, MAY'S ROOM - SAME

May lies in a hospital bed, attached to a ventilator, catheter, EKG diodes, and drip. A monitor SOUNDS its steady metronomic beep, as A NURSE'S HANDS steady an ENVELOPE that MAY is struggling to address:

"RONNIE"

INT. EAST WYNDAM POLICE STATION - SAME

A HAND, attached to the HASH MARKED SLEEVE of a POLICEMAN'S SHIRT, passes a MAN'S BELT, a PACK OF CHEWING GUM, and a WEDDING BAND across a recess on the underside of a Plexiglas walled counter. On the other side of the divider, a PAIR OF HANDS attached to a familiar SWEAT SHIRT receive the above.

On a PRISONER RELEASE FORM, a signature is made on a line above a typed name - *Larry Hedges*.

A WALL MOUNTED SECURITY MONITOR memorializes the exchange.

EXT. POLICE IMPOUND YARD - LATER

The street is empty, except for Larry, who glances around in all directions, as he makes his way over to a chain-length-fence, and rests his hands against it.

Out of nowhere A BARKING GERMAN SHEPARD leaps spread-eagle onto the fence and tries to bite Larry.

Larry, safely on the other side, jumps back, startled.

A LARGE MAN with a pot belly emerges from the impound office and pulls the dog back.

LARGE MAN
Get down - knock it off!

He grabs a chain that is permanently fastened to the side of the building and attaches it to the animal's collar. Then opens the chain-length-fence. The dog continues to bark.

Larry backs away, putting as much distance between himself and the Shepard as he can. Headlights smack Larry in the face as his van emerges from the back recesses of the lot, and pulls up to the fence.

Larry clocks the dog as he steps forward to retrieve his van.

The animal gives a constant low growl, not taking his eyes off Larry for a second.

Larry throws the van into gear, and takes off.

INT. LARRY'S VAN - NIGHT

He drives as if in a trance. Larry looks worriedly down at his right hand, which shakes uncontrollably. He tries to steady it by gripping the wheel, as if his life depended upon it.

INT. ICU WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

Ronnie, asleep in a chair, is alone in the room now. The TV continues to drone in the background.

A NURSE arrives at his side - she takes a seat beside Ronnie and, placing her hand on his shoulder, gently wakes him.

NURSE

Mr. McGorvey? Mr. McGorvey?

Ronnie stirs.

NURSE

I'm afraid we have some bad news.

Ronnie just stares at her.

INT. ICU STAFF COUNSELOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

A windowless office with fluorescent lighting. Day or night - the place remains the same. An ICU COUNSELOR is midway through a speech he's given too many times. By degree, his bedside manner only slightly more sensitive than a veteran police officer reading a perp their Miranda rights.

COUNSELOR

Do you have a mortuary to make the arrangements for you?

Silence.

COUNSELOR

It's not a problem. The hospital has a list I can provide you with. Now here's what's going to happen. Your mother's body will remain in her bed for up to three hours. Three hours is typical, but if there is a request for more time, depending on our occupancy, it's usually not a problem. If there's anyone you'd like to call - family, friends, they're welcome to full bedside visitation privileges before the body is taken downstairs to be prepped for transport. Do you have any questions that come to mind?

Ronnie is silent.

COUNSELOR

Anything we can help you with?

Ronnie finally looks up.

RONNIE

...no.

COUNSELOR

Okay. I'd like to remind you to take all of your mother's personal belongings with you before leaving the hospital today.

COUNSELOR (CONT)

And all I need from you now is to sign
this release-of-remains form.

He slides a clipboard across the desk.

EXT. HOSPITAL, PARKING LOT - FOLLOWING AFTERNOON

A dazed Ronnie leaves the hospital, clutching May's travel case. He heads down the sidewalk, but stops suddenly when he sees -

The same cab that dropped him off the night before, waiting at the curb. Ronnie heads over and gets into the back seat. The car pulls away.

As it leaves the hospital parking lot it passes -

LARRY, sitting in his van at the other end of the parking lot - watching.

INT. MCGORVEY HOUSE, ENTRY WAY - LATE AFTERNOON

The door opens and closes to RONNIE'S FEET. They make their way inside, and over to A PAIR of MAY'S SHOES, that sit patiently waiting for her return.

INT. MCGORVEY HOUSE, MAY'S BEDROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Ronnie's hands unpack May's travel case. He removes each item, and gently lays them onto the bed: A compact, a toothbrush, moisturizing creme, and a hairbrush. He is about to close the lid, when he spots something on the bottom of the case, AN ENVELOPE with a single word roughly scrawled across its front - "Ronnie."

INT. MCGORVEY HOUSE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

The kitchen light flicks on. Ronnie stands in the doorway, the unopened envelope in his hand, taking stock of the mess he's made in the past few days - UNWASHED DISHES piled up in the sink, yesterday's HALF-EATEN DINNER still sitting on the table, right next to an OVERFLOWING ASHTRAY.

A PLAY-TEX RUBBER GLOVE is tugged over a hand.

The faucet runs, filling a pot with sudsy water.

A determined Ronnie reaches for a sponge & gets down to work.

LATER

The gloves come off, and are tossed in the sink. The kitchen looks clean.

Ronnie crosses over to the kitchen table and sits.

He stares at the UNOPENED ENVELOPE, now resting in the fruit basket. He tentatively picks it up, and slowly turns it over in his hands. How long should he wait to have this conversation with his mother?

He waits, but a moment, and then opens it.

A single line of script, "Please be a good boy."

His face begins to contort, as if he's in real pain. He drops the piece of paper and flees the kitchen.

LIVING ROOM

He flies into the room, talking to himself, while he moves straight to the many shelves full of HUMMEL FIGURINES. He stares at a myriad of innocent faces. The little boys & girls in halcyon settings seem to be mocking him. It is the hour, and suddenly all of the clocks begin to strike. So does Ronnie. With a frightening intensity - smashing, throwing, and destroying the figurines, the clocks - all of it. He displays an energy and determination we have never seen.

INT. BRAD'S HOUSE, HALLWAY - NIGHT

Brad makes his way along the upstairs hallway, stopping outside the doorway of -

AARON'S ROOM

Brad stands there a moment staring at his, jester-cap clad, son asleep on his bed.

After a moment, Brad kneels down and shakes the boy awake.

BRAD
(whispers)
Aaron?

Aaron nods. And sits up a little. Brad takes a deep breath, studying his son, who gazes back at him with trusting eyes.

BRAD
Aaron?

AARON
(sleepy)
Yes, daddy?

BRAD
(almost pleading)
Could you take off your hat for me? Just for a second?

To Brad's surprise, Aaron does as he's told.

AARON
Are you mad at me, daddy?

BRAD
No, No, No. I just want you to know that I love you very much, and I would never do anything to hurt you. Okay?

AARON
...okay.

Brad leans over and kisses Aaron on the cheek.

BRAD
You can go back to sleep now.

INT. BRAD'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - LATER

CLOSE ON a piece of paper being slipped into an envelope. It rises up to BRAD'S LIPS, and he licks the flap. The front is addressed with a single word - "Kathy."

His eyes stray to Kathy's bedside table on which rests a framed picture of husband & wife. Kathy standing in front of Brad - protective.

HALLWAY

Marjorie and Kathy busy themselves with after-dinner clean-up. In the hallway behind them, Brad passes unnoticed on his way to the front door, carrying a SMALL GYM BAG.

He opens the door, glances over his shoulder toward the kitchen, and leaves the house.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - SAME

Sarah rounds the bottom of the stairs to find Lucy, in front of the television, watching Charlie Rose.

She crosses to Lucy, kneels down, and picks her up.

SARAH

Lucy, come on. Let's go.

EXT. SARAH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Sarah emerges with the child on her hip, her free hand struggling with the overnight bag and a Barbie backpack. She barrels toward her Volvo, opens the back door and is immediately faced with the impossibility of Lucy's car seat.

LUCY

I will not get in the car seat!

Sarah struggles to load her in. Lucy goes completely stiff and straight making this an impossibility.

SARAH

Yes, you will. You will get in the car seat.

LUCY

No. I will not.

SARAH

(pleading)
Please!?

CUT TO:

THE OPPOSITE BACK PASSENGER DOOR OPENS

Sarah tries to appear calm.

SARAH
Alright, you don't have to get into the car seat. You can just lie here.

She lays Lucy onto the back seat. Lucy allows this.

SARAH
No, actually...

She puts the child down on the floor.

SARAH
...get on the floor. Now just stay on the floor. Stay on the floor and hide. Or mommy will get arrested. Okay?

Sarah shuts the door.

INT. MCGORVEY HOUSE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Looking wild-eyed and muttering angrily to himself, Ronnie rummages through a CUTLERY DRAWER until he finds what he's looking for. He draws his finger along the blade of a BUTCHER KNIFE, testing its sharpness.

EXT. WALKER STREET PLAYGROUND - NIGHT

Sarah, carrying Lucy, arrives at the playground, entering through the front gate. Sarah turns and closes the latch with a clank.

LUCY
Mommy. I want to go home?

SARAH
(impatient)
In a minute. As soon as Brad gets here.

INT/EXT. LARRY'S VAN, MCGORVEY HOUSE - NIGHT

Larry's parked outside Ronnie's house, staring at the front door.

THE SOUND OF A DOORBELL RINGING

INT. MCGORVEY HOUSE, FRONT HALL - MOMENTS LATER

The entry way is unoccupied. No one moves to answer the door. The ringing stops. We hear the SOUND of knocking, and the door slowly opens to reveal Larry. He looks nervous, unsure how to proceed without the obstacle of a gatekeeper.

LARRY
Ronnie?

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Brad, carrying his gym bag, walks past the darkened businesses in the town center. He looks like a robot, or a man heading to the gallows. Finally he picks up the pace to his normal gate - breaks into a trot, and then a full out sprint.

EXT. WALKER STREET PLAYGROUND - SAME

Sarah pushes Lucy on the swing. She steals a look at her watch, and then glances toward the front gate. She turns back around and continues pushing the swing. Her ears perk up at the sound of RAPIDLY APPROACHING FOOTSTEPS she smiles. The gate clanks open. She smiles and turns toward the sound. But instead of finding Brad -

It's RONNIE.

His hands are buried beneath his shirt, and he is moaning. His hunched-over figure makes his way past her, and over to the swingset at the opposite end of the park.

SARAH

Oh, my God.

Almost unconsciously, she continues to push Lucy. The metronomic rhythm some sort of odd comfort. She keeps her eyes trained on this man, and then steals an expectant look back toward -

THE ENTRANCE OF THE PLAYGROUND.

EXT. MUNICIPAL LIBRARY - SAME

Brad sprints down the street past the library. But at precisely this moment "G" comes flying through the air on his skateboard, and sails right across his path. Brad comes to a complete stop. His eyes follow the boy.

"G" (O.C.)

Hey, dude. What's your hurry?

As if in a trance, Brad walks straight up to the skateboarders, who are gathered around a steep concrete stairway. He has never been this close to them. Brad stands next to "G", who watches one of his minions fly off the staircase. The boy turns to him, extending his board.

"G"

Why don't you take a run.

ANOTHER SKATER

Give it a shot, see what happens.

BRAD

You guys are crazy.

(pointing to the stairway)
I can't do that.

"G"

It's not about that.

He speaks to Brad as if this is the most important piece of wisdom one person could impart to another.

"G"

It's about skating.

CUT TO:

EXT. MUNICIPAL LIBRARY - MOMENTS LATER

Brad stands on the board, poised at beginning of a long run of concrete. He kicks forward gaining speed. The skateboarders urge him on with shouts, whoops, and cries of encouragement. He will need it. His approach to the stairway is coming up fast. It must be right. Here it is. He launches off the stairway, catching an unbelievable amount of air.

EXT. WALKER STREET PLAYGROUND - SAME

Sarah, trying to ignore Ronnie's presence, glances over her shoulder expecting Brad's arrival.

The SOUND of Ronnie sobbing is something she can no longer ignore. She turns to see -

Him hunched over on his swing, crying uncontrollably.

She pauses just a moment, and then abandons Lucy's swing, and makes her way over toward the other end of the park. Stopping half-way between the two structures.

She wears a look of uncertainty on her face as she takes a couple of hesitant steps in his direction.

SARAH
... do you need help?

He looks up at her in shock, and then nods.

RONNIE
(through tears)
...she's gone.

He can hardly get the words out.

RONNIE
...she's ...gone.

Sarah doesn't know who "she" is, even so, she offers what little solace she can.

SARAH
(gently)
...who? ...who's gone?

RONNIE
... mommy.

SARAH
I'm... I'm sorry.

RONNIE
She loved me.

A moment.

RONNIE
She's the only one.

He drops his head back down, and continues to sob. What he says from this point on is to himself. For him, Sarah no longer exists.

RONNIE
Mommy died... mommy died...

Sarah is at a complete loss. She stands dumbstruck for a moment.

The SOUND of the ENTRANCE GATE clanking shut, turns her around, expecting to find Brad.

Instead she finds Lucy's empty swing, swaying back-and-forth.

Sarah panics.

SARAH
Lucy?!

Nothing.

SARAH
LUCY!!!

Nothing.

The child is nowhere in sight. Sarah scans the tiny playground. The child has disappeared. Sarah sprints away from Ronnie, and begins searching the shadows.

SARAH
(screaming now)
LUCY!!!!!!

NOTHING

Sarah sprints toward the entrance, and emerges onto -

THE STREET - She looks up and down in both directions. Her face primal, as is her cry.

SARAH
LUCY!!!!!!

A moment of terror that feels like an eternity.

Finally, about a hundred yards down the sidewalk she sees -

LUCY - The child stands at the base of a street light staring up at the lamp, as if hypnotized.

INSECTS flutter in groups, propelling themselves against the vapor.

The child is utterly absorbed.

Sarah's face relaxes. Though it wears the confusion of her sudden outburst and momentary sense of loss.

SARAH
Lucy!

Sarah runs to Lucy, scoops her into her arms, and heads to her -

CAR

Almost hyperventilating now.

SARAH

(angry)

Get in the car-seat. Get in the car-seat.

The child does not fight her.

Sarah's sense of urgency verges on panic. She attempts to strap Lucy into the seat, but her shaking hands make a mess of it. Finally she just gives up. Sarah lurches forward and begins to sob uncontrollably into her child's lap.

Lucy looks down at her mother, concerned.

She lifts up her tiny hand and places it on top of Sarah's head - gently stroking it, back and forth.

LUCY

It's okay, mommy. It's okay.

Lucy continues to caress Sarah's head, and this seems to calm her.

Sarah raises her head up, and looks at her daughter. Her eyes unwavering, transfixed by the child's face, which greets her with unconditional trust. The two suspended together. Nothing else exists.

Lucy stares at her mother curiously.

And it is in this moment that something essential in Sarah completely transforms.

SARAH

... oh, Lucy.

She leans forward and embraces her daughter.

SARAH

I'm sorry... I'm so sorry.

She kisses her daughter's nose, forehead, and cheek.

SARAH

(whispers)

Would you like to go home?

The child nods.

SARAH

Okay, let's go.

Sarah gets to her feet, closes the back door, and climbs into the front.

EXT. WALKER PARK, RATHBUN AVENUE - NIGHT

Her car pulls away from the park, where, for a split second it crosses paths with an AMBULANCE heading the opposite direction. Sarah slows to a safe distance before continuing on her way.

EXT. MUNICIPAL LIBRARY - NIGHT

DeWayne, looking very official, towers over us dressed in a police uniform. He crouches slowly, his face full of concern.

DEWAYNE

Brad?

Brad lies flat on his back.

DEWAYNE

Brad? Can you hear me?

His eyes flutter open.

DEWAYNE

Don't move, the ambulance is on its way.

He stares up at DeWayne, as if suddenly waking from a dream.

BRAD

(groggy)

Jesus, what happened to me?

DEWAYNE

I don't know, but these kids say you've been out cold for the last five minutes.

"G" appears next to DeWayne.

"G"

Man, you almost had it.

Another boarder joins "G" and DeWayne.

ANOTHER BOARDER

Dude, you were awesome.

STILL ANOTHER BOARDER

Man that shit was knarly.

A small smile of satisfaction forms on Brad's face.

DEWAYNE

Alright back-up. Back-up. Give him some room.

(to Brad)

Just hold still. Hold still. Everything is going to be alright.

EXT/INT. MUNICIPAL LIBRARY, AMBULANCE - NIGHT

Strapped onto a GURNEY, Brad is lifted into the ambulance. The AMBULANCE ATTENDANT is about to shut the door when "G" interrupts.

"G"
Hey, bro. This fell out of your pocket.

He extends the envelope addressed to "Kathy."

Brad frowns.

BRAD
(waving him off)
Thanks, I don't need it anymore.

Brad raises his head, making eye contact with DeWayne.

BRAD
DeWayne? Could you call my wife?

DEWAYNE
You got it buddy.

EXT. WALKER STREET PLAYGROUND - NIGHT

From a distance we see Ronnie sitting alone on his swing, still hunched forward with his hands in his lap, moaning. Slowly we make up the distance, moving toward him - The SOUND of gravel under moving feet - Someone is coming.

As we arrive at his back, the crunch of gravel STOPS. Still lost in his own private hell, Ronnie is oblivious. A large male hand reaches out and comes to rest on his shoulder.

MALE VOICE (O.C.)
I'm so sorry Ronnie...I really am.

Ronnie's head jolts up. Suddenly present. His face scared, but also angry. He is looking at -

LARRY

LARRY
I never wanted anything like this to happen.

Ronnie just stares at him.

Ashamed, Larry averts his eyes, and stares at the ground.

And he sees something from this proximity that Sarah completely missed from her vantage point: beneath the seat of Ronnie's swing, drops of blood trickle to the sand below.

Larry's eyes go wide. He looks up to Ronnie.

LARRY
(scared)
... are you...are you okay?

Ronnie smiles.

He stands up and takes a couple of steps away from Larry. He turns to face him, and drops his pants.

From behind it is apparent he has wrapped his lower extremities in rolls and rolls of cotton gauze - like a paper towel, the white texture rapidly absorbing red.

Larry stares at Ronnie's crotch. Horrified.

RONNIE

... I'm... I'm gonna be good now.

Ronnie's legs go rubbery, and he begins to collapse.

Before he hits the deck, Larry catches Ronnie in his arms, lifts him off the ground, and quickly carries him to the -

PARKING LOT

THE SIDE DOOR of the van opens, and Larry carefully lays Ronnie down in back and covers him with a blanket. Larry, now covered in blood, looks down at Ronnie worried.

LARRY

Hold on Ronnie. I'm not gonna let anything happen to you. You hold on!

He closes the door, and runs around to the driver's side, jumps in, starts the van, pulls a portable GUMBALL light from under the dash and places it onto the roof.

VOICE

In his wildest dreams, Larry would have never imagined he'd once again be in this position, where precious minutes count.

Larry's van screeches out and tears down the road, driving like there's no tomorrow.

INT. LARRY'S VAN, EAST WYNDAM ROAD - MOVING FAST

RED LIGHT rakes the van interior, and the road ahead.

VOICE

Tonight he could save a life.

Larry turns in his seat, and screams encouragement to Ronnie in back. Words we cannot hear.

VOICE

He knew Ronnie had done some bad things in the past - but so had Larry.

EXT. PRESBYTERIAN HOSPITAL, AMBULATORY ENTRANCE - NIGHT

TWO NURSES, and a YOUNG DOCTOR rush forward through automatic doors, and are immediately bathed in red GUMBALL light.

VOICE

You couldn't change the past...

The GURNEY is pulled out the back of the AMBULANCE, as KATHY rushes past MEDICAL TECHNICIANS to reach BRAD.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, LUCY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

On her side next to a sleeping Lucy, Sarah reaches up and kills the bedside lamp. She remains in the tiny bed with her child.

VOICE

... but the future could be a different story...

EXT. SARAH'S HOUSE, ROOF LINE -- NIGHT

Rise with the wind up over roof-tops and tree-tops -- All of East Wyndam laid out like a wood-cut in monochromatic relief.

VOICE

... and it had to start somewhere.

A gust kicks up, the trees begin to sing, their branches dance. The distant sound of metal on metal, *ping, ping, ping*.

The view begins to slide back to where we started, looking straight down at the playground, now empty and quiet, save for the chain of a single swing that stubbornly beats its tune into the structure.

BLACK

- THE END -