

HMS 2nd Revised Network Draft 1.6.10  
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HMS

Pilot episode

"White Coat"

by

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registered WGAW

"WHITE COAT"

TEASER

EXT. HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL (HMS) - DAY

A city bus pulls to the curb directly across from Harvard Medical School. The doors swing open and NELL LARSON (23) steps off carrying a duffle. Torn jeans hang off slim hips. A men's tie works for a belt. Nell's faded, artfully cut T-shirt says "Larson's Lunch Box".

The BUS DRIVER hands her several large cardboard boxes. She piles her stuff on the curb, straightens. The bus drives away clearing Nell's view of the academic quad. It's monumental, almost Grecian in scale. Five huge white marble buildings with giant pillars.

An elderly AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN sits on a nearby bench. Nell approaches.

NELL

Could you watch these just one second?

The woman nods. Nell runs across the street and into the center of the quad. She spins around, pulls out her cell, hits number one on the speed dial. The screen flashes "Zack".

ZACK (O.S.)

Island Stone and Gardens.

NELL

I'm here.

ZACK (O.S.)

Talk to me.

NELL

This place is like....I don't know....a temple of medicine. And Zack, I am going to bring it to it's knees.

ZACK (O.S.)

(laughing)

Kick booty, baby. Send me a picture.

NELL

Coming at you.

Nell uses the camera on the phone, holding it at arm's length. Bang. We see the PHOTO of Nell in the famous great white quadrangle at Harvard Medical School. Crooked. Smiling. A streak of sun hitting her hair.

EXT. VANDERBILT HALL (AKA "VANDY")- DAY

Nell drags the duffle and kicks the boxes towards the front entrance of the dorm. The building is brick, three stories, 19th century. Other students are being dropped off by parents or friends, unloading Subaru Outbacks, the occasional Prius, fancy Hybrid SUV's.

INT. VANDERBILT HALL - DAY

Swarming with people. Nell glances at the students. Clean cut. More chino than denim. Ethnically diverse. Preppies, Asians, Indians (from India) African Americans, Latinos. A rainbow.

Tables are set up, manned by second and third year medical students. Nell goes to the first one.

NELL

Nell Larson.

SECOND YEAR STUDENT

Room 203.

(hands her a key)

Welcome to Harvard Medical School.

Nell drags her stuff to the next table which groans with goodies: Harvard pens, HMS back packs, HMS notebooks, HMS lariats to hold ID tags. Nell looks at it all with longing.

NELL

How much?

THIRD YEAR STUDENT

Free.

Nell grins, loads up on everything. Then she spots the real prize...an HMS back pack. She grabs the last one at the same time as....

NATE DAVID, 24, a star jock, head of student council type. They both hold fast, look up. Eyes lock. Nate's broad shoulders taper to a narrow waist. He wears a worn leather jacket covered with varsity letters. Gorgeous. She rocks back on her heels, unprepared for this. He takes one look at her, releases the back pack.

NATE

All yours.

NELL  
No, really.

NATE  
It'll look better on you.

He sees what's written on her T-shirt, uses it to prolong the moment.

NATE (CONT'D)  
Hey, Larson's Lunch Box. Know it well. The fried clams are off the hook. Pun intended.

NELL  
My family owns the place.

NATE  
No kidding. So you live on the island?

NELL  
For about 400 years. Larsons have been there forever. When were you-

NATE  
Summer of 2008. Visiting the Wellers.

NELL  
We care-take their place. Hedge fund, right?

NATE  
Bond trader. I'm Nate David.

NELL  
Nell.

They shake. He holds on a moment too long. She literally has to take a step back to defuse the attraction.

NELL (CONT'D)  
This moving in is a bit overwhelming. Gotta go. See ya'.

Nate heads off with a wave. Nell goes back to her boxes, now all the more unwieldy with the addition of the shiny new things. She starts humping them to the elevator.

THREE BURLY MOVERS sweep past, bringing in furniture under the guidance of BRITTANY LACE, 24. Brittany is classy, fearless, super bright, super rich. Reese Witherspoon type.

She wears Acne jeans and a Black Hearts Brigade double T-shirt, moss green Tod's ankle boots, carries a Kelly bag.

BRITTANY  
 (calls to the movers, re a  
 big box)  
 Careful with that one! It's  
 precious to me.

As Nell punches the elevator button.

NELL  
 What's in it?

BRITTANY  
 Cinema display HD Apple with Blu-ray and surround sound speakers.

NELL  
 (genial)  
 Damn, girl. And I was so down with  
 my four year old Dell.

Nell starts shoving the boxes into the elevator. Brittany takes a beat, registers Nell's situation.

BRITTANY  
 You on your own?

NELL  
 'Fraid so.

BRITTANY  
 (calls to the movers)  
 Guys. Lend a hand, here. Toss  
 these boxes on our dolly.

The movers come and quickly take Nell's stuff. Nell straightens, pleasantly surprised at Brittany's generosity.

NELL  
 Thanks. I'm Nell Larson.

BRITTANY  
 Brittany Lace. Brit to my friends.

INT. SECOND FLOOR VANDERBILT HALL - DAY

One of the movers leaves Nell's stuff by her door.

NELL  
 (with genuine warmth)  
 You're a real life saver.

BRITTANY

No problem.  
 (re: the HMS back pack)  
 Word. No one uses this free stuff.  
 So not cool.

NELL

(shrugs)  
 It's Christmas to me. Give a call  
 when you break in that blu ray.  
 I'll bring the beer.

BRITTANY

(waves as she heads off)  
 Excellent. I have "Twilight" and  
 "New Moon".

NELL

Oh my God! I'm a total vampire  
 geek. Robert Pattinson -

BRITTANY

-is to die for.

They both laugh. A connection. As Brit disappears around  
 the corner, she calls to the movers.

BRITTANY (CONT'D)

Be careful with that Nakashima  
 desk! It's museum quality.

INT. NELL'S ROOM - DAY

Nell enters her room, closes the door behind her, looks  
 around at the standard issue dorm furniture. Spare to the  
 point of grim. But to Nell, perfect. She pulls back the  
 curtain. She has a beautiful view of the quad.

NELL

(soft, to herself)  
 I'm here.

She leaps up on the bed and starts jumping like an eight year  
 old. She's blissfully happy.

END TEASER

ACT ONE

EXT. MEDICAL EDUCATION CENTER - (MEC) - DAY

The eastern arm of the quad. Students swarm through the double glass door.

INT. AUDITORIUM - DAY

Rows of seats in a semi-circle stacked like an IMAX theatre. Nell drops into a good spot, opens her new HMS notebook filled with blank paper. She pulls out her shiny Harvard pen and writes "Nell Larson, Harvard Medical School. 1st Year". Looks damn good.

Brittany plops into the next seat. She's changed into another mad stylish outfit: tight short Armani jacket over burnout leggings.

BRITTANY

They towed my Beemer.

NELL

Bummer.

BRITTANY

Note to self. Get Daddy to buy me a parking spot near the dorm.

NELL

Note to self.  
(pretending to write)  
Buy bus tokens.

Brittany laughs. A young woman climbs over both of them clutching books and a large thrift store handbag. AUTUMN LEE. Asian, gentle, nerdy repressed and terminally literal.

Autumn flops down, opens her notebook, already filled with binders, a pen holder, calculator, full internal map of human organ system etc. She pulls out a hand held tape recorder, ready to start taking notes.

BRITTANY

Chill, guys. It's orientation. No pop quiz later.

Autumn looks up.

AUTUMN

(blank)  
I always take notes.

DR. JOSEPH STRYKER moves to the podium. 50. Uptight. Blue blazer and regulation bow tie. A textbook Boston Brahmin. The face of old Harvard.

DR. STRYKER  
Good morning.

Silence. Dr. Stryker cups his ear.

DR. GOODMAN  
I said good morning!

STUDENTS  
(loud)  
Good morning!

DR. STRYKER  
That's better. I'm Dr. Joseph Stryker, Dean of Harvard Medical School. You are among the finest young minds entering medicine today. As they say in the airlines, we know you could have gone elsewhere. But you have chosen the best. And so have we.  
(beat)  
Today we ask you to begin your journey by diagnosing yourself. Soon we'll be holding the White Coat Ceremony where you'll be given the uniform of our profession. You'll be asked to speak about who you are and why you want to be a doctor. Spend the week preparing your "self-diagnosis", and as you don the white coat for the first time, share with us what you've discovered.

INT. HIGH TECH COMPUTING FACILITY - DAY

An Arab man, DR. HASAMI leads a smaller group of students on a multi-media tour through the incredible technical facilities of HMS. Hasami is self-important, dressed head to toe in black. Nell, Brittany and Autumn are still together.

DR. HASAMI  
I know all of you think you can handle anything Harvard throws at you. Hold on to that illusion as long as you can. Soon you'll be buried in a thousand pages of material to read a week.

(MORE)

DR. HASAMI (CONT'D)

One in four of you will become clinically depressed. One in ten will consider suicide.

Nell frowns, somewhat thrown by this information. Autumn writes carefully...."Consider suicide!!!" Brittany rolls her eyes, not the least intimidated. An AIDE hands out PDA's.

DR. HASAMI (CONT'D)

Keep your PDA with you at all times. On board you have information on drugs, diseases, and diagnostics, everything required for today's health care professional. On line at the HMS student site you will find 20,000 handouts, 500 textbooks, all major medical periodicals and every lecture of every class you will ever take at HMS. The campus is wireless everywhere. If you have technical questions, speak to one of your classmates, Krishna.

Hasami indicates a genial, happy-go-lucky Indian-American uber geek, KRISHNA, 23.

DR. HASAMI (CONT'D)

Krishna designed the "My Courses" software we run on here at Harvard.

NELL

(whispers low)

Maybe he can install a USB port so I can download all this information directly to my brain.

Autumn is staring at the dorky Krishna, smitten.

AUTUMN

I wonder if he has a girlfriend. He is smokin' hot.

INT. MEC - ADMINISTRATION AREA - DAY

A line snakes down the corridor. Nell looks through her orientation booklet as Brittany has her photo ID taken.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Smile.

BRITTANY

Helmut Newton took my baby pictures.

(MORE)

BRITTANY (CONT'D)

Annie Leibovitz shot my 13th birthday party. Trust me, I know how to handle myself in front of a camera.

Brittany tilts her chin down, keeps her eyes open, looks pleasant, does not smile. The photographer fires. We see a QUICK CUT of the photo. It's great. Nell sits down next. Big smile.

INT. BASEMENT - MEC - DAY

Nell comes down the hall, looking with distaste at her ID.

NATE (O.S.)

Does it do you justice?

She looks up, finds Nate at the locker next to hers.

NELL

The good news is, one of my eyes is open.

She shows him the ID. He winces.

NATE

This will make you feel better.

He pulls out his wallet, flips to his driver's license. He's completely bald in that photo, looks like a jerk.

NELL

Whoa.

(she laughs, grabs it)

You don't seem the skinhead type. Why'd you pull a Brittany Spears?

NATE

(ducking the question)

It's a long story.

NELL

Now I'm totally curious. Come on.

Nate realizes he can't get out of it, speaks quickly, off-hand.

NATE

A buddy of mine got cancer. He lost all his hair in chemo, so I shaved mine to keep him company.

Nell freezes, totally amazed. She watches as he puts the wallet away. He looks up. Their eyes meet. And hold.

This guy is dangerously cool. Nell catches herself, quickly turns away, gets out a large photo of herself with ZACK from her back pack, slaps it up on the inside of her locker.

NATE (CONT'D)  
 (hopeful)  
 Your brother?

NELL  
 Is thirteen. With freckles.

NATE  
 Looks serious.

NELL  
 Since sophomore homecoming.

Nate nods, clearly disappointed. ACE passes. 24. About six foot six. African American. Dreadlocks.

ACE  
 Nate, pick up basketball at Vandy  
 in ten.

NATE  
 I'll be there.

He waves to Nell as he walks off. We see CARLOS at the next locker. Latino, obviously gay, handsome, wears a small crucifix. Both Carlos and Nell check out Nate's amazing butt.

CARLOS  
 Goal for the semester. Convince  
 that boy he has an inner diva.

EXT. VANDERBILT HALL - DAY

Two roach coaches are in constant residence. One serves middle eastern food, the other Chinese. Nell gets a plate of falafel, goes inside.

INT. BASKETBALL COURT - VANDY - DAY

The guys have the pick-up game going. The court is indoors, has a huge HMS in block letters in the center. Nell passes by with her food, pauses to look. All the boys are stripped to the waist.

Carlos is on the sidelines, acting like a cheerleader. Ace handles the ball like a Harlem Globetrotter, double-dribbles and spins down the court with grace and ease, generously passes to Nate, who scores a three pointer.

Nate and Ace high five, then Nate glances up and sees Nell. Waves. She moves on. Quickly.

INT. NELL'S ROOM - DAY

Nell eats her lunch. She hasn't made much progress unpacking. Autumn walks by the door then comes back, sticks her head in.

AUTUMN

You know why they call it falafel?

NELL

Uh, no.

AUTUMN

Cause afterwards you feel awful.

Long beat. Then Autumn turns without further comment, goes.

INT. AUTUMN'S ROOM - DAY

Autumn's door is decorated with a leaf that says AUTUMN LEE, as if she were in kindergarten. Nell enters. The room is impeccably neat. She already has piles of textbooks, study aids, posters, a full reproduction of a skeleton, flash cards, post-it reminders of unimportant deadlines, and a pile of surgical instruments. Autumn is sorting through the books, putting them on shelves.

NELL

What are you doing?

AUTUMN

Alphabetizing my text books. I have a tinge of OCD.

NELL

Wow. Sorry. Hey, if you ever feel snowed, come study with me. I shadowed our family doc every summer all through college. I think I have a handle on things.

Nell rises to go, notes a Yale banner on the wall.

NELL (CONT'D)

You went to Yale?

AUTUMN

Graduated in three years. Spent my gap year volunteering at a pediatric hospital in India.

NELL

Wow.  
 (she sees a trophy)  
 What's this?

AUTUMN

(always literal)  
 A trophy.

Nell picks it up, reads "Tournament of Champions, COLLEGE JEOPARDY".

NELL

You.....won.....college Jeopardy?

AUTUMN

In a blowout. Got fifty grand and a Mustang, too.

Nell is now totally thrown. Tries to cover with humor.

NELL

Hey. I have a trophy. Come to my room and check it out. Yep. Took the gold at the Tisbury Fair this summer.

(beat)  
 Pie eating contest.

Autumn just nods. Very interesting. Nell exits.

INT. HALLWAY - VANDY - DAY

Nell stands, mildly in shock. Looks down the hall where another student is practicing T'ai Chi, floating like a grand master, which in fact, he is.

HANK comes out of the door across. 30. Wears a biker jacket. Rougher looking than the other students. Tattoo of an eagle on his forearm. Currently pissed.

HANK

Does anyone have more than one outlet in their room? I've got a recording studio to hook up!

He goes back in, slams his door. Hard. Nell remains in the hallway. Who are these people?

EXT. MEC - DAY

Establishing.

INT. MEC 424 - MEDICAL SIMULATION LAB - DAY

DR. DINO, 33 (off-beat, edgy, fast talking, irreverent with a black sense of humor) leads a seminar of twelve students. Among them we see Autumn, Ace, Hank, Nate, Nell and Carlos.

DR. DINO

So, here's the problem. Day one. Time to start teaching you certain basic procedures. But we can't let you practice on an actual human because you are ignoramuses. So we've taken a page from the aviation industry. If you want to be a pilot, you don't start at the controls of a 747. You train on a flight simulator.

Dr. Dino pulls back a curtain and reveals a "patient" lying on a gurney hooked up to machines and tubes.

DR. DINO (CONT'D)

Meet Stan for "standardized patient". Stan is a high-fidelity patient simulator.

(he knocks on Stan's chest)

Stan, my man. Wake up. We have visitors.

Stan's eyes flutter open. A heart beat starts up. Machines pulse to life all around the students.

STAN

Get away from me you incompetent sod!

Nell and the other students jump back, explode with nervous laughter.

DR. DINO

Yes, Stan talks. He also breathes, blinks, bleeds, his pupils dilate, he has a reactive temperature, and...

There's a tinkling sound. A tube from under the sheets leads to a bag now filling with yellow fluid.

DR. DINO (CONT'D)

...he urinates. Treat him for whatever ails him and Stan will react appropriately.

STAN  
Help me! I have a terrible pain.

DR. DINO  
Anyone know what to do for this patient?

The students exchange nervous looks. Is he kidding?

ACE  
Call a doctor?

More laughter. Dr. Dino steps back. No one makes a move. Stan continues moaning. It's unnerving.

DR. DINO  
Come on. I need a volunteer. You can't let this poor man suffer.

No one wants to be the guinea pig. Finally Nell raises her hand.

NELL  
Can I to talk to him?

DR. DINO  
That would be advisable.

NELL  
(approaching, tentative)  
Hello Stan....I'm Nell Larson.  
Where does it hurt?

STAN  
My chest!

NELL  
Does the pain radiate down your arm?

STAN  
Yes.

NELL  
Is it sharp, burning, crushing, heavy?

STAN  
Burning. Can't breathe.

Brit and Nate exchange looks, impressed at Nell's growing confidence and the odd kindness with which she instinctively treats the dummy.

NELL  
Heart attack?

DR. DINO  
Amazing. A diagnosis. After just  
three questions and no physical  
exam!  
(points to a machine)  
Small problem. The EKG is normal.

Nell colors. One tall, arrogant student, LEO, snickers.

LEO  
You can't just guess. It could be  
something incredibly simple, like  
heartburn or acid reflux.

Nell is chastened, remains silent. Stan, however, starts to SCREAM like a banshee. It's incredibly unnerving. Nell finds herself patting Stan's arm to comfort him, forgetting he's a dummy. Nate watches this, both touched and impressed.

NELL  
Take it easy, Stan. You're going  
to be all right. We'll help you.  
(to Dr. Dino)  
Can we give him something for the  
pain?

DR. DINO  
Your call. There's medication on  
the counter.

Nell searches among the vials, gets one that says MORPHINE. She rapidly and expertly injects the drug into Stan's IV. Everyone waits. Stan quiets. Nell relaxes. Better. But then Stan's heartbeat, which is amplified in the room, slows.

DR. DINO (CONT'D)  
Apparently the morphine suppressed  
his vitals. What now? Your  
patient is crashing.

NELL  
(confused)  
I gave him a small dose. It  
couldn't have done any harm.

DR. DINO  
Unless he's allergic. You never  
checked his chart or took a  
history.

NELL

You didn't say he had a chart! And how can he have a history? He's a dummy.

DR. DINO

Every patient has a history. Together with a physical exam, it's the key to diagnosis.

AUTUMN

Look, he's developing a rash!

Red bumps are appearing on the arms and face of the dummy.

DR. DINO

An acute allergic reaction to the morphine, possibly complicated by alcohol in Stan's system.

Stan emits a heart wrenching groan. His heartbeat stops.

HANK

Damn. He's in cardiac arrest.

CARLOS

(blurts out)

Someone do something. He's dying!

Nell immediately starts CPR. Her technique is impressive and no one else lifts a finger. But the CPR has no effect. The clock is ticking. The heart not beating. Nell is sweating, panicked, finally looks up as Dr. Dino shuts off the monitors. The room falls silent as Dino's arrogant eyes bore in on Nell with a hint of mocking.

DR. DINO

Congratulations. You just killed your first patient.

ON NELL....devastated.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. LOWER HALLWAYS - DAY

Nell stands by her locker seeing absolutely nothing. People surge around her. Brittany approaches.

BRITTANY

I hear you croaked the dummy.

NELL

Don't laugh. It was horrible.

Nate appears.

NATE

Not at all. You jumped right in when the rest of us were clueless. You asked all right questions. Your CPR was flawless.

Carlos opens a nearby locker.

CARLOS

Dr. Dino never mentioned a chart or a history.

BRITTANY

It was a total set up.

NATE

He probably does this every year. Kills the patient to scare the first year students.

NELL

You think so?

NATE

Yeah, you were fantastic.

Nell smiles at Nate gratefully, but doesn't seem convinced as she walks off with Brittany. Nate watches the two of them as Ace and Hank move in.

ACE

Smooth move, Captain Save-a-'ho.

HANK

Yeah, you spit some serious game.

ACE

Oooh. Med school romance in the house.

NATE

She's got a boyfriend.

ACE

Oh yeah? You're here. Where is he?

INT. NELL'S ROOM - EVENING

Nell lies on the bed, staring at the ceiling, her mind turning. She finds her cell phone in a pile of clothes. The battery is dead. She plugs it in. Hits number one on the speed dial.

ZACK (O.S.)

Hey, it's Zack. Sorry I can't take the call. Leave a message and I'll get right back to you.

Nell closes her eyes, frustrated. After the beep.....

NELL

(soft)

Zack? Hey. It's me. Um. Just....touching base. Where are you, anyway?

(she rubs her eyes)

Call me when you get this. I'm feeling a bit....well, like it's my booty that could get kicked around here. Anyway....

(soft)

Miss you like crazy.

She hangs up. A knock at the door. It swings open. Nate stands in the doorway. There's a crowd of 1st year students behind him.

NATE

End of day one. Bring on night one. It's time to party.

Brittany ducks past Nate, grabs her by the hand.

BRITTANY

Attendance is mandatory. Hard drinking required.

Nell laughs and goes leaving the charging cell phone behind. Almost as soon as the door closes behind her, it starts to ring. We move on the ID flashing "Zack".

EXT. THE SQUEALING PIG - NIGHT

Establishing. An everybody-knows-your-name kind of place with pool tables, pin ball, darts and booths. This is the prime hook-up spot for HMS as well as other graduate schools in the Boston area.

INT. THE SQUEALING PIG - NIGHT

Red Sox game on the TV at the bar, local Boston residents cheering loudly. Carlos and Brittany are racking balls to play pool with the highly competitive Leo and GAYE (model-gorgeous, wearing heels, dressed to perfection). Leo puts a hundred dollar bill on the rail.

LEO

Me and Gaye against you and Carlos.  
Let's make things interesting.

Brittany digs in her pocket, matches the bet.

BRITTANY

Oh, it's gonna be interesting.

Brittany chalks her cue, breaks expertly. Lounging in the booth watching are NATE, NELL, AUTUMN, ACE, KRISHNA and HANK. Nell has a cocktail and she's hitting it hard. Everyone else is drinking beer.

HANK

Who's the babe?

AUTUMN

Her name is Gaye. She's a dental student.

ACE

How come all the hot chicks are in dental school?

NATE

(ever the gentleman)  
Present company excluded.

AUTUMN

It's a lifestyle choice. A dentist can be a "girlie girl", have a family, keep regular hours.

NELL  
 (as a waitress goes by)  
 I'll have another Mojito please.

As Nell reaches for some pretzels, she almost knocks over Autumn's beer.

AUTUMN  
 (low)  
 Whoa. Slow down.

NELL  
 I'm cool.

Brittany sits on the edge of the pool table, slips the cue behind her back for a trick shot. Sinks another stripe with ease. Leo pounces.

LEO  
 You have to keep one foot on the floor. The ball goes back and you lose your turn.

BRITTANY  
 No friggin' way. My toe was so grounded.

LEO  
 It slipped off. I saw it.

Brittany is going to protest but decides not to bother. Passes Carlos.

BRITTANY  
 (low)  
 This guy is an anus. We must destroy him.

Nell watches as Leo puts back the ball Brittany just sank, not exactly where it was when she started. He gives Gaye an easy shot. She misses, giggles. Leo looks pissed. Nell turns to Nate.

NELL  
 Carlos told me you spent your gap year in Africa.

NATE  
 Yes. I worked in a clinic run by the World Health Organization in Cameroon. They're trying to eradicate Polio in the third world.

NELL

Let me guess. You have a subspecialty all picked out. You want to be a epidimo, epidemio-

Stops. Whoops. Getting very loaded.

NATE

(helpful)

Epidemiologist. How 'bout you, Hank?

HANK

I did three tours of duty in Iraq. Commanded a hundred Marines on the ground in Falluja. The medics were my heroes. Watching them go in and save lives made me want to be an ER doc.

NELL

Ace?

ACE

I was a point guard at USC. We made the final four. I'm looking at sports medicine.

Nell looks to Autumn.

AUTUMN

I'm doing an MD/Ph.D in neuroscience. I want to be a pediatric neurologist. And Brit shadowed one of the most famous cardiologists in the country.

BRITTANY

(looks up from the pool table)

I love to cut.

Nell gets her drink, takes a big hit and turns to Krishna.

NELL

So here we are in genius school. Are you the biggest genius here?

KRISHNA

Not by a long shot. Leo was Valedictorian and first in his class at Harvard.

Nell checks out Leo at THE POOL TABLE as he fiddles with the cue stick, his back partially turned. Finally he gives the cue to Carlos. Carlos lines up a shot and misses completely. The cue ball spins sideways. It's Leo's turn and he proceeds to run the table. Feeling Nell's gaze, Leo looks up, cool.

LEO

What's your story, Nell?

She swallows. There's a moment of silence.

NELL

Well, I didn't go to Yale, or Harvard or any of the Ivies.

(quiet)

I went to U. Mass.

NATE

(warm, jumping in)

Bet you rocked the MCAT's. And you must have had a great GPA to get into HMS from a state school.

NELL

I thought I was doin' great until I met all of you. Now....the honest truth? I feel like....an admissions mistake.

BRITTANY

Don't be ridiculous. What kind of doc do you want to be?

NELL

GP.

Dead silence falls. It's as if Nell just said something massively embarrassing. Leo snorts, dripping scorn.

LEO

General Practitioner? Aw. The "family doctor". Are you serious? Why even bother coming here?

Nell has no answer. She rises, extremely unsteady.

NELL

Must go home. Don't feel so good.

Leo turns away, with one smooth stroke sinks the 8 ball, takes Brittany's money. Brittany and Carlos could care less. They're watching Nell. She starts to fall. Nate grabs her.

BRITTANY  
Need some help?

NATE  
I got it.

As Nate leads Nell out, she turns to Leo.

NELL  
Oh. You.....Give Brit back the  
hundred bucks.

LEO  
Why would I do that?

NELL  
Her foot never left the floor  
an'...you...put Chipstock...I mean  
Chapstick...on the chalk 'fore you  
gave it to Carlos.

Nate and Nell exit. Everyone looks at Leo, accusing.

LEO  
She's drunk.

Brittany makes a quick move, turns out Leo's pockets, finds  
the Chapstick. Shakes her head.

BRITTANY  
Incredible. She sees more than the  
rest of us do sober.

LEO  
(angry, defensive)  
So I have Chapstick? That doesn't  
prove anything. Come on. Who are  
you going to believe? Me or some  
loser who will end up running a  
clinic at Wal Mart?

Brittany grabs her hundred dollars back, gets right up in  
Leo's grill.

BRITTANY  
Don't ever talk about Nell like  
that again.

INT. NELL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Nell lies on the bed, passed out. Nate pulls off her shoes.  
Loosens her pants. She opens her eyes.

NELL  
Hi.

NATE  
Hi there.

NELL  
You're nice.

NATE  
So are you.

NELL  
The room is moving. It should stop  
that.

NATE  
It will. If you sleep.

NELL  
I like you. You're gorgeous.

NATE  
So are you.

NELL  
(soft, sad)  
I made an ass of myself, didn't I?

NATE  
No.

NELL  
All you guys. So amazing.

NATE  
So are you.

She shakes her head "no" softly. He shakes his "yes".

NELL  
Thank you. For everything.

They look at each other and suddenly he kisses her gently.  
She responds instantly. Really kissing back. He pulls away  
with difficulty.

NATE  
No. No. Not like this. Sleep.

He turns off the lamp. Goes to the door, pauses for one last  
look back. Hold on his face, falling hard as we....

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE

Over black, we hear an ALARM. Loud. Brutal.

INT. NELL'S ROOM - DAY

The light comes on. Nell turns over. Head splitting. Red eyes focus on the clock.

NELL

No!

Nell LEAPS out of bed, hits her shin on an unpacked box. Jumps around, grabbing clothing.

EXT. QUAD - DAY

Nell runs across the lawn, buttoning her shirt.

INT. BETH ISRAEL HOSPITAL - DAY

The students enter the beautiful lobby of one of the best hospitals in the country. Nell runs in dead last, barely made it.

INT. AUDITORIUM - DAY

Less high tech than the auditorium in MEC, more historic. Oil paintings of Harvard doctors line the walls, all white men, some dating back to the 19th century. Nell comes up the aisle wishing she could be invisible.

BRITTANY

(loud)

Hey, party girl. Over here!

Nell turns. Brittany is holding a chair for her next to Autumn.

NELL

Could you possibly say that any louder?

BRITTANY

HEY PARTY GI-

Nell throws her sweatshirt at Brittany, sits. Autumn digs in a pocket, hands Nell two Advil and a water bottle.

AUTUMN

Hydrate.

Nell takes them, spots Nate across the aisle. He waves. Nell manages a smile, but slides down in her seat.

NELL

Without going into gory detail, how embarrassed do I have to be? On a scale of one to ten.

AUTUMN

Five and a half.

BRITTANY

Zero. You were right about Leo.

Autumn signals they should both hush as DR. EUGENIA JANIS comes to the podium. 40. Brilliant. Slender. Intense. Radiating an aura of calm authority.

DR. JANIS

Good afternoon. I am Dr. Eugenia Janis. Welcome to your first patient presentations. Sir William Osler, the legendary 19th century doctor, author, and educator wrote, "To study the phenomena of disease without books is to sail an uncharted sea, while to study medicine without patients is not to go to sea at all." Your greatest teachers at Harvard Medical School will be your patients. Listen to what they say. On that note, I am honored to introduce you to James and Cory Andrews.

JAMES AND CORY come from the front row to sit on stage. A handsome young couple in their early 30's.

DR. JANIS (CONT'D)

The first patient we are going to discuss is their son, Matt.

The room darkens and the screen behind Dr. Janis lights up with film of Matt's birth. Cory takes the microphone.

CORY

The day Matt was born was the most terrifying day of my life. He came out pink and healthy but within minutes...

She stops, her eyes on the screen, reliving the emotional moment. James takes over.

JAMES

He turned blue.

We see this happening as the newborn baby struggling for air. Nurses quickly whisk Matt from the delivery room.

DR. JANIS

Matt was born with a heart defect known as hypoplastic left heart syndrome, which means that his left ventricle was too small to work properly.

A heart diagram projects on screen showing the defect.

DR. JANIS (CONT'D)

The heart couldn't distribute oxygenated blood to Matt's body. He was suffocating. As little as ten years ago, this baby wouldn't have lived more than a few hours.

The screen behind Dr. Janis changes and we now see Matt's impossibly tiny body lying in the middle of a gurney. He is surrounded by a top cardiac team using the tiniest of tools, the finest techniques.

DR. JANIS (CONT'D)

Surgery on newborns is enormously complicated due to the size of their internal organs, but open heart surgery was the only way to save Matt's life. A new path had to be made to get blood quickly from the heart to the lungs. His aorta, which was only 1 millimeter wide, had to be enlarged, then a tiny shunt was inserted, and after that, a three millimeter tube was made from gortex.

The students watch the screen in awe. Nell has forgotten herself and is totally absorbed.

DR. JANIS (CONT'D)

The surgery was successful. That was three years ago. Today....

The lights come up. Dr. Janis nods to an assistant who opens the door to the auditorium. A beautiful little boy is outside with his grandmother. MATT (3) runs into the room, climbs on his mother's lap. The students applaud.

DR. JANIS (CONT'D)  
Questions?

Leo is in the front row, right in the middle, where he will always be found. He raises his hand first, rises.

LEO  
Were there any underlying maternal health problems related to the heart defect?

DR. JANIS  
Excellent question. Cory hemorrhaged at 18 weeks and was diagnosed with gestational diabetes. Increased maternal glucose levels are associated with perinatal complications, including birth trauma, hypoglycemia, and jaundice. Rarely, late intrauterine fetal death occurs. But in this case, the heart defect was unrelated.

Nell quickly starts taking notes along with Autumn. Brittany raises her hand.

BRITTANY  
Am I correct in assuming that the technique you described was the Norwood procedure, named after the surgeon who pioneered it?

Nell glances at Brittany. Wow.

DR. JANIS  
Exactly right. The first successful palliation of HLHS was reported by Norwood in a series of infants who underwent surgery from 1979-1981.

More questions and answers continue.

ACE  
Did the gestational diabetes complicate the prognosis and how was it managed?

INT. ATRIUM BRIGHAM AND WOMEN'S DAY

Dr. Janis leads the crowd of students. Nell hangs back with Brittany and Autumn.

NELL

Wow, Brit. Major props. How did you know about the...  
(checks her notes)  
Norwood procedure?

BRITTANY

The doc I shadowed at Johns Hopkins performed it. I saw him save a baby's life.

DR. JANIS

For our second patient presentation we'll be breaking into smaller groups.

Brittany takes Nell's arm, pulls her and Autumn into the elevator.

BRITTANY

Dr. Janis is a faculty star. We want to be in her group.

Brit quickly pushes the button hard just as Leo is coming forward, making sure the doors close in his face.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE ICU - BRIGHAM AND WOMAN'S - DAY

A smaller cluster of 25 students stand with Dr. Janis outside the ICU, among them Brittany, Autumn, Nate, Carlos and Hank. Autumn glances at Krishna, who is organizing the color coded pens in this pocket protector. She decides to make her move.

AUTUMN

Hey, Krishna. Could I borrow a pen? Mine just ran out of ink.

Krishna fumbles for a pen, drops the entire pocket protector and its contents. They both stoop, bump heads. Their eyes lock. He quickly looks away. Not clear if he's shy or just not into her. Autumn won't be dissuaded and unexpectedly aggressive.

AUTUMN (CONT'D)

Thanks. Mind if I take the purple one? It's my favorite color.

Meanwhile, Leo comes down the hall at run from the stairwell, breathing heavily, joins them shooting a furious look at Brit.

CARLOS

Ooh. He is giving you the stink eye, girl.

Brit shrugs. Like she gives a shit. Nell turns her attention to the Intensive Care Unit where a lovely young woman, unconscious, is hooked up to myriad machines.

DR. JANIS

Can everyone see?  
(after nods and some  
shuffling)

Okay. This patient's name is Annabeth Gold. While she was still conscious, Annabeth made a point of asking me to present her case. She wants future doctors to know what happened to her. Annabeth is 23 years old and she's been in the ICU now for two weeks with an acute bloodstream infection. The infection is resisting all known antibiotics and her condition is critical.

Nell's eyes flood with compassion and her gaze locks on Annabeth's face. She is exactly Nell's age, pale, incomprehensibly fragile. Her eyes are closed, the ventilator breathing for her. Her lovely hands lie on the sheets. They are delicate and pretty, the nails painted an eggshell pink.

DR. JANIS (CONT'D)

Just four weeks ago, Annabeth was the picture of health, well enough to run a ten mile marathon. Afterwards she felt a bit light headed and sick to her stomach. Her fiance, erring on the side of caution, took Annabeth to the emergency room. The doctors did a work up and found she was....

NELL

(soft, without thinking)  
Dehydrated.

DR. JANIS

...dehydrated. Nothing more. She was given intravenous fluids and sent home.

We pan Brittany, Nate, Autumn, Krishna, Ace, Carlos, Leo and all the other students as they listen.

DR. JANIS (CONT'D)

A week later Annabeth noticed that her forearm was sore at the site where she'd had the intravenous line. So she went back to the ER. The doctors instantly recognized that she had an infection caused by the IV. This is a common complication in American hospitals where Staphylococcus bacteria run rampant. Every year, 100,000 people die from these infections which occur as a result of inadequate hand washing, inattention, and poor sterilization procedures on the part of doctors and nurses. Imagine 300 jumbo jets crashing. That's how many people are killed. If Annabeth doesn't survive, the cause of death will probably be listed as heart failure. But she is a victim of Iatrogenics. Would someone like to tell us the meaning of that word?

Several students raise their hands. Dr. Janis points to Nate.

NATE

Doctor induced diseases. Fourth leading cause of death in the United States.

DR. JANIS

That is correct. Right after heart disease, stroke, and cancer. "He that sins before his maker, let him fall into the hand of the physician." Ecclesiastes. Cases like Annabeth's remind us of the responsibility we carry to those who entrust us with their lives and the damage we can do if we're not careful.

Dr. Janis starts taking questions again but Nell doesn't hear a word. She focuses on Annabeth, pressing against the ICU glass, as if willing her to get better. Annabeth's long blond hair is damp from fever, her breathing labored.

But suddenly the young woman's eyes open! She sees Nell and Nell sees her. In Nell's eyes: compassion. In Annabeth's: pain and a terrible, hopeless resignation.

They share a long moment of wordless communication through the ICU glass: two women of the same age, so much alike but with such different fates. Then Annabeth closes her eyes and loses consciousness again.

EXT. MEC - DAY

Another day. Now raining hard. Students hurry to classes.

INT. MEC HALLWAYS - DAY

Nell is at her locker. The number of books and hand-outs inside tell us that work is piling on. She glances up, sees Nate.

NATE

Hey.

NELL

Hey. I never thanked you for....you know the other night....and I also want to apologize...

NATE

Totally unnecessary.

He smiles. She relaxes, smiles back. Hard to resist him. Brittany comes up, interrupts by slinging an arm over Nell's shoulder.

BRITTANY

Come on, they're putting up the list of lab partners for Gross Anatomy. Four to a cadaver. Let's see who we'll be inhaling formaldehyde fumes with all semester.

INT. MEC - HALLWAYS - DAY

Everyone crowds around a bulletin board at the end of the hall. As Nell and Brittany make their way to the front....

BRITTANY

Awesome. We have Nate on our team.

NELL

(heart sinking)  
And Leo.

INT. GROSS ANATOMY LAB - DAY

Ten bodies still zipped in bags lie on ten gurneys. Buckets at the end of each gurney. Brittany, Leo, Nate and Nell take up positions on the either side of their cadaver.

DR. GOODMAN enters. He's about 35, wears wire rim glasses, hiking boots, looks like he's about to take them out to climb Mt. Katadin, not dissect corpses.

DR. GOODMAN

I'm Dr. Goodman. Welcome to Gross Anatomy. Everyone listen up before we begin. This is important. When we unzip the body bags, you will notice there are two sheets on your cadaver. One covers the body and the other the head. Under no circumstances are you to attempt to uncover the face. This is for your own protection. As a physician develops a relationship with the patient, the student develops a relationship with their cadaver. Keep the face covered for now in order to keep your emotional distance. Let's begin. Please put on your gloves.

Nell fumbles to slip the latex over her hands.

LEO

I'm cutting first.

BRITTANY

I don't think so.

Brittany lifts her hand triumphantly. She's already got the scalpel.

DR. GOODMAN

Bodies are preserved in an aqueous solution of formaldehyde. Prepare yourselves for the smell. It's not pleasant. You may unzip the bags now.

Leo leaps forward to do it. The zipper retracts slowly. Everyone reacts to the smell. Then they all remove the lower sheets. A long moment. At the next table, Ace tries to lighten the mood.

ACE  
 (to the room)  
 I see dead people.

CARLOS  
 (at another next table)  
 This guy has a boner.

Scattered laughter. Nell, Brittany, Leo and Nate stare at their cadaver. Most of the bodies are of elderly people. There is a lovely young woman. The second sheet covers her head, but her hair peeks out from underneath. It is long and BLOND. Nell stares.

FLASH CUT....of Annabeth in the ICU. Blond Hair. Just like this.

Nell glances down at the cadaver's hands. They are delicate, the nails painted a light pink.

FLASH CUT...of Annabeth's hands. Also with pink nails.

Nell grips the table. Could this be Annabeth? Meanwhile, Leo stares lasciviously at the naked body.

LEO  
 Nice rack.

BRITTANY  
 Shut. Up.

Nell looks up at Leo, suddenly loathing him. The silence in the room is broken by a metallic crash. Nell has kicked OVER a bucket at the end of the gurney. She colors.

DR. GOODMAN  
 I see you've found the buckets at your stations. As we make our first incisions, fluids will leak out and run down the table. The bucket is to catch these fluids. Don't let it overflow. Now take the scalpel and place the blade between the ribs at the sternum.

Brittany puts the knife to the dead flesh with no trace of fear or hesitation. The skin separates easily exposing layers of fat. The fluids seep out, run down the table and drip into the bucket. Nell grips the table and tries to focus.

INT. WOMEN'S SHOWER - NIGHT

A row of showers in a communal bathroom. Nell is naked in the first stall. Her skin is raw from scrubbing herself frantically to get the smell out.

AUTUMN (O.S.)

I've washed my hair three times and  
I can still smell it.

BRITTANY (O.S.)

My highlights ain't gonna make it  
through the semester.

Nell stands in the water letting it wash over her as if it could wash away the images in her mind.

INT. NELL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Nell is dressed, lies on her bed, head in hands. Her books lie opened and untouched beside her. She can't get the body lying in gross anatomy lab out of her mind.

We see a FLASH CUT....of the cadaver's face beneath the sheets. Hidden. Unrecognizable. The blond hair...

NELL rises, paces. She closes her eyes again and in her mind's eye imagines:

INT. ER - DAY

ANNABETH, healthy, in her running clothes, joking with the doctor, trying to resist the IV as her FIANCE encourages her compliance. And then....

INT. ICU - NIGHT

ANNABETH....gasping for breath. Tossing in a final death agony. Alarms go off. Personnel rush in. Annabeth is coding. The staff works frantically to save her. Her FIANCE is hysterical, calling her name.

INT. NELL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Nell jerks out of her thoughts, makes a decision, grabs her coat and exits.

INT. HALLWAY VANDY - NIGHT

Nell heads for the stairs, passing Nate.

NATE

Hey. Krishna is cooking everyone  
vegetable curry.

NELL

Sounds great, but I have to get  
some books from my locker. Maybe  
I'll come by later.

She exits. Nate looks after her, frowns. Sensing something.

EXT. LONGWOOD AVE. - NIGHT

Nell enters Brigham and Woman's hospital.

INT. BRIGHAM AND WOMAN'S HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Nell boards the elevator, hits the button for the 7th floor.

INT. 7TH FLOOR - NIGHT

Nell comes out. The coast is clear. The nurses are not at  
their station. She can hear them singing "Happy Birthday",  
to a patient in a room down the hall.

INT. ICU AREA - NIGHT

Nell slowly, hesitatingly approaches the window to the ICU  
seen in patient presentation. She afraid of what she'll find  
there.

She stops outside the glass. Deep breath. It's just as she  
feared.

The bed Annabeth occupied is empty.

EXT. BRIGHAM AND WOMAN'S - NIGHT

Nell comes out to the sidewalk. An ambulance flies by, siren  
screaming. It pulls into the emergency bay and the flashing  
light streaks Nell's face.

She takes a moment, makes a decision and walks towards MEC  
just as Nate comes out of Vanderbilt Hall, looking for her.  
He sees where she's going, frowns.

INT. MEC - NIGHT

Nell nods to the NIGHT GUARD. He waves her on. Moments  
later she's alone in the twisting corridors of the old  
basement, listening to her own footfalls.

She walks on until she arrives at her intended destination,  
double doors that lead to....

GROSS ANATOMY LAB. She looks either way. She's all alone.  
The lab is open and available to students at all hours Nell  
pushes the door open and enters.

Once she's gone we see another figure around the corner at the lockers.

It's LEO.

INT. GROSS LAB - NIGHT

Nell enters the darkened room. She stands a moment surrounded by the rows of dead bodies covered with white sheets that glow ice blue in the moonlight.

Nell passes the lifeless forms on sterile tables, drawn inexorably towards her cadaver. She can hear her own heartbeat in her ears as she reaches her station.

She looks down at the face outlined beneath the sheet. Then she reaches out a hand.....hesitating, her hand hovering over the sheet that covers the face of her cadaver.

She knows that she shouldn't do this, but she can't stop herself. She takes the sheet and tugs....as we...

END ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

INT. GROSS ANATOMY LAB - NIGHT

ON NELL.....her eyes well up and...we cut around to see see what she sees.

A beautiful young blond woman. Not Annabeth. Her face is lacerated from some kind of accident. A different tragedy. Nell takes a breath, leans on the table and....

SOMEONE RISES UP BEHIND HER! Nell spins, is about to scream when she sees...

NELL

Nate.

NATE

What are you doing here?

NELL

I had to know it wasn't her.

NATE

Who?

NELL

Annabeth.

(off his blank look)

The girl in the ICU, the one we saw at patient presentation. I was so certain.

Nell looks back at the body, saddened at this woman's fate, too. Nate quickly covers the cadaver again and takes Nell's arm, pulls her aside gently, concerned.

NATE

Come on. Let's get out of here.

But she hesitates, looks up at him.

NELL

You followed me here. Risked getting in trouble for me. Why?

NATE

You know why.

Of course she does. The attraction was there from the first moment.

NELL

I told you I have a boyfriend.

NATE

I know. But we're going to be at this for the next eight years.

NELL

It hasn't even been eight days! What is wrong with me?

NATE

In my book? Nothing.

NELL

I shouldn't even be here!

NATE

You came because you care. That's what will make you a great doctor.

NELL

I...I couldn't leave it alone. Let go. If it was her, I couldn't cut into her like a piece of meat.

NATE

Listen to me. So you're not some world class science geek. You have empathy, which is far more important. And you notice things no one else sees, like you did with Leo. And me. That will make you a great diagnostician.

ON LEO.....we now see he's still there, in the darkness, watching.

NELL

Thank you.

Nate touches Nell's face. He's saying what she needs so badly to hear.

NELL (CONT'D)

You've been so kind to me. Right from the beginning.

Suddenly he can no longer control himself and neither can she. The attraction between them is an overwhelming force. He kisses her and she kisses back. And once it starts, the fire between them is unstoppable.

In moments they are all over each other. They slide onto one of the empty stainless steel tables, start pulling at their clothes.

INT. MEC HALLWAYS - NIGHT

Leo runs down the halls to the guard station. We see him speak to the NIGHT GUARD.

INT. GROSS ANATOMY LAB - NIGHT

Nell and Nate are in each other's arms. It's hot. Desperate. Unthinking. All consuming to the degree that they don't even realize where they are, or hear the sound of footsteps approaching.

And then the door bursts open. Light floods the room. Nell gasps. Nate tries to cover her. Both of them are breathing hard.

They scramble off the table, clutching their clothes, surrounded by body bags, suddenly aware of how bizarre this looks. Three night guards stare in amazement and horror.

EXT. ADMINISTRATION - DAY

One of the imposing white marble buildings.

DEAN STRYKER (V.O.)

In all my years at HMS, I've never seen such behavior. And in the first week.

INT. HMS DEAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Nell and Nate both stand before Dean Stryker. Nell is pale, Nate rigid.

DEAN STRYKER

What do you have to say for yourselves?

NELL

It wasn't my intention....to see Nate, or meet him in the lab or anything like that. We didn't plan this. It just happened.

DEAN STRYKER

Then why were you there?

NELL

I wanted to see the face of my cadaver.

NATE

She thought it was someone she knew.

NELL

Nate came to stop me. To help me. Things got out of hand. It wasn't his fault.

DEAN STRYKER

(to Nate)

Your father is a distinguished alumnus and a fine physician. If he knew about this-

NATE

I'm so sorry.

DEAN STRYKER

And Nell? We took a chance on you. Your grades and MCATs.... sterling of course. But still, you were on the cusp. One eloquent recommendation letter from your mentor convinced us to give you a shot. Right now, I'm questioning that decision.

Nell hangs her head, has no words.

DEAN STRYKER (CONT'D)

I suggest you both get serious about the opportunity you've been given. If you can't behave like responsible adults, then you don't belong at HMS. Do I make myself clear?

Nate and Nell both nod.

EXT. HMS QUAD - DAY

Nate and Nell come outside. They can barely look at each other.

NELL

I'm sorry.

NATE

So am I. You okay?

She shrugs. What does he think?

NATE (CONT'D)

I feel awful. I took advantage of you at a vulnerable moment.

NELL

No, you didn't. I was right there.

He reaches for her hand.

NATE

What now?

But she pulls away.

NELL

(soft)

I can't keep doing things I'm ashamed of. You're terrific, but clearly this has been a mistake. On so many levels.

NATE

(cool)

If that's how you feel-

NELL

Nate, please. I don't want to hurt you.

NATE

(stung)

See you when you need me.

He walks off without saying another word. Nell stands alone, feeling like he punched her. Then she starts to hyperventilate. Leans over, reaching for air. Slides to sit on the steps.

EXT. STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES - DAY

Establishing.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Nell has just finished being examined by DR. KILEY, a sympathetic, Asian-American doc about 32 years old.

NELL

I couldn't breathe or swallow.

DR. KILEY

You were having an anxiety attack, Nell. Not surprising under the circumstances.

(MORE)

DR. KILEY (CONT'D)

There's nothing physically wrong.  
I'll give you some Valium so you  
can sleep, then, after the weekend,  
let's make an appointment for you  
to see one of our therapists.

NELL

That's not necessary.

DR. KILEY

I think it is. You have to decide  
if this is the right place for you.

NELL

(she rises)

Right now there's only one person I  
want to talk to.

CUT TO:

EXT. OPEN OCEAN - DAY

The camera flies over the dark water off the Cape until it  
finds....

EXT. MARTHA'S VINEYARD FERRY - DAY

Nell stands on deck, a small lonely figure, looking ahead to  
the island.

END ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

EXT. VINYARD HAVEN - DAY

Nell comes down the ferry ramp with a crowd of tourists. Her eyes search the people waiting on the dock.

She sees a muddy, hard working Dodge pick-up that says Island Stone and Landscaping. Leaning against the hood is an incredibly handsome, instantly sympathetic guy. ZACK NEVIN.

Nell walks straight for him. He walks straight for her. They meet. He picks her up, swings her around and deposits her in the front seat of the pick-up.

INT. ZACK'S TRUCK - DAY

Driving up-island. Lovely cross light. Nell leans on Zack's shoulder, closes her eyes. He reaches up with one free hand, strokes her hair. She kisses his palm. Words aren't necessary.

EXT. ZACK'S CABIN - AFTERNOON

A small, fantastically romantic converted barn in the woods. The pick-up is parked outside.

INT. ZACK'S CABIN - AFTERNOON

Exposed beams, rough wood walls covered with landscape designs, water colors and sketches. A free-standing Franklin stove warms the room. A fire is burning. Nell sits on Zack's bed, burrowed into a patchwork quilt. He brings her a cup of tea, settles beside her.

ZACK

Feels like fall today. The air is so cold.

NELL

It's lovely.

(beat)

Zack....

(she takes his hand)

ZACK

Nell...

They lace their fingers together, then....

NELL

What if what I thought I wanted my whole life doesn't work out?

ZACK

(small smile)

It's a bit early for that, isn't it?

NELL

This is serious. Just listen. Would you be disappointed in me?

ZACK

What's going on?

NELL

I mean, maybe it would be great if I came back for good, I could get my real estate license. We could move in together now, not wait eight years.

ZACK

This doesn't sound like you.

NELL

I failed, Zack. In lots of ways. I don't think I can do this.

ZACK

Fight.

NELL

(anguished)

What if I can't fight? I mean can't. Fight. What if I'm not up to this?

ZACK

All your life, you met a wall, you climbed right over it.

NELL

(anguished)

You are disappointed.

ZACK

No. There's nothing I'd like more than you staying here with me. But you won't be happy. And I know you can do this.

Tears start in her eyes. He totally believes in her. She moves into his arms, rests her head against him.

NELL

I don't want to lose you.

ZACK

The only way you lose me is if you lose yourself.

She looks up at him. If only it were that simple. He kisses her and holds her.

EXT. LARSON'S LUNCH BOX - AFTERNOON

A hole in the wall up-island. White lights over the door. Lunch is over. A sign says CLOSED. Nell and Zack enter.

INT. LARSON'S LUNCH BOX - AFTERNOON

Nell's Dad, JOE LARSON (50) is sweeping up. Her brother JOSH (13) busses the tables. Joe's face splits in a grin.

JOE

(heavy Boston accent)

Hey, it's my girl. Ma? Nell's home!

Nell's mom, VIOLET LARSON, 45, comes from the kitchen pulling off her apron.

VIOLET

It's the Harvard student!

Violet hugs Nell. Josh comes over.

JOSHUA

(teasing)

What happened? Flunk out already?

They hug.

NELL

Working on it. How about you? How was your first week of school?

JOSHUA

Sucked.

VIOLET

All he wants to do is fish.

ZACK

Nothing wrong with that.

JOE  
Can't make a living at it.

ZACK  
(to Nell)  
I gotta get back to work. I'll  
call when we're done for the day.

He kisses her, exits. Nell sits. Dad puts hot coffee in front of her. Mom sets her place. They're treating her like royalty. A LOCAL MAN passes outside. Joe knocks on the window.

JOE  
Frank! Look who's here. My  
daughter. She's at Harvard medical  
school.

Frank tips his hat, smiles in at Nell who manages a small wave. Her parents's pride only adds to the pressure.

VIOLET  
Honey, I wish we'd known you were  
coming. We have to go up-island  
and do a turn over at the McMillan  
place. You want to come?

NELL  
No, I'll meet you later. There's  
someone else I want to see, anyway.

EXT. ISLAND STREET - DAY

Nell stands before a lovely old clapboard home with a wide porch. The ground floor has been converted to a doctor's office. A sign outside reads: "Dr. Mark Jacobs. Walk-ins Welcome." Nell steels herself, heads inside.

INT. DR. JACOB'S WAITING ROOM - DAY

Small and homey. Patients fill the sofa and chairs. One of them sees Nell, starts to rise with some difficulty. This is MRS. MULDAUR, 60.

MRS. MULDAUR  
Nell?

Nell smiles with warm recognition. Holds out a hand.

NELL  
Mrs. Muldaur. Don't get up. How  
are you?

As Nell takes Mrs. Muldaur's hand, she notices something immediately.

MRS. MULDAUR

It's nothing, just my back acting up. Got a little carried away with the gardening last weekend.

NELL

Your hand feels warm. You have a fever. Where does your back hurt?

Mrs. Muldaur indicates her right side, at mid back. Nell frowns.

NELL (CONT'D)

Mid back? And only on one side? That's unusual.

MRS. MULDAUR

I'm probably wasting Dr. Jacobs's time. What I need is an ice pack and a good night's rest. Those third graders are running me ragged. This year is the worst class ever!

NELL

That's what you said about us!

Mrs. Muldaur laughs and then it turns into a coughs that makes her wince with pain. Nell notices this, too, as NURSE BETH appears.

NURSE BETH

Winkie Keith?

A woman in the corner, WINKIE KEITH, rises. She has one arm in a sling, in the other carries a carton of eggs. She's in overalls, looks like she just came from the farm as she enters the exam rooms. Beth sees Nell.

BETH

Nell! Welcome home!

Nell crosses to Beth and the two women hug with warmth and familiarity.

NELL

I'm home for the weekend. I was hoping to see Dr. Jacobs, but I can see you're busy.

BETH

It's fine. He needs to take a little break. I know he'd love to see you. Why don't you wait in the office?

INT. EXAM ROOM - DAY

DR. JACOBS is in his late 50's. Prematurely grey. Kindly. The picture perfect country doctor. He finishes cutting off Winkie's cast and she hands him the carton of eggs, which he opens with pleasure.

DR. JACOBS

So fresh they still have the feathers on them! Thank you, Winkie.

WINKIE

Free eggs for you all year. Just stop by the farm any time. Thanks, Dr. Jacobs. I'm good as new!

INT. DR. JACOBS'S OFFICE - DAY

Nell waits in a room packed with memorabilia, evidence of a well lived life. There are many framed photos of Dr. Jacobs with patients and even more thank you letters, some written in crayon.

Nell looks at them and smiles. Then she moves to a vintage DISCO BARBIE which seems woefully out of place on the doctor's desk. She picks it up, and for reasons we can't imagine, her eyes suddenly fill as Dr. Jacobs enters with the eggs.

DR. JACOBS

Nell! An unexpected treat.

They hug.

NELL

Winkie Keith and her eggs, again?

DR. JACOBS

As I've said many times, I don't do this to get rich. But really fresh eggs? A treasure! Sit. What brings you here?

NELL

Well, Dr. Jacobs....  
(she settles across from him, replaces Barbie)  
(MORE)

NELL (CONT'D)

I found out your recommendation letter is what got me into Harvard and....I want to thank you, of course....but...you see....

She pauses, embarrassed and unsure how to begin. He jumps right in.

DR. JACOBS

The first week was rough. Everyone else is brilliant and they all have incredible resumes and now you're wondering what you're doing there and you're thinking of quitting.

He settles behind his desk. Matter-of-fact. She shakes her head, amazed.

NELL

Wow. You're good.

DR. JACOBS

You're not so hard to read. You just left for Harvard last week and you're back already. I come in here and find you mooning over your old Barbie. Are you regretting that trade we made so long ago?

NELL

I don't know. I don't know anything anymore.

DR. JACOBS

Not many little girls want to part with a Disco Barbie. And fewer still want to trade it for their doctor's stethoscope. How old were you when you did that?

NELL

Five.

DR. JACOBS

It was the best deal I ever made. Come on, Nell. What do you want to hear? That you're a born doc? You know you are! And....What's so interesting out that window?

Nell rises. She is indeed looking out the window.

NELL

Sheila Muldaur.

DR. JACOBS  
What about her?

NELL  
You haven't seen her yet. She  
can't leave.

EXT. DR. JACOBS OFFICE - DAY

Mrs. Muldaur's old Subaru is pulling out. Nell flies out of the building and runs into her path, forcing Mrs. Muldaur to brake. Sheila rolls down her window.

MRS. MULDAUR  
Sakes alive, I almost hit you,  
Nell.

NELL  
(breathless)  
Where are you going?

MRS. MULDAUR  
Back to school. I can't wait any  
longer.

NELL  
You have to see Dr. Jacobs.

MRS. MULDAUR  
Tomorrow or the next day is soon  
enough. My class-

NELL  
You're sick. You have a fever.  
That's not consistent with a simple  
muscle pull. And the cough I heard  
sounded like you have fluid in your  
lungs. Do you remember Lyle Poole?

MRS. MULDAUR  
The landscaper?

NELL  
Yes. He died two years ago because  
he didn't see Dr. Jacobs for what  
he thought was back pain. By the  
time he showed up at the ER, it was  
too late. He died, Mrs. Muldaur.  
Will you come back inside? Please,  
Mrs. Muldaur.

INT. DR. JACOB'S EXAM ROOM - DAY

Dr. Jacobs pulls a thermometer from under Mrs. Muldaur's tongue as she sits on the exam table. She shivering slightly.

NELL  
(to Dr. Jacobs)  
Chills.

Dr. Jacobs nods towards the cabinet. Nell gets out a blanket, wraps it around Mrs. Muldaur's knees. Now he listens with his stethoscope to her lungs.

DR. JACOBS  
Deep breath. In. And out.

He looks concerned, then passes the stethoscope to Nell. She listens to the lungs.

NELL  
Rales.

MRS. MULDAUR  
Speak English, please.

DR. JACOBS  
That's a medical term for bubbling or rattling sounds. It means Nell was right, you have fluid in your lungs.

NELL  
Mrs. Muldaur isn't just the best third grade teacher on the island. She's president of the garden club.

MRS. MULDAUR  
What does that have to do with anything?

Dr. Jacobs laughs with obvious pride.

DR. JACOBS  
Maybe a great deal. Good catch, Nell.  
(to Mrs. Muldaur)  
Lyle Poole died of Tularemia, a very serious illness caused by the bacterium found in animals, especially rodents and rabbits.

NELL

People who work outdoors are most at risk.

DR. JACOBS

You may indeed have Tularemia. We're going to have to put you in the hospital and run some tests.  
(he pats her hand)  
You go on and get dressed while I make the necessary arrangements.

INT. HALLWAY DR. JACOB'S OFFICE - DAY

Nell steps out of the exam room with Dr. Jacobs.

DR. JACOBS

You saved a life today. The first of many. You have a gift. Does that answer the questions that brought you here?

Nell throws her arms around Dr. Jacobs in a big bear hug.

EXT. DR. JACOB'S OFFICE - DAY

Nell comes out, runs down the steps two at a time and does a spin, practically skips off down the street.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ISLAND ESTATE - DAY

A fantastic 25 acre farm on a peninsula in gorgeous cross light. Zack's truck is parked by a construction area. A group of workers, many of them Portuguese, are building a stone wall under Zack's supervision. Nell is there to say good-bye.

ZACK

The wall will go all the way down by the water line. And we're putting in a wild flower garden by the boathouse. Come on. I'll show you.

They walk down across the grass together. His arm slips around her waist.

BY THE BOATHOUSE - DAY

She looks back at the work he's been doing. It's beautiful. Zack pulls her to the other side of the boat house, out of sight of the crew. She wraps her arms around his neck and they kiss.

EXT. VINEYARD HAVEN - DAY

Nell stands on the deck of the ferry as it pulls away.

ON THE DOCK...

Zack stands in the flatbed of his truck, waving to her.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL - DAY

It's the day of the White Coat Ceremony. Students walk up the white marble steps to the main building. The young women wear dresses or pants with heels. The men have on pressed pants, shirts and ties.

INT. MARBLE QUAD - DAY

A beautiful sunlit room. At one end are racks filled with WHITE COATS. Dr. Janis and Dr. Goodman stand beside them. Dr. Stryker is at a podium.

DEAN STRYKER

Doctors tend to hold fast to the illusion of a wide gulf between themselves and their patients. This distance helps us to bear it when we face horrific maladies or terrible pain. But I ask you now to realize that separation is false. Don't let the white coat be a barrier. It is an honor, and when you wear it, you automatically gain the respect society accords to all doctors. Seek above all else to earn it.

CUT TO:

NATE SLIPPING ON A WHITE COAT...

NATE

My parents are both doctors. When I was growing up in Chapel Hill, I can't even count the number of times people would come up to me and say, your mother saved my life, your father-

CARLOS.....in his coat.

CARLOS

-caught my cancer early.  
(he crosses himself)  
Leukemia. I was thirteen when I got the diagnosis. When I'd see a white coat coming down the hall, I felt safe. One day-

AUTUMN....

AUTUMN

-I realized I wanted to wear one. My family raised two foster children with special needs. Down's Syndrome and Tourettes. I hope to help other kids just like them. This is-

HANK....

HANK

-for Jack Epstein, who fell on a live grenade and saved seven of his buddies one dark day in Fallujah.  
(fingers his coat)  
Semper Fi, Jack. I'll never forget you, and I'll never forget-

KRISHNA....

KRISHNA

(buttons his coat)  
-my parents, who took me off a street in Calcutta when I was seven years old, too old to be "adoptable." My Mom and Dad never gave up on me and they never-

LEO....

LEO

-got over the death of my big brother, Jake.

(flat, diffident)

Jake, you see, was the star of our family. I wanted to be just like him. But two years into his surgical residency, he killed himself. Whatever I accomplish, I'll never be as good as Jake, or-

ACE....

ACE

-a bigger man than my father. He is a janitor who wanted more than anything to play pro ball. He never got his dream, but he worked nights and double shifts to get me mine. My dream is this-

BRITTANY...

BRITTANY

-to be a surgeon. Because I like to fix things. I love the cure. Cut out the appendix. Repair a torn hernia. Remove the cancer. Done. My parents are not behind this. They wanted me to marry a nice guy and pop out kids. But I figured any one can make a life-

And finally we come to NELL.

NELL

But few people can save one. I'm here today because of the family doctor in my home town who has saved many lives. He taught me and he inspired me.

Nell looks out at her classmates, all so amazing, but so is she. Her voice is steady and her gaze is firm. She knows who she is, and what she wants to be.

NELL (CONT'D)

Every day Dr. Jacobs lives the saying that good patient care can only happen when you care about your patients. My ambition is big, and I don't know yet if I'll achieve it.

(MORE)

NELL (CONT'D)

Because what I want, more than anything else, is to live a life as meaningful as his and to be just like him.

EXT. HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL - DAY

The entire class lines up on the same white marble steps, under the same white marble pillars that so impressed Nell when she first arrived. All of them now wear white coats. A photographer is preparing to take a picture. Nate crosses to Nell. He smiles, conciliatory and warm. She smiles back.

NATE

Looking good.

NELL

You, too.

He leans over and kisses her cheek. A moment too long. She flushes. It's still there. The spark. Brittany joins them. And to Nell's surprise, Nate moves to her and hangs his arm around Brit's shoulder.

NATE

Hey, gorgeous. Like your outfit.

BRITTANY

I think it needs something. A wide patent belt, perhaps.

CARLOS

The right shoes will pull the look together.

Nate looks at Nell, smiles, still with his arm around Brit. Is he trying to make her jealous or has he transferred his affection to her best friend? And if he has, why does she care?

No matter what, it's going to be complicated. Meanwhile Krishna approaches Autumn. He holds out a gift. It's a purple pen protector filled with purple pens.

KRISHNA

Congratulations.

AUTUMN

Wow. I love it. Really.

They stand regarding each other, at the precipice of geek love. Carlos turns to Nell.

CARLOS  
How do you feel?

NELL  
(after a moment)  
Like I'm on the other side.

HANK  
(shakes his head)  
You wish. Long road ahead.

ACE  
Yeah. This is just the beginning.

NELL  
(thrilled)  
Yes, it is.

CUT TO:

THE PHOTO OF THE INCOMING CLASS AT HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL.

Standing proudly shoulder to shoulder in their white coats.  
And in the center of the group is Nell.

FADE OUT.