

THE HUMAN STAIN

Screenplay by

NICHOLAS MEYER

Based On The Novel
The Human Stain
By Philip Roth

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LAKESHORE



ENTERTAINMENT

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1 EXT. BERKSHIRE WOODS - NIGHT 1

A OLD VOLVO driving along a small, winding road...

NATHAN'S VOICE OVER
This is the story of the tricky
life and bitter downfall of
Coleman Silk.

ANOTHER ANGLE ON THE VOLVO as THE CREDITS BEGIN. We watch the car wending its moonlit way. The radio in the car is playing Rogers and Hart.

2 INT. VOLVO - CONTINUOUS 2

The DRIVER, an attractive MAN in his mid-sixties. Leaning serenely against him, eyes closed, a handsome WOMAN, mid thirties...

As THE CREDITS CONTINUE we occasionally CUT TO A SHOT OF A BEAT UP RED PICK UP TRUCK sitting ominously in the shadows at the side of the road. As THE CREDITS END we CUT TO:

CLOSE ON THE WINDSHIELD OF THE PICK UP TRUCK--inside we see a shadowy figure.

HIS POV (TELEPHOTO SHOT): (looking through the windshield) in the distance the Volvo rounds a curve in our direction.

3 EXT. THE PARKED RED PICK-UP TRUCK - CONTINUOUS 3

As the HEADLIGHTS wink on, the pick-up roars to life and squeals onto the road, heading in the opposite direction as the Volvo.

SEVERAL ANGLES--We see the Volvo and the pick-up heading towards each other on the curving road.

When the vehicles are near enough to see each other's lights, the pick-up abruptly swerves into the oncoming lane...

4 INT. VOLVO - CONTINUOUS 4

The couple suddenly BLINDED by the glare of headlights! The woman wakes up, startled, squints -

DRIVER
Jesus - !

He pulls the wheel over hard! SOUND OF SQUEALING BRAKES -!

5 EXT. BERKSHIRE ROAD - NIGHT 5

The Volvo barely avoids the oncoming pick-up, but careens off the road, plunging wildly down a steep embankment, ricocheting off TREES and flipping into a small RIVER...

5 CONTINUED:

5

CLOSER: NO MOVEMENT FROM WITHIN, there is a terrible silence. Suddenly we hear the scream of a bird and CUT TO:

6 EXT. ATHENA COLLEGE - DAY

6

TIGHT ON A LARGE CROW as it flaps its wings and flies away, screeching as it disappears into the sky. We see, in the distance, the tall steeple of a beautiful, white church, set against the Berkshires in the distance. It is an idyllic setting, over this we HEAR:

A MAN'S VOICE

Hey, if Clinton had fucked her in the ass, none of this would have happened.

THE CAMERA MOVES ACROSS to reveal A TRIO OF TENNIS PLAYERS (ALL MIDDLE-AGED MEN) - walking after a game, carrying their rackets, swigging bottled water and laughing. In the background we see a picturesque, small New England campus; old, red-brick, ivy covered, white-columned buildings, bisecting footpaths and huge, spreading trees, benches...

1ST TENNIS PLAYER

(the original voice)

That would've kept her quiet. Besides, in Arkansas, you're expected to be an ass man. That's tradition.

2ND TENNIS PLAYER

Wait a minute, she was overwhelmed by Starr's team in that hotel room. 11 guys hitting on her? That was a gang bang...

3RD TENNIS PLAYER

Come on, she was talking to Linda Tripp, talking to everybody. She's part of that dopey culture. Yap, yap, yap--

1ST TENNIS PLAYER

Look, if Clinton couldn't figure Monica Lewinsky, then the guy shouldn't be president; that's grounds for impeachment by itself.

Laughter. By now the three men have passed THE CAMERA and are heading away from us.

2ND TENNIS PLAYER

I keep telling you guys, in the ass is how you create loyalty.

6 CONTINUED:

6

3RD TENNIS PLAYER

Know what Kennedy would have told her? Nixon? They would have told her that not only would they not give her a job, nobody would ever give her a job again as long as she lived. That her father would be out of work. And her mother and her brother. That no one in her family would earn another dime if she dared to open her mouth.

2ND TENNIS PLAYER

Yeah, he played it like a lawyer. That's why he didn't want to come.

1ST TENNIS PLAYER

Hey, when he came, he was finished. Evidence. The smoking come.

(laughter)

If he'd fucked her in the ass, the nation would have been spared this terrible trauma.

As the men continue walking away from THE CAMERA, laughing and talking, we HEAR:

NATHAN'S VOICE OVER

1998 was the summer of sanctimony. America was on a piety binge. Propriety was king. After the fall of Communism and before the horrors of terrorism, there was a brief interlude when the nation was preoccupied by cocksucking.

Just then the tennis players intersect an attractive man in his mid-sixties; his name is COLEMAN SILK and he is the same man we saw earlier in the car crash. He wears a well cut, harris tweed jacket, grey flannels and carries a worn, but expensive briefcase.

NATHAN'S VOICE OVER

(continuing)

What Nathaniel Hawthorne called "the persecuting spirit" was abroad in the land... And Bill Clinton was not its only target.

THE CAMERA FOLLOWS COLEMAN SILK as he walks quickly across the campus heading toward a classroom building in the distance.

6 CONTINUED: (2)

6

NATHAN'S VOICE OVER
(continuing)

This is Coleman Silk. Before the car crash, of course. Once the powerful Dean of Faculty and professor of Classics at Athena College in western Massachusetts, one of the first Jews to teach in a classics department anywhere in America, Coleman had spent over thirty years at Athena... He took a pokey, Sleepy Hollow-type college and dragged it kicking and screaming from mediocrity to excellence.

As he enters the imposing looking building we HOLD FOR A BEAT:

NATHAN'S VOICE OVER
(continuing)

Of course, in the process, he made a good many enemies... and finally "the persecuting spirit" caught up with Coleman...

DISSOLVE TO:

7 INT. CLASSROOM - SAME

7

ON A BEAUTIFUL PALLADIAN WINDOW--that looks out onto another imposing church, this one in the Gothic style. Over this we hear Coleman Silk reciting first in Greek, then in English:

COLEMAN'S VOICE
"Sing O Gods, of the wrath of
Achilles..."

THE CAMERA PANS DOWN FROM THE WINDOW TO COLEMAN SILK who stands in front of a desk on a raised platform. He holds a worn copy of the Iliad in one hand

COLEMAN'S VOICE
(continuing)

All of European literature springs from a fight--a barroom brawl really. And what was Achilles so angry about? He and King Agamemnon are quarreling over a woman, a young girl and her body and the delights of sexual rapacity... Achilles, the most hypersensitive killing machine in the history of warfare.

7 CONTINUED:

7

COLEMAN'S VOICE (cont'd)

Achilles, who because of his rage at not getting the girl--isolates himself defiantly outside the very society whose protector he is and whose need of him is enormous. Achilles has to give back the girl.

(a beat:)

This is how the great imaginative literature of Europe begins and that is why, three thousand years later, we are going to begin there today. Miss...

(scanning the paper
on the desk in front
of him)

Cummings, can you tell us...

Coleman looks up:

HIS POV: thirty students, silent, there is no sign of a response.

CLOSER ON COLEMAN--frowning.

COLEMAN

(sardonic)

Still not here. And Mr. Thomas?..

(a beat:)

We're five weeks into the semester and I haven't laid eyes on either of these folks. Do these people exist or are they spooks?

FREEZE FRAME ON COLEMAN-

NATHAN'S VOICE OVER

And now they had him. After thirty years of academic distinction, Coleman Silk would be brought down by the use of one single word.

8 INT. FACULTY CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

8

ON PROFESSOR DELPHINE ROUX--forty years old, chic, french accented. She is the chairperson of a faculty committee of seven. We note that one of the members of the committee is a middle aged black man (HERB KEBLE).

PROFESSOR ROUX

Were you aware, Professor Silk, that Tracy Cummings and William Thomas are African Americans?

8 CONTINUED:

8

CROSS-CUT TO COLEMAN who sits across the table from them, baffled.

COLEMAN
(with icy sarcasm)
How could I be? I've never seen them.

PROFESSOR ROUX
But you are aware of the connotation of the word spook.

COLEMAN
(emphatic)
Ghost. I was referring to her ectoplasmic character.

He opens his dictionary to the marked page -

COLEMAN
(continuing)
Here's the first definition of the word: "Spook. 1. Informal, a ghost; specter."

ANOTHER FACULTY MEMBER
Dean Silk, let me read you the second dictionary meaning:
(reading)
"Disparaging. A Negro."

COLEMAN
(leaning forward, speaking emphatically, but with care)
I had never laid eyes on them, how could I know they were black? What I did know was that they were invisible.

PROFESSOR ROUX
(awkward pause)
Nevertheless, they have lodged a complaint... Miss Cummings was deva-

COLEMAN
(cutting her off)
These students have not attended a single class! "Do they exist or are they spooks?!" Consider the context.

8 CONTINUED: (2)

8

COLEMAN (cont'd)

The only issue is the nonattendance of these students, their inexcusable neglect of work and their sheer chutzpah. To charge me with racism is not only false, it is spectacularly false.

Satisfied with his rebuttal, Coleman rises and leaves the room. HOLD ON the faculty sitting in silence.

NATHAN'S VOICE OVER

However it wasn't going to be that easy.

9 INT. IRIS SILK'S OFFICE IN COLEMAN'S HOUSE - DAY

9

IRIS

They what?

IRIS, Coleman's wife, a vital woman with a mane of crinkly, salt and pepper, fly-away hair, always threatening to burst the confines of bands, pins, combs and pencils she thrusts into it. She wears an ethnic but chic print dress and lots of "folkloric jewelry."

Her office in their home is almost as much of a rat's nest as her hair, bespeaking her many civic and aesthetic activities-

COLEMAN

Accused me of quote, employing a racist epithet. Unquote.

IRIS

What epithet?

COLEMAN

Spook. Fifty years ago, it was slang for-

IRIS

(cutting him off)

I know what it was slang for.

(then:)

That's absurd. Did you remind them that when you were Dean, you hired the first black -

COLEMAN

(hasty irony)

African American--

9 CONTINUED:

9

IRIS

Hired the first *African American* ever on the faculty. What about Herb Keble? He's on the committee isn't he? Herb and Edith are friends of ours for God's sake! Didn't Herb open his mouth?

COLEMAN

Oh, yes...

(a withering
imitation of Herb's
sonorous voice)

"I'm sorry, Coleman. I can't be with you on this."

CLOSER ON IRIS--outraged at the injustice.

IRIS

Well, we'll fight them! We'll organize. My God, what a travesty - after thirty-five years of devoted...

(interrupting herself)

We'll start a petition drive, that's what we'll...

(racing ahead of
herself)

We'll get a lawyer. We'll counterattack--

THE CAMERA HOLDS ON IRIS as she continues, but the voice slows down and deepens, moving out of sync with the image-- like a record slowing down after the power has been shut off.

IRIS

(continuing)

I've got friends among the-

QUICK CUT OF COLEMAN--as he realizes something is horribly wrong.

COLEMAN

(a cry)

Iris!

VERY TIGHT ON IRIS--as she looks toward her husband, a look of utter terror on her face. She knows she is about to die.

We slowly FADE TO BLACK:

NATHAN'S VOICE OVER

No, it certainly wasn't going to be that easy.

10 INT. NATHAN ZUCKERMAN'S CABIN, BERKSHIRES - DAY

10

CLOSE ON A DESK cluttered with yellow legal pads, pencils, a computer. In the distance we hear the sound of a television set.

NATHAN'S VOICE OVER

Four hours later, Iris Silk died
in Coleman's arms. It was after
that that Coleman came into my
life.

THE CAMERA BEGINS TO PAN PAST a cup filled with old coffee, half a sandwich, stacks of books, etc., etc. The impression: chaos which hasn't been touched to REVEAL NATHAN ZUCKERMAN, (early 40's), staring at the TV; his is the voice we have been hearing. Light flickers on his expressionless face. Then, from O.S. We hear the sound of someone banging on a door. Nathan Zuckerman pays no attention. We HEAR applause from the TV. The banging on the door becomes more insistent. Nathan reluctantly gets to his feet-

NATHAN

(yelling)

I'm coming...I'm coming...

ON THE DOOR, he opens it cautiously.

NATHAN'S POV: Coleman Silk, wearing chinos and a sweater. What we notice immediately is that there is a ferocious intensity about the man; a fire of what just might be madness in his eyes.

COLEMAN

Zuckerman? Nathan Zuckerman?

NATHAN

(suspicious)

Yeah?

COLEMAN

(he charges inside
without being asked)

We've got to talk.

NATHAN

I'm afraid--

ON COLEMAN--He turns on Nathan, suddenly suspicious.

COLEMAN

You are the Zuckerman that's the
writer? Correct?

NATHAN

Yeah, but--

10 CONTINUED:

10

COLEMAN

Your last book won some sort of prize, right?

NATHAN

(starting to get pissed)

It was short listed for the--

COLEMAN

That was five years ago; what happened?

(not waiting for an answer)

Blocked? Right? You're blocked; worried you don't have another story in you? Well I can fix that. I'm the answer to your prayers. You know who I am?

NATHAN

(intrigued, at the very least)

Dean Silk?

COLEMAN

Dean Coleman Silk, that's right, the late, retired and now resigned and unlamented Dean Silk, following the MURDER - did you clock that? -MURDER of my wife.

(faces him)

How's that grab you, Zuckerman? Good enough to get your juices flowing? Huh?

NATHAN

I'm not sure I under-

Throughout the following Coleman paces around the room, pausing sometimes to pick up something only to immediately put it down. Occasionally he sits only to jump to his feet almost immediately and resume his pacing.

COLEMAN

Those sons of bitches killed my wife, Nathan--you don't mind if I call you Nathan?

(not waiting for an answer)

They killed her as sure as if they had taken a gun and fired it into her heart. Who would have thought Iris couldn't take it...

COLEMAN (cont'd)

(reflective)

Strong as she was, brave as she was.

(back to Nathan)

But their kind of stupidity was too much even for a juggernaut like Iris. Massive embolism. I got her to the hospital, but it was too late.

(fixing Nathan with a look)

The point is they meant to kill me, and they got her instead; all in the name of political correctness--an oxymoron if I ever heard one.

(pleased with himself)

There's your book, Zuckerman.

NATHAN

Look, Dean -

COLEMAN

Coleman, just Coleman. "All my other titles I have given away" -

NATHAN

Look...ah, Coleman, I can see you're devastated. And I'm sorry, really sorry. But I write fiction--

COLEMAN

(cutting him off)

Believe me, this thing will read like The Manchurian Candidate - they murdered the wrong person, for Chrissakes, and for what? One word. "Spooks"? Let me tell you something, Nathan.

(confidentially)

My father was a saloon keeper in New Jersey--the only Jewish saloonkeeper in East Orange. He only got as far as the seventh grade, but he insisted on the precision of words and I have kept faith with him.

(as though convincing himself)

I have kept faith with him.

Coleman has run out of steam for the moment. Flops onto the ratty sofa as Nathan studies him. Then, cautiously -

10 CONTINUED: (3)

10

NATHAN

If you don't mind a suggestion,
maybe you ought to write this book
yourself.

Coleman considers this.

COLEMAN

Maybe so. Maybe I should at that.
(then, looking around
the room:)
You're divorced, right?

NATHAN

Does it show?

COLEMAN

Nathan, you have the look about
you of a man at loose ends.
(sighs)
Takes one to know one.

NATHAN

What's the moment called in Greek
tragedy - you know, the one where
the hero learns that everything he
knows is wrong?

COLEMAN

Peripeteia...

NATHAN

(rueful)

That's me.

TIGHT ON COLEMAN--He smiles - different from the killer grin.
Open.

COLEMAN

Nathan, by any chance do you play
Gin Rummy?

NATHAN'S VOICE OVER

And that was how our friendship
began.

Over this we HEAR: STOMPIN' AT THE SAVOY

11 EXT. COLEMAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

11

A big, white, rambling home, with lights on and MUSIC
blasting from within. The screened-in porch is lit up,
too...and inside we can see two FIGURES playing cards...

12 INT. COLEMAN'S SCREEN-IN PORCH - NIGHT

12

ON A PING PONG TABLE with a computer, that is stacked high with papers. THE CAMERA PANS ACROSS TO COLEMAN AND NATHAN playing gin-rummy while drinking BEER from bottles.

ON COLEMAN--studying his hand.

COLEMAN
(nonchalant)
Why did you and your wife split up?

CROSS-CUTTING BETWEEN THEM:

NATHAN
Which wife--the first or the second?

That gets Coleman's attention.

NATHAN
(continuing; grins)
You sure you want to discard that?

We HEAR Ella Fitzgerald singing "But Not For Me" as we CUT TO:

13 INT. LIVING ROOM, COLEMAN'S HOUSE - DAY

13

CLOSE ON A PHOTOGRAPH OF IRIS SILK--It is a black and white photograph, we see her carrying a placard that reads, "Freedom of Choice." And this is obviously a rally at a women's clinic, because she is yelling at someone O.S.. She looks both alive and vital, beautiful and plain, angry and thoroughly happy all at the same time. It sits on the mantelpiece, surrounded by other photographs of his family.

WE REVERSE ON NATHAN--He takes the photograph from the mantle, so that he can study it more carefully. Over this we HEAR:

COLEMAN'S VOICE OVER
Forty years we were married...

ON THE DOOR LEADING FROM THE KITCHEN INTO THE LIVING ROOM -- coleman, in khakis and an oxford cloth, button down shirt, frayed around the collar and shirt tail hanging out, stands in the doorway holding two bottles of beer.

COLEMAN
Add on the six months we lived together. That's not bad - especially these days.

NATHAN
(sympathetic)
You must have loved her very much.

13 CONTINUED:

13

COLEMAN

After forty years, who could tell?

NATHAN

Kids?

COLEMAN

Jeff and Michael - both married now, tenured professors out in California. And then there's Mark, the thorn in my side; Marky, for whom nothing was ever quite good enough.

(sighs)

He's an orthodox Jew, lives with a dental technician, in Queens, who supports him while he writes long, angry, unpublishable poetry.

(picking up the

photograph of his daughter, smiling)

And there's my Lisa, she's in New York; teaches remedial reading.

Coleman studies the photograph of Lisa a moment longer - then puts it down as the music changes again; Dick Haymes is singing "Where or When."

14 INT. SCREENED IN PORCH - NIGHT

14

Once more we see the computer, if anything there are more papers piled on the ping pong table. THE CAMERA PANS ACROSS TO NATHAN AND COLEMAN. The gin rummy game continues; both men whooping with hilarity as they slam down their cards. Nathan steals a look at the ping-pong table - it is now COVERED with documents, boxes, more files.

Nathan glances back and sees Coleman has caught his look.

COLEMAN

Hey, you're the guy that threw away a chance at the Pulitzer, not me.

ON NATHAN--not fazed in the least; he smiles, lays down his cards.

NATHAN

Gin.

15 INT./EXT. PORCH - ANOTHER EVENING

15

As Nathan takes a pull from the bottle of beer, nods toward the ping-pong table: it's empty. On the floor, a lot of FILE BOXES crammed with papers.

NATHAN

What's with the book?

COLEMAN

The book has come and gone.

NATHAN

Meaning?

(he nudges a box with
a toe)

Meaning it's worthless. You can't make a college without breaking egg-heads and I couldn't write a book called Spooks that didn't sound like a lunatic raving. All this...

(nodding towards the
cartons of papers)

Useless; unless you count the dubious thrill of re-reading old love letters.

He takes several letters that he has obviously just been re-reading and drops them on top of one of the boxes.

TIGHTER IN as a photograph falls out of one of the envelopes.

ON NATHAN--as he leans down and picks it up.

HIS POV: INSERT OF THE PHOTOGRAPH--It is a snapshot taken in the late forties by a street photographer. It shows the young Coleman Silk; his dark hair is closely cropped (in what used to be called a GI cut); he wears a tweed jacket, oxford cloth, button down shirt (not dissimilar to the one he is wearing now), crew necked sweater. He is walking down the street, with a stunningly beautiful blonde girl, their arms around one another, laughing. However, what we notice most is that the girl looks at him with total adoration.

ON NATHAN--looking from the photograph to Coleman.

NATHAN

This you?

COLEMAN

(wry)

Hey, I was young once.

15 CONTINUED:

15

NATHAN

That's not what I meant. Who's the girl?

COLEMAN

(taking the photograph)

Her name's Steena Paulsen. She was from Minnesota.

NATHAN

(with a look)

Forgive me, Coleman, but you don't seem to me to be the Minnesota type.

COLEMAN

(with a laugh)

There are depths about me, young man, you will never plumb.

(then quickly:)

I met Steena when I was at NYU on the GI bill. Almost married her.

(a beat:)

What would my life have been like if I had.

As Coleman is talking "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered" starts to play on the radio.

COLEMAN

(continuing; he stops for a beat, savoring the music)

Listen...I hear that and everything within me unclenches and the wish not to die, never to die is almost too great to bear.

(then:)

Come on, let's dance...

NATHAN

(taken aback)

What?

COLEMAN

Dance. You and me. Don't worry, Nathan, I'm not making a pass. Come on, live a little.

NATHAN

Alright, but just don't sing in my ear, okay?

15 CONTINUED: (2)

15

And the two men start to dance.

NATHAN

(continuing)

You seem pretty cheerful for a man whose book just tanked.

COLEMAN

(a beat, then:)

I'm having an affair, Nathan.

NATHAN

No kidding?

COLEMAN

No kidding,...I'm having an affair with a thirty-four-year-old woman. I can't tell you what it's done to me.

NATHAN

I'm getting a pretty good idea...

COLEMAN

(with great simplicity)

I thought I couldn't take any more of anything. But...when this stuff comes back so...late in life,

(thoughtfully)

Completely unexpected, completely unwanted, it comes back at you with such force and...when there's nothing you can do about it, when there's nothing to dilute it.

NATHAN

And when she's thirty-four.

COLEMAN

(grins)

And ignitable, Nathan. Ignitable. Ever hear of something called Viagra? Without it I would still have the dignity befitting a man my age and position. Without it I could continue in my "declining years" to draw profound philosophical conclusions and have a steadying moral influence on the young.

15 CONTINUED: (3)

15

COLEMAN (cont'd)

Without Viagra I would not be doing something that makes no sense, something that is ill considered, and potentially disastrous for all involved.

NATHAN

So exactly where did you find, "La Belle Dame sans Merci"?

16 INT. ATHENA POST OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

16

CLOSE ON FAUNIA FARLEY, the woman who was next to Coleman in the fatal crash. WIDEN TO REVEAL her mopping the floor in the one room Post Office.

A thin woman with high-cheekbones, and a certain aristocratic carriage, she wears a cut-offs, a tee shirt and flip-flops. She's the janitor.

There's a KNOCK on the door. She ignores it. The KNOCK is repeated, insistently.

Finally, with an exasperated sigh, Faunia looks up.

HER POV - behind one of the glass door panes, a good-looking older man - Coleman - is peering at her, frowning... holding his hand to the glass like a salute so he can see inside...

FAUNIA

Closed.

(louder)

Closed!

He can't HEAR her but says something she can't make out. KNOCKS on the glass again.

HIS POV - Faunia comes to the glass opposite - they stare at each other, each face framed through the glass pane.

COLEMAN

I only want to use the stamp machine to get a -!

FAUNIA

(muffled)

Can't you read?!

She points through the window to the sign where the post office hours are posted -

16 CONTINUED:

16

COLEMAN

Come on..! I just want to use the
damn machine...

He points at the vending machine over her shoulder. She gets
it, considers, shrugs, what the hell. Unlocks the door -

FAUNIA

Hurry it up, okay?

COLEMAN

Thanks... Thanks so much...

Coleman hastily goes inside. She looks briefly around - no
witnesses, and closes the door.

Inside, Coleman buys his book of stamps.

CLOSER ON FAUNIA--as she studies him.

FAUNIA

Couldn't wait till tommorrow?

COLEMAN

(smiles at her)

Look, I really appreciate it...

He takes his book of stamps and heads out. As she re-locks
the door we CUT TO:

17 EXT. ATHENA PUBLIC LIBRARY - DUSK

17

Another day. Coleman, wearing a different outfit, exits
carrying a stack of books. An ACADEMIC COUPLE he used to
know gives him a wide berth. Pretending he hasn't seen this
snub, Coleman gets in his Volvo and heads out of town.

18 INT. COLEMAN'S VOLVO - DUSK

18

On Coleman--Driving home when he spots something ahead:

HIS POV, through the windshield, we sees the SUN setting
behind a big, old Chevy parked on the side of the road and
leaning against it, smoking a cigarette - is the woman
janitor from the post office. She wears a short denim skirt
and a t-shirt. Behind her a sign: AUDUBON SOCIETY.

19 EXT. ROAD - SAME

19

WIDE SHOT--Coleman stops his car beside the Chevy.

19 CONTINUED:

19

COLEMAN
 (yelling through the
 open window)
 Car trouble?

FAUNIA
 (shrugs)
 Every other day.

COLEMAN
 Can I give you a lift?

She looks at him, considering - flicks away the butt.

20 INT. COLEMAN'S VOLVO - LATER

20

Coleman drives.

COLEMAN
 Where can I drop you?

FAUNIA
 Nickerson's.

COLEMAN
 The organic dairy?

FAUNIA
 Yeah...Mind if I smoke?
 (she lights up, not
 waiting for an
 answer)
 There's two dykes that run it.
 (inhaling deeply)
 I get a room in exchange for doing
 the milking.

COLEMAN
 So you work in the post office AND
 the dairy...

FAUNIA
And the college. "Faunia Farley,
 Custodial Staff". Says so on my
 name tag.

COLEMAN
 (eyes on the road)
 Sounds like you keep busy.

FAUNIA
 Action is the enemy of thought.

CLOSER ON COLEMAN--That gets his attention; he looks at her.

20 CONTINUED:

20

COLEMAN

Who said that?

HIS POV; CLOSE ON FAUNIA--staring out the windshield. She exhales a long plume of smoke. We see that, much as she tries to hide it, she is very beautiful.

FAUNIA

Jesus, you ask a lot of questions.

COLEMAN

(reluctantly bringing
his eyes back to the
road)

You must know Smokey Hollenbeck.

FAUNIA

Smokey hired me.

COLEMAN

(glancing in her
direction)

And I hired Smokey.

FAUNIA

(looks him in the eye)

I know you did.

Coleman holds her look for a moment longer than necessary before turning his eyes back to the road.

21 EXT. BARN AT THE DAIRY - TWILIGHT

21

WIDE SHOT--as Coleman's Volvo drives into an open area between a large dairy barn and several outbuildings. It comes to a stop.

22 INT. VOLVO - SAME

22

There is a beat of silence, then:

FAUNIA

Well, I guess this is the end of
the line. Thanks for the lift.

COLEMAN

I enjoyed it. I can't tell you how
long it's been since I've sat next
to an attractive--

As he is talking, Faunia takes a cigarette, starts to light it.

22 CONTINUED:

22

COLEMAN
(continuing; quickly
reaching for the
matches)

Here...

He strikes a match and lights her cigarette.

TIGHTER ON THEM--as she puts her hand up and rests it gently on his hand.

TIGHTER ON HER as she blows out the match.

FAUNIA
You wanna' come in?

COLEMAN
(suddenly flustered)
Me? Thanks, but no...ah, I don't
think...
(then:)
Look, this may sound odd, but ah,
I haven't been this close to a
woman since--

FAUNIA
(finishing his
sentence)
Since your wife died. I know all
about it. Look, let's get
something straight, my friend. If
you're looking for sympathy,
you've come to the wrong place.
(inhaling deeply)
Sympathy's definitely not my
specialty.
(then as she gets
out:)
In any case thanks for the ride.

COLEMAN'S POV as she walks inside one of the buildings,
leaving the door open behind her.

CLOSE ON COLEMAN--He stares at her long after she has
disappeared, then looking up, he spots his reflection in the
rearview mirror--grins.

COLEMAN
Action is the enemy of thought.

As he opens the door and gets out of the car we CUT TO:

23 INT. OUTBUILDING - SAME

23

ON THE DOOR--as he pushes open the door.

HIS POV: Although there is very little light we can see a stairway leading to the second floor where a door is open and a light on inside the room.

ON COLEMAN--as he starts up the stairs.

24 INT. FAUNIA'S ROOM - SAME

24

ON COLEMAN--as he steps inside. THE CAMERA PANS ACROSS TO FAUNIA in bed; although the covers are around her we can see that she is naked beneath them--clearly waiting for him.

CLOSER ON COLEMAN--He looks at her for a long beat and THE CAMERA MOVES WITH HIM as he crosses to Faunia, sits beside her on the bed.

ON FAUNIA--as he does she reaches up, wraps her arms around his neck and draws him to her. As they kiss we FADE TO BLACK:

25 INT. FAUNIA'S ROOM AT THE DAIRY - LATER

25

It is obvious they have just made love.

FAUNIA

Now then, you gotta get out of here. Nothing personal, but I don't get my beauty sleep, I don't wake in time to do the milking...

COLEMAN

Will I see you again?

FAUNIA

(guffawing)

Hell, you can't much miss me.

ON COLEMAN--He leans forward, starts to kiss the inside of her wrist, stops:

INSERT; HIS POV: across the wrist we see an ugly red scar. THE CAMERA WHIP PANS ACROSS TO HER FACE--she looks at him with a steady gaze.

FAUNIA

(continuing)

The question is, will I see you again?

Ie: now that you've seen my wrist scars?

By way of answer, Coleman leans down and kisses her passionately on the mouth.

25 CONTINUED:

25

TIGHT ON THE INTENSE KISS - as Coleman pulls away, Faunia's eyes are still closed, but there's a little smile-

FAUNIA
(continuing; barely
a whisper)
Now you're talking...

26 INT. BARTON HALL, ATHENA CAMPUS - EVENING

26

The corridor deserted at this hour. Over this we hear:

NATHAN'S VOICE OVER
But they did see each other again
and again.

27 INT. ENGLISH CLASSROOM, BARTON HALL - EVENING

27

Faunia is dusting, collecting trash, etc. A car HORN. She looks out the window.

HER POV - Coleman's Volvo out in front.

Faunia's face: no change of expression but she tugs the kerchief out of her hair...

28 EXT. BARTON HALL, ATHENA CAMPUS - MOMENTS LATER

28

Faunia runs out the door towards the car; as she does she brushes past a woman carrying a briefcase. Faunia reaches Coleman's Volvo, jumps inside and as the door slams behind her we

REVERSE ON THE WOMAN SHE PASSED--who turns to look. It is Delphine Roux, the woman we saw at the "Spooks" hearing. She watches the car drive away, her face a mask.

29 INT. COLEMAN'S PORCH - NIGHT

29

Nathan and Coleman are playing gin. Nathan is dealing, his eyes on Coleman.

NATHAN
You ought to know something,
Coleman--the jungle drums are
beating, you know the sort of
thing... "Small college town.
Distinguished professor flips out,
seen entering pharmacy, clutching
prescription."
(he discards)

29 CONTINUED:

29

COLEMAN
(studying his hand)

Ummm...

(then:)

Are you certain you want to
discard that?

NATHAN

Yes.

(watching as Coleman
takes his discard)

Coleman, are you listening? Right
now we're living at a time and in
a country where people are doing
everything they can to bring down
the President. -

COLEMAN

Who happens to be a jerk...

NATHAN

Nevertheless, if they're doing
that to him, they sure as Hell
won't hesitate to go after you.
We can't just -

COLEMAN

(looking up at Nathan)

Can I stop you right there? If
there's one word I've struggled
with all my life, Nathan, it's the
tyrannical word "we." We must, we
can't, we don't. I'm not talking
about we, I'm talking about me.
I'm not hurting anyone, I'm not
breaking any laws.

(grins)

I'm just having fantastic sex.

(laying down his
cards)

Gin.

CLOSE ON NATHAN--studying his friend.

NATHAN

(with a look)

Coleman, there is no such thing as
just having fantastic sex.

30 EXT. COLEMAN'S HOUSE - LATE AT NIGHT

30

ESTABLISHING SHOT--The house is dark.

31 INT. COLEMAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

31

The clock on a table beside the bed says: 12:15. THE CAMERA MOVES ACROSS TO COLEMAN--who is awake watching Faunia whose eyes are closed.

COLEMAN

What are you thinking?

FAUNIA

I'm thinking you're going to ruin it.

COLEMAN

No I'm not.

FAUNIA

You are. "What are you thinking?" Why can't you leave well enough alone? Why do we have to talk?

He looks at her, says nothing - she relents.

FAUNIA

(continuing; opening her eyes, looking at him)

Alright, have it your way. I'm thinking I'm a crow.

COLEMAN

A crow... Why do you-

FAUNIA

Uh uh. Your turn.

He's not sure where to begin -

COLEMAN

I was wondering what it was like making love -

FAUNIA

Fucking -

COLEMAN

All right, "fucking". What's it like "fucking" an old man?

FAUNIA

Perfect; no surprises. What's it like being out of a job?

COLEMAN

Lonely. Like you, I suspect. My turn?

31 CONTINUED:

31

She doesn't contradict him -

COLEMAN

(continuing)

Aside from that dumb car, you don't seem to have any possessions. I mean, there's not even a calendar on the wall--

She stops Coleman and begins to kiss him with great passion.

COLEMAN

(continuing; coming up for air)

Action is the enemy of thought?

She sits up, annoyed -

FAUNIA

All right! My life story, is that what you want?

(fires up a cigarette)

Fine. I used to have lots of "possessions". My father was rich, I mean really rich. I grew up in a big house outside of Boston, oriental rugs, fireplaces in every room, a staff of servants-- the whole nine yards.

(noticing his look)

You don't believe me?

COLEMAN

Yes. Yes, I do.

She settles back, blowing smoke -

FAUNIA

Then my parents got divorced. My mother remarried - another rich guy. The thing is this one couldn't keep his hands off me.

(a beat:)

Bedtime stories were his speciality - sweetheart, lemme read you a story. Before I knew it he had his fingers in my cunt--

(uneasy)

Look, you don't have to -

31 CONTINUED: (2)

31

FAUNIA

(sharp)

Hey, you asked.

(then:)

I told my mother, but she didn't believe me. Nobody believed me. When I was fourteen he tried to fuck me. That's when I split.

(shrugs)

No possessions. I travel light.

COLEMAN

I'm really -

She sits up abruptly -

FAUNIA

What's that?

COLEMAN

What's w-

FAUNIA

Sssh!

They listen. Dead silence except for crickets...

COLEMAN

It's nothing. What could it be?

FAUNIA

It's Les.

COLEMAN

Les? Who's -?

FAUNIA

(peeks out the window)

My ex-husband. He works at a garage in town. Follows me around...shit.

COLEMAN

(slipping on his trousers)

If he's bothering you, I'll deal with him...

FAUNIA

(alarmed whisper)

No!

31 CONTINUED: (3)

31

COLEMAN

Hey, once upon a time I was
counted a pretty fair boxer...

She grabs him -

FAUNIA

This is no joke. He's out of his
mind. He was in Viet Nam...Two
tours of duty. He used to kill
gooks and keep their ears on a
string. Just...

(she listens, then
releases him)

Maybe I imagined it.

She sits on the bed, shaking. He puts an arm around her.

FAUNIA

(continuing)

If I moved in my sleep he thought
it was gooks. Used to beat me so
bad...one time I was in a coma.

COLEMAN

Jesus... Why does he follow you?

FAUNIA

He's crazy, I told you.
(then she gets to her
feet and starts to
dress)

I've got to go.

COLEMAN

(concerned)

Stay.

FAUNIA

No.

(then:)

No, I never stay.

32 INT. DAIRY BARN - THE NEXT MORNING

32

ON FAUNIA--She wears shorts, high, rubber boots and a tee-
shirt, not exactly romantic, but on her the effect is
curiously carnal. She moves through her morning routine of
milking. She nudges a COW into position -

32 CONTINUED:

32

FAUNIA
 C'mon Maggie, that's a good girl...
 (then:)
 Move your ass, Flossie you old
 bitch.

Suddenly Faunia realizes that she isn't alone; she looks O.S.
 smiles:

COLEMAN SILK--Who knows how long he has been standing
 watching her;

COLEMAN
 (returning her smile)
 Hi...

ON FAUNIA--She looks at him and nods; there is an unexpected
 dignity in her gaze.

COLEMAN
 (continuing)
 I, ah...got to thinking and...ah,
 when you reach my age it wouldn't
 hurt if I were to start drinking
 more milk. I mean...
 (embarrassed)
 Calcium--that sort of thing.

FAUNIA
 (amused)
 The milk's in that old fridge by
 the door. Leave a couple of
 dollars in the mason jar on the
 top.

COLEMAN
 Fine...

Nevertheless, he doesn't move.

CLOSE ON FAUNIA IN A SERIES OF DISSOLVES WE SEE: Faunia
 gently, but firmly shoving the cows into position. We see her
 attaching the cups to the cows teats and massaging the
 udders. There are patches of sweat between her shoulder
 blades and beneath her breasts. Her shorts are ripped along
 the side and we note that she isn't wearing underwear. This
 is all powerfully erotic without being premeditated in the
 least. Coleman watches, mesmerized. All through this she is
 talking to him.

FAUNIA
 Come on, Daisy... After I left
 Boston, I was in Florida for a
 while, doing this and that.

32 CONTINUED: (2)

32

FAUNIA (cont'd)

A girl like me can always get by.
Hand me that hose - the red one-

Coleman hands it to her - enchanted by her sensual movements
as she goes about her work... her hands...

FAUNIA

(continuing)

Then I got tired of that, came up
here and married - guess what - a
dairy farmer. Lester Farley. I
was 20...

(she looks at Coleman
who is watching her)

What are you looking at?

CLOSER ON COLEMAN--Hew smiles, shrugs.

TIGHT ON FAUNIA--She returns the smile, then goes back to
work.

FAUNIA

(continuing)

I remember one time we got in this
huge fight in the barn and I threw
cow shit at him. He threw cow shit
back at me; next thing you know
we're both covered in cow shit and
laughing like hell. Best day of
the marriage.

COLEMAN

(more to make
conversation than
anything)

You never had kids?

FAUNIA

(a beat:)

No. No kids.

33 INT. VA HOSPITAL - DAY

33

CLOSE ON LESTER FARLEY--He is the same man who we saw in the
opening sequence, sitting in the truck; the same man who ran
Coleman Silk and Faunia off the road.

PSYCHOLOGIST (O.S.)

Did you ever kill anyone in
Vietnam, Mr. Farley?

33 CONTINUED:

33

LES
 (he looks around
 amused)
 Did I kill anyone?
 (taking out a pack of
 cigarettes)
 Wasn't that what I was supposed to
 do when they sent me to Vietnam?
 Fucking kill gooks? They said
 everything goes so...I guess
 everything went. You have a match?

A moment later someone from O.S. hands him a pack of matches.

LES
 (continuing; good
 manners)
 Thanks.
 (he lights his
 cigarette, inhales)
 Look, let's get something straight
 right off the bat, I never hurt
 her, okay? Never. And I never hurt
 the kids. That was all lies. She
 never cared about anyone but
 herself. I should've never let her
 go off with the kids. She--
 (interrupting himself)
 You sure you don't mind me smoking?

PSYCHOLOGIST (O.S.)
 Not at all.

LES
 She waited until I was in rehab.
 That's why she wanted to get me in
 rehab to start with, so she could
 take the kids. She used the whole
 thing against me to get the kids
 away. She had no right to steal my
 kids. And now she's fucking this
 old Jew.
 (quietly)
 I should've killed her back then.

34 INT. VERMONT "MADAMASKA INN" RESTAURANT - NIGHT

34

Coleman has taken to Faunia to a candlelit dinner at a New
 England gourmet inn. Faunia is nicely dressed; Coleman wears
 a tie.

34 CONTINUED:

34

FAUNIA
 (uneasy)
 I don't know why we had to do
 this...

COLEMAN
 (smiles)
 It's a meal, not a commitment.

FAUNIA
 (suspicious)
 Have it your way.

VOICE
 Hope I'm not late...

They look up. It's Nathan.

TIGHT ON FAUNIA--She turns to Coleman with the look of an animal caught in a trap.

COLEMAN
 (to Nathan)
 We just got here.
 (to Faunia, ignoring
 her look)
 Faunia, I'd like you to meet my
 friend Nathan.

NATHAN
 Hi.

He extends his hand, which she ignores, glaring at Coleman. Nathan sits, recovering, just then the maitre'd appears hovering at Faunia's shoulder.

MAITRE'D
 (handing her a menu)
 Madame the specialty of the house
 is game...
 (pointing)
 Perhaps the venison.

Silence.

MAITRE'D
 (continuing)
 Or perhaps Madame would prefer the
 fish. In that case I would
 recommend this...
 (pointing to one item
 on the menu)
 Or this...

34 CONTINUED: (2)

34

She slams the menu into the waiter.

FAUNIA
 Whatever he's having...
 (indicating Coleman)
 Ditto for me.

QUICK CUT NATHAN--as he suddenly realizes that Faunia cannot read.

TIGHT ON FAUNIA--who interprets Nathan's avoidance of his friend's gaze correctly.

FAUNIA
 (continuing)
 That's right, Mr. Zuckerman. I
 can't read.

And she's out of there. Coleman is on his feet now -

NATHAN
 Coleman -

COLEMAN
 (going after her)
 Look, I'm sorry -

NATHAN
 Another time...

COLEMAN
 Right...

Nathan sits alone at the table set for three...

35 EXT. MADAMASKA INN - NIGHT

35

Coleman pursuing Faunia as she storms into his VOLVO. As Coleman climbs into the driver's side,

36 INT. COLEMAN'S VOLVO - SAME

36

She's staring straight ahead...

FAUNIA
 Full of surprises, aren't you?

COLEMAN
 Take it easy. He's my friend,
 okay? I wanted you to get to know
 one another.

36 CONTINUED:

36

FAUNIA

Because you're so proud of me,
right?

(lighting a cigarette)

You've really come down in the
world, haven't you? Dean of
Faculty, professor of classics -
and look at you, fucking a
cleaning lady who can't even
fucking read..!

Coleman says nothing. There's nothing he can say.

FAUNIA

(continuing; her
voice quiet)

You're going to drop me now,
aren't you?

COLEMAN

Why are you always-

FAUNIA

Because you're not up to fucking
somebody who can't read. That's
what you were thinking -

It's exactly what he was thinking, but Coleman kisses her
hard, his hands on her breasts.

COLEMAN

You're wrong. I'm going to fuck
you extra hard because you can't
read.

FAUNIA

(throaty laugh)

Now you're talking.

37 EXT. VOLVO - SAME

37

Coleman's car pulls out and THE CAMERA PANS OVER TO REVEAL
THE RED PICK-UP (the same one that forced Coleman's car off
the road earlier). After a pause the pick-up's engine rumbles
to life and it begins to follow the Volvo.

38 EXT. THE DAIRY - NIGHT

38

We see Coleman's Volvo parked near the small house where
Faunia stays. All the lights are out; everything is quiet.
THE CAMERA PANS AWAY FROM THE VOLVO, PAST THE BARN AND COMES
TO REST ON THE RED PICK UP. It moves slowly around the corner
of the barn, lights off, and comes to a stop facing the
house, the motor idling.

38 CONTINUED:

38

CLOSE ON THE TRUCK--Through the window we see the flare of a match as Lester Farley lights a cigarette.

39 INT. FAUNIA'S ROOM AT THE DAIRY -SAME

39

The room is dark, lit only by the moonlight coming through the windows. THE CAMERA PANS ACROSS TO THE BED where Faunia and Coleman lay sleeping, wrapped around one another. THE CAMERA MOVES INTO A CLOSE SHOT OF FAUNIA as she comes wide awake. In the distance we hear the sound of Lester's truck idling. Her sudden motion brings Coleman awake.

COLEMAN

What is it? What's wrong?

FAUNIA

(a whisper)

It's Les. He's out there. I can hear the truck.

In the silence we can hear the engine of the truck as Les revs the engine slightly.

Coleman grabs for his trousers.

COLEMAN

I'll take care of this.

FAUNIA

(panic)

No, don't! He's crazy.

But it is too late. Coleman has his trousers on and is pulling a sweater over his head.

40 EXT. BARN - MOMENTS LATER

40

As we watch, the high beams of the truck are turned on. A moment later Lester Farley appears in front of the truck silhouetted against the glare of the headlights.

LES

(yelling)

Come out of there you murdering bitch!

ON THE DOOR--as it opens and Coleman steps outside holding a tire iron.

COLEMAN

Come here you. I wanna talk to you!

CLOSER ON LES: locking eyes with Coleman.

40 CONTINUED:

40

LES

Did she tell you?! Did she?! I bet not!

(shouting so Faunia
can hear)

I bet you fucking didn't!

(back to Coleman)

Did she tell you she was giving some guy a blow job while her kids were catching fire? Did she?

COLEMAN

Get out of here before I brain you!

LES

Put that fucking thing down before I ram it through your fucking skull!

FAUNIA'S VOICE

Les!

TIGHT ON LES--He stops, looks at her. At the sight of her his face suffuses with pain.

HIS POV: Faunia stands just outside the door, now she is wearing Coleman's shirt and baggy work pants. She holds up a revolver for him to see.

FAUNIA

(from her tone of
voice she is
practiced in dealing
with her ex-husband)

Don't try anything, Les. I've already called the police.

CLOSE ON LES--He stands in the open area, staring at his wife, his chest heaving.

LES

You murdering, fucking cunt!

In the distance we hear a police siren approaching.

COLEMAN

Get the fuck away from here.

Just then a squad car with lights and sirens roars up.

CLOSE ON LES--He freezes.

ON THE SQUAD CAR--The doors open and two cops race towards Les.

40 CONTINUED: (2)

40

LES

Look who's here! Fucking
government gonna stick me back in
rehab?! No fuckin' way..!

1ST COP

Come on, Les...

FAUNIA

Watch out -!

He swings at one of the cops, two more grab him from behind.
He struggles but to no avail.

LES

Fucking payback for what I did in
'Nam -!

The COPS have tackled Les but it isn't easy. They wrestle him
to the ground and drag him to the squad car.

LES

(continuing)

Rehab again, right?! Thorazine
for breakfast, right?! Fucking
government. This is the fucking
thanks I get for serving my
country--for all the shit I went
through.

(as they drag him
back towards the
police car)

They didn't give us a fucking
chance. They say we lost the war.
We didn't lose the war, the
fucking government lost the war.
I walked the walk, man. You can't
know the shit I've seen. And then
I come home to this!

The COPS have reached the squad car, they open the back door
VERY TIGHT ON LES--as they force him into the back seat, he
stares at his wife with a terrifying ferocity.

LES

(continuing)

Fucking a goddamn carpenter while
her kids are on fire! I shoulda
killed you and my kids when I had
the chance - !

As the door slams, blocking him from view, we CUT TO:

41 INT. FAUNIA'S ROOM AT THE DAIRY - LATER

41

Faunia sits on the edge of the bed, shivering. Coleman is beside her, saying nothing, watching her patiently. Finally

FAUNIA
 (a whisper)
 You wanted to know why I didn't
 have any possessions. Well, now I
 guess you found out...

She fumbles under the bed. Fishes out a small URN and places it on her lap.

FAUNIA
 (continuing; stares
 at it)
 This is what's left of my kids.
 (a long beat)
 It was an accident. A space
 heater tipped over and the place
 caught fire.

Tears stand in her eyes - spill down her cheeks...

FAUNIA
 (continuing;
 clutching it to her
 breast, rocking it)
 I can never figure out what to do
 with them. Keep them? Bury them?
 My sole remaining "possession" and
 I don't know what to do with it.
 You got any bright ideas,
 Professor? Or is this all too
 trailer trash for you?

He puts his arms around her, allowing her choking sobs -

COLEMAN
 (gently)
 It's all right. It's over. It's
 all over now...

NATHAN'S VOICE OVER
 But it wasn't. Not by a long shot.

42 INT. COLEMAN'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - MORNING

42

Coleman stands at the counter, the New York Times in front of him, spritzing a cappuccino a portable phone tucked to his ear... MUSIC on the radio...

COLEMAN
 Lisa, darling, it's Dad...how's it
 going...? What? I can't hear you.

42 CONTINUED:

42

He turns down his radio -

43 INT. LISA'S TINY NYC APT. - MORNING

43

Lisa, at her cluttered desk, filled with paperwork. She's attractive, with her mother's important hair but without Iris' aura of authority. Lisa is always overwhelmed.

And just now upset as well, curt...

LISA
I said I'm fine.

INTERCUT WITH a puzzled COLEMAN -

COLEMAN
You don't sound fine.
(no reply)
How's the class coming?
(smiles)
What happened to the little kid
who couldn't recognize the letter
N? Did he ever get it? Lisa?

LISA
Everything's fine.

COLEMAN
(frowns)
Would you care to know how I am?

LISA
I know how you are.

COLEMAN
(vague premonition)
Do you?

She's staring into space, passing a hand over her forehead.

COLEMAN
(continuing)
Sweetheart, what's the matter?
You sound -

LISA
Dad, Marky told me all about it!

COLEMAN
Told you all about what?

LISA
Dad, everyone in Athena knows--

43 CONTINUED:

43

COLEMAN
 (his anger rising)
 Who? Who is everyone?

The line goes dead.

COLEMAN
 (continuing)
 Lisa? Lisa...!

44 INT. NELSON PRIMUS' LAW OFFICE, ATHENA - DAY

44

INSERT: A NEATLY FOLDED PIECE OF TYPING PAPER--written in big block letters with a red ball point pen we read: "EVERYONE KNOWS YOU'RE EXPLOITING AN ABUSED ILLITERATE WOMAN HALF YOUR AGE."

NELSON PRIMUS'S VOICE OVER
 Everyone knows you're exploiting
 an abused illiterate woman half
 your age.

REVERSE ON NELSON PRIMUS, Coleman's attorney, an amiable fellow in his thirties; he wears a suit that hints of Ralph Lauren more than Brooks Brothers. Nelson rapidly rereads the letter, mumbling the words together-

NELSON
 "Everyone knows you're exploiting
 an abused illiterate woman half
 your age."

A grim smile as he sets aside the letter and looks O.S.:

NELSON
 (continuing)
 Well, if this doesn't take the
 cake-

CROSS-CUT TO COLEMAN--pacing back and forth in front of his attorney's desk.

COLEMAN
 That's not all; my kids have even
 got wind of it.

NELSON
 You don't say...

COLEMAN
 What's more, I know damn well who
 wrote this - Delphine Roux.

44 CONTINUED:

44

NELSON

Who?

COLEMAN

Professor of Languages and
Literature.

(irate)

I hired her for Christ's sake! I
hired all of them..!

NELSON

Why would she send you something
like this?

COLEMAN

I've no idea. How should I know?
You're my lawyer. I want you to
send her a letter and warn her off.

NELSON

She'll just deny she ever -

COLEMAN

That's her writing! Any
handwriting expert would con-

NELSON

You're being hasty -

COLEMAN

No! No I'm not -

NELSON

Yes you are, same as when you
resigned from the college, just as
the whole "Spooks" thing was on
the point of blowing over. I told
you then -

COLEMAN

And I told you: they killed my
wife! What else could I-?

NELSON

Coleman. Slow down. SIT.

Reluctantly, Coleman obeys. Nelson studies him.

NELSON

(continuing)

Listen to me, professor. Forget
about the letter. You got bigger
fish to fry. What are you going to
do about Lester Farley?

44 CONTINUED: (2)

44

COLEMAN

Get a restraining order, an injunction, I don't know...

NELSON

A restraining order. Have you any idea what you're getting into here, Coleman? What it looks like from the outside?

(leaning back in his chair)

After thirty-some years of academic distinction in a community you virtually created from scratch, suddenly you've gone off the deep end. You want me to fight a legal war for you on two fronts - one of them with a phantom correspondent and the other with a psychotic who's been locked up twice in the mental ward at the VA hospital in Northampton, under real restraints, not legal ones.

Before Coleman can get in a word -

NELSON

(continuing)

Sure I can get a restraining order, but will that restrain him? I can get you a handwriting expert. I can get you a bulletproof vest. But what I can't provide is what you're never going to know as long as you're involved with this woman: a scandal-free, Farley-free life. Is she HIV negative, by the way? Did you have her tested, Coleman? Did you use a condom, Coleman? And if you don't use protection, does SHE? How do you know she doesn't want to use you to help make up for what she's lost? Do I represent you in the paternity suit, Coleman?

COLEMAN

I can handle Lester if I have to-

NELSON

But why do you have to? Give up the girl, Achilles.

44 CONTINUED: (3)

44

COLEMAN
 (stiffening)
 I beg your pardon?

NELSON
 (grins)
 I took your intro to European lit
 umpteen years ago as an undergrad.
 Never forgot your lectures on
 Homer. Achilles, listen to me: you
 have to give up the girl. Give
 her up and your troubles go away.
 I'm speaking as your friend as
 well as your attorney. Faunia
 Farley is not in your league and
 she's not from your world. Last
 night you got a good look at her
 world - Coleman, the fact is she
 ain't worth it.
 (a amiable smile)
 Achilles on Viagra - how much
 sense does that make anyway?

Coleman looks up at him - he's pale with fury. But when he
 speaks, it is with deadly quiet -

COLEMAN
 Are you quite finished?

The tone gives Nelson pause. Coleman rises to his feet.

COLEMAN
 (continuing)
 You're a genuine vocal master,
 Nelson. And so rich with contempt
 for every last human problem
 you've never had to face.

NELSON
 Listen, I was only -

COLEMAN
 You listen: I never again want to
 hear that self-admiring voice of
 yours - or see your smug, lily
 white face.

And with that he turns and stalks out. We HOLD ON THE OPEN
 DOOR to the outer office as Nelson's secretary sticks her
 head in.

SECRETARY
 Is anything wrong, Mr. Primus?

44 CONTINUED: (4)

44

ON NELSON--he stands looking after Coleman.

NELSON
 (to himself,
 perplexed)
 What the hell do you suppose he
 meant by, "lily white."

WHAM! The SOUND of a PUNCH landing -!

45 INT. GYMNASIUM BOXING RING - DAY

45

TIGHT ON AN IRISH KID--big, although he cannot be more than eighteen as he takes the jab, blinks in surprise; then lashes out in a fury.

TIGHT ON THE YOUNG COLEMAN SILK--aged 17 as he easily steps away from his opponent's punch, feints with his left and slams a right hook into the Irish kid's mid-section.

Note: As Coleman boxes, we notice the barest trace of a smile on his face; he knows just how good he is.

THEN IN A SERIES OF VERY QUICK CUTS we watch as Coleman bores in on his opponent, easily dancing out of the way each time the other boy tries to throw a punch. Over this we SUPERIMPOSE: "EAST ORANGE, NEW JERSEY 1944." Then, as the bell rings we CUT TO:

WIDER ANGLE--We see we're in a GYMNASIUM, where a group of twenty-five or thirty men have crowded around a boxing ring, cheering on the two young men.

IN COLEMAN'S CORNER, DOC CHIZNER, Coleman's coach. A Dentist in his 50's, Doc coaches kids but also referees big matches in Madison Square Garden. Coleman, covered with sweat, breathing hard returns to his corner, drops onto a stool.

DOC
 Coleman, wait for it! Wait for it!
 Let him do the work...Ah..!

As Doc and the CUTMAN work him over:

DOC
 (continuing)
 Listen to me, kid. You're smarter
 than him, you read me? Smarter.
 He's a putz. You counter punch.
 (tapping him on the
 side of the face)
 Coleman, pay attention...

45 CONTINUED:

45

Coleman, breathing deeply, staring at his opponent across the ring, nods.

DOC
(continuing)
Counter punch. That's your game.

Just then the bell sounds. Coleman charges out. As Doc watches, Coleman puts his strategy to devastating effect - it's like previews of Mohammed Ali. Coleman dancing away, dodging the punches - he's enjoying himself, enjoying using his brains in this brawny situation... bobbing and weaving. And then - WHAM! the counter punch from nowhere. As the Irish kid drops to his knees.

46 EXT. GYMNASIUM - LATER

46

ON THE DOOR--as it opens and the young Coleman, carrying a gym bag in one hand and a stack of books in the other, steps out. He holds the door open for Doc Chizner.

DOC
Next week, West Point...

COLEMAN
(worried)
Doc, that guy's got five pounds on me.

THE CAMERA TRACKS WITH THE TWO MEN as they walk towards Doc Chizner's car.

DOC
(confident)
But he's slow. You can take him easy. Besides the Pitt coach is gonna' be there. He's a buddy of mine. I want him to see you fight.

COLEMAN
So?

They walk in silence for several beats, then:

DOC
So, once he sees you fight and once I tell him about your grades, I'm pretty sure he'll offer you a scholarship to Pitt.

COLEMAN
(shakes his head)
I can't go to Pitt. My father wants me to go to Howard.

46 CONTINUED:

46

DOC
He's an optician, your dad?

COLEMAN
Used to be, he lost his business
in the depression.

By now they have reached Doc Chizner's car.

DOC
Look, Coleman, just box for the
guy. That's all. Then let's see
what happens.

He starts to get into the car, stops, turns back to Coleman.

DOC
(continuing;
embarrassed to be
saying this)
One thing. When you meet the guy
from Pitt, don't tell him you're
colored, okay?

COLEMAN
Don't tell him?

DOC
Don't bring it up. You're neither
one thing or the other. You're
Silky Silk. That's all.

COLEMAN
He won't know?

DOC
How's he gonna know? Here's the
top kid from East Orange High and
he's with Doc Chizner; he's gonna
think you're Jewish.

And with that, Doc gets into the car and drives away as we
HOLD ON YOUR COLEMAN watching the car disappear a thoughtful
look on his face.

47 EXT. ALLEYWAY, EAST ORANGE - TWILIGHT

47

TRACKING WITH COLEMAN--as he races down the alleyway, pushes
his way through a back gate and dashes up a short staircase,
two steps at a time.

ON THE BACK DOOR--where his sister ERNESTINE, a light skinned
African American girl of fifteen is waiting for him.

47 CONTINUED:

47

ERNESTINE
 (an urgent whisper)
 You're late!

48 INT. SILK HOUSE, EAST ORANGE, NJ - NIGHT

48

As Coleman pushes through the door, hands Ernestine his gym bag.

COLEMAN
 I know. Hide this for me willya-

THE CAMERA MOVES WITH THEM as they walk through the kitchen toward the dining room.

ERNESTINE
 Walter's home on leave -!

49 INT. SILK DINING ROOM - EVENING

49

ON THE DOOR--as Coleman steps through the door into the dining room; it is attractively but inexpensively furnished. Framed reproductions of flower painting and landscapes are on the walls.

THE CAMERA PANS ACROSS TO THE DINING TABLE where the Silk family sits at dinner. Coleman's parents are light-skinned African Americans.

Coleman's MOTHER is a primly attractive woman who sits very straight in her chair - a nurse by profession.

Coleman's FATHER is a barrel-chested man with intelligent features. He wears a tasteful, but inexpensive suit.

The atmosphere in the room has a definite chill.

ON COLEMAN--as he takes a seat next to his brother WALTER, who is wearing a spiffy army uniform -

COLEMAN
 Sorry, I'm late--

ON COLEMAN'S FATHER--who says nothing, doesn't look up at his son.

WALTER
 (coming to Coleman's
 rescue)
 What's this I hear about you being
 class Valedictorian?

Mr. Silk continues to eat, saying nothing. Walter throws a glance toward Coleman. Coleman shrugs.

49 CONTINUED:

49

Just then Ernestine enters the room having stashed Coleman's gym bag somewhere.

ERNESTINE

Hey, with the only four point o grade average, who else were they--

MRS. SILK

Yes, we're very proud of Coleman.

Nothing. Mr. Silk doesn't bother to look up.

MR. SILK

(icy)

May I inquire how you did, Coleman?

TIGHT ON COLEMAN--again he shoots Walter a look, this time Walter shrugs.

COLEMAN

How I did?

MR. SILK

Night before last, at the Knights of Pythias arena. I'm asking whether you won or lost your bout.

COLEMAN

(furious, to Ernestine)

Did you tell them?

However before she can reply:

MR. SILK

Kindly answer my question.

COLEMAN

(glum)

I won.

MR. SILK

(like a prosecuting attorney)

And how many fights have you won so far?

COLEMAN

(quiet)

Eleven.

MR. SILK

And how many have you lost?

49 CONTINUED: (2)

49

COLEMAN
None, so far.

MR. SILK
(acid)
And when are you planning on
turning professional?

WALTER
(coming to Coleman's
defense)
Dad, he's only--

MR. SILK
(not bothering to
even look at Walter)
This does not concern you, Walter.
(to Coleman)
I asked you a question, young man.

COLEMAN
(eyes averted)
Doc says I could get an athletic
scholarship, maybe to Pitt.

MR. SILK
Like Walter, you will go to
Howard. And after Howard, should
you choose to become a doctor, you
will not be doing your hands any
good, pummeling them in a boxing
ring.
(getting to his feet)
You know, if I were your father,
Coleman, you know what I'd tell
you now?

COLEMAN
You are my father.

MR. SILK
I'm not at all sure. I was
thinking that Doc Chizner was your
father.

COLEMAN
He's my coach, that's all. He
teaches me how to fight. You're
my father.

MR. SILK
Well if I were your father, you
know what I'd tell you now?

49 CONTINUED: (3)

49

COLEMAN
(his voice a whisper)

What.

MR. SILK
I would say, "You won last night.
Good. Now you can retire
undefeated."
(firm)
You're retired.
(getting to his feet)
Now, if you'll excuse me, I don't
want to miss my train.

A SHRILL TRAIN WHISTLE OVER..!

50 INT. PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD DINING CAR - DAY

50

Filled with DINERS and uniformed WAITERS bustling among white tablecloths, Mr. Silk, among them, carrying an overloaded TRAY.

DINER
Boy, this fish is overcooked...

MR. SILK
Sorry, sir...

DINER
I'd like to change my order...

MR. SILK
Yes, sir, very good, sir,...

He picks up the man's plate, puts it on the laden tray along with food, glasses and utensils, starts back to the galley -

Suddenly he collapses, bringing down dishes with a CRASH! that startles everyone in the dining car.

51 EXT. EAST ORANGE CEMETERY - DAY

51

A dreary spot. A knot of MOURNERS across from Mr. Silk's coffin. Mrs. Silk upright as always, her hair now tinged with GREY, a handkerchief to her mouth, holds Ernestine's hand.

Ernestine's tears stream silently down...

51 CONTINUED:

51

THE MINISTER

"Cowards die many times before
their deaths; the valiant never
taste of death but once."
Clarence Silk knew well those
lines from Julius Caesar. But I
don't think there's any question
here about who was valiant.

PAN TO COLEMAN, stunned -

The coffin now lowered into the ground...

THE MINISTER'S VOICE

Ashes to ashes...

52 INT. (COLEMAN'S) DARK ROOM - EVENING

52

At first we don't know where we are. Then a DOOR is opened,
revealing a SILHOUETTE -

MRS. SILK

Coleman?

COLEMAN

Leave it off...Please...

MRS. SILK

Alright.

She closes the door and walks tentatively towards Coleman,
who lies in his bed. Gradually, our eyes become accustomed to
the dark; his mother sits on the edge of the bed.

She's in her crisp, starched white NURSE'S UNIFORM -

COLEMAN

You on duty? Tonight?

MRS. SILK

It's better this way. For me,
anyway...

COLEMAN

I never knew him. Not really. I
didn't have any idea what he went
through. Every...

(on the verge of
saying "goddamned"
but checks himself
in front of his
mother)

...single day...

52 CONTINUED:

52

MRS. SILK

I don't believe he wanted you to know, dear. He couldn't see the point.

COLEMAN

I can see the point. The point is if you're Colored it doesn't matter how much you know, you work in the dining car. That's the point.

MRS. SILK

Coleman, if it's your education, you don't have to worry. Your father's insurance and your own academic record will see to it that you get into Howard.

COLEMAN

Mom, Howard isn't a real university. Howard's no different from East Orange.

MRS. SILK

(sharp)

Coleman!

COLEMAN

(he must make himself heard, despite the cost)

I heard all about Howard from Walt. He said they're always talking about "the negro people." About "We the negro people." Mom, I'm not a "political" person. I don't know who this "we" is.

MRS. SILK

Your father wanted you to know who you were; to be proud of your race.

COLEMAN

(with passion)

What about me?! What about just being proud of being me? I don't want to be part of some group. I don't want to be "a Howard Negro."

MRS. SILK

Coleman, your father wanted the best for you. He--

52 CONTINUED: (2)

52

COLEMAN

And what about what I want?! It's my life! Don't I get any say in the matter?

(softening his tone)

Mom, I just want a chance to be the best I can be. Why is that so wrong?

MRS. SILK

I'm not clever enough to argue with you, Coleman...

COLEMAN

(he puts an arm around her)

Then don't. Don't let's argue. I love you, Mom, but don't ask me to go there...

MRS. SILK

Coleman... you're barely eighteen; what're you going to do?

53 INT. FEDERAL BUILDING, NAVAL RECRUITING OFFICE - DAY

53

Scores of YOUNG MEN filling out forms. PAN THE ROOM TO REVEAL

A large CALENDAR with the date - October 6, 1944 and several propaganda POSTERS which inform us that "There's still a war to be won" in the Pacific, "One down, One to Go" etc.

DISCOVER COLEMAN staring at his application form.

HIS POV: on the query demanding his age and date of birth. Coleman fills out the data, then looks over to -

PAN TO THE NEXT QUESTION: RACE

The form offers WHITE, NEGRO, ORIENTAL, OTHER

Coleman stares at the boxes - WHITE... NEGRO...

Instinctively he looks around the room before returning his scrutiny to the categories. Then:

CLOSE ON HIS PENCIL MAKING THE MARK IN THE BOX MARKED WHITE.

WIDER ANGLE--as Coleman hands the form to the NAVY RECRUITER, a young man (white) in a crisp white uniform. He studies the form, looks up at Coleman.

CLOSE ON COLEMAN--certain that he has been found out.

53 CONTINUED:

53

CROSS-CUTTING BETWEEN THEM:

NAVAL RECRUITER
 (a big smile)
 Welcome to the Navy, young man.

54 INT. NATHAN'S CABIN, BERKSHIRES - NIGHT

54

NATHAN, who looks up from the letter, which he has just read.

NATHAN
 So what did the lawyer say?

Coleman, still dressed as at Primus', paces, irritated,
 confused -

COLEMAN
 He wouldn't even discuss the
 letter, he just... Well, he -

NATHAN
 (not really a
 question)
 Was more worried about Lester
 Farley?

COLEMAN
 I don't want to talk about Lester
 Farley..!

NATHAN
 (hands him the glass)
 What DO you want to talk about?
 You show up here, all in a lather -

Silence, as Coleman struggles with his emotions.

Nathan studies him, then, softly -

NATHAN
 (continuing)
 Listen, I was at the post office
 this morning, I heard people
 saying you got Faunia Farley
 pregnant, that she had an abortion
 and tried to kill herself--

COLEMAN
 (cutting him off)
 Did they add she's an opium eater,
 while they were at it? And don't
 forget the best part, she's an
 "illiterate woman"!

54 CONTINUED:

54

NATHAN

Coleman, I know it's bullshit, I'm your friend, remember -?

Coleman bangs down the glass of ice tea -

COLEMAN

Then act like it.

NATHAN

Coleman, don't take these people on.

(gesturing toward the television where the impeachment hearings are playing)

They're all crazy to blame, crazy to punish-

COLEMAN

So I just throw her to the wolves?

(Realizes)

She's waiting for that. To her, sex and betrayal are as basic as bread.

NATHAN

I'm not thinking about her. I'm thinking about you.

But Coleman is cranking up...

COLEMAN

Christ, my own kids - I never allowed any of them to watch TV and they manifest the mentality of a soap opera. The best schools, superior SAT scores, post graduate degrees and where their father's concerned, Jerry Springer is the best they can do -?? Don't be like them.

NATHAN

(helpless)

I don't know what you want me to say...

COLEMAN

I want you to acknowledge that something important is taking place between me and this woman - something worthy of respect. Don't judge me.

54 CONTINUED: (2)

54

COLEMAN (cont'd)
And for heavens sake don't judge
her.

Nathan is flummoxed, having trouble following...

NATHAN
She's - what are you telling me?
She's the love of your life?

COLEMAN
Okay, look, granted, she's not my
first love and granted, she's not
my Great Love, okay? But she's
sure as hell my Last Love. Isn't
that worth something? Isn't it?

And he opens the door and walks out into the night

NATHAN'S VOICE OVER
And with my failure to reach him,
all the doors but one had been
slammed in Coleman's face.

55 INT. COLEMAN SILK'S BEDROOM, ATHENA - NIGHT

55

Coleman and Faunia together after making love, listening to
"The Man I Love"... she's smoking...

COLEMAN
Dance for me.
(her look)
Dance.

Undismayed and naked, Faunia stubs out the cigarette, gets
out of bed and undulates to sultry Gershwin.

COLEMAN
This is more than sex.

FAUNIA
No, it's not... You just forgot
what sex is. Don't fuck it up by
pretending it's something else.

STAY with Coleman, watching, not a depleted old man, but a
lover... Faunia's performance darkly reflected in an antique
oval MIRROR above the head of the bed just over Coleman...

She dances.

He watches. A connection between them... Faunia is not self
conscious.

55 CONTINUED:

55

Her movements are small, not dancing really, rather rhythmically exhibiting herself in tiny gestures for him... Then in a series of slow dissolves as THE CAMERA MOVES IN ON HER:

FAUNIA
(continuing)
Don't fall in love with me.

COLEMAN
Keep dancing...

FAUNIA
(dancing)
You're falling in love... Look at you, Coleman, you're a little boy in love with his piano teacher. You're much too young for me.
(she smiles)
I need a much older man. At least a hundred. You know anyone in a wheelchair?

COLEMAN
Don't stop.

FAUNIA
I can't stop...

COLEMAN
This is all there is.

FAUNIA
Now you're talking. Stay angry. Angry brings us together. Lemme tell you, pal, you picked the right dancing girl...

COLEMAN
You're wiser than your years...

FAUNIA
I'm dumber than my years. Being stupid, that's my achievement. Turns out I've been watching you dance. I know all about you, Coleman.

COLEMAN
That a fact?

She's dancing closer to him now, her body glistening -

55 CONTINUED: (2)

55

FAUNIA

You imagine you've kept secrets
from me?

COLEMAN

You never know...

FAUNIA

What could there possibly be I
don't know about you by now..?

56 INT. MOVIE THEATRE - NIGHT

56

CLOSE ON a beautiful young girl (STEENA); she is blond and cannot be more than nineteen. Hers is the FACE we saw in the PHOTO with Coleman earlier. Just now she's alone-

ED HERLIHY'S VOICE

The war is over and hundreds of
thousands of American soldiers,

REVERSE ON THE NEWSREEL she's watching -

ED HERLIHY

sailors and airmen are returning
to a grateful nation where, thanks
to Uncle Sam, a college education
awaits, courtesy of the GI Bill..!

As the newsreel about the GI bill continues, We CUT TO:

COLEMAN SILK, now 21 wearing a tweed jacket and looking very collegiate. He sits several rows behind Steena; his eyes fixed on her. Then, just as he is about to make a move toward her, three young women crowd in on either side of Steena and they all begin whispering and giggling among themselves. Reluctantly, Coleman gets to his feet and starts up the aisle of the theater, throwing one last look over his shoulder, towards the girl as he does.

57 INT. STACKS, NYU LIBRARY - DAY

57

ON COLEMAN--He moves through the stacks, carrying a couple of books; clearly searching for another. He pauses, about to remove a book from the shelf when he looks O.S.:

HIS POV: In the distance we get a glimpse of the beautiful blond girl we saw in the movie theater. She instantly disappears; and for a moment Coleman isn't sure whether what he saw was real or an apparition.

CLOSER ON COLEMAN (TRACKING WITH HIM)--he instantly starts in hot pursuit of the girl.

57 CONTINUED:

57

As he reaches the end of the row; he stops, looks around.

HIS POV--At first there is no sign of the blond. Then he spots her disappearing into another row of books.

ON COLEMAN (AGAIN TRACKING WITH HIM) as he ducks into another row of books, moving parallel with her, intending to head her off.

COLEMAN'S POV (TRACKING SHOT): looking though the shelves we get a glimpse of the blond several rows away. Once again she disappears.

ON COLEMAN--brushing past a browser in the stacks.

COLEMAN

Excuse me...

Throughout this we are continually CROSS-CUTTING BETWEEN COLEMAN, AND HIS POV OF THE GIRL (never getting more than glimpses of her).

ON COLEMAN as he rounds a corner and stops dead in his tracks:

HIS POV: There is the blond, she stands not far away, her back to him, still intent on the book she is reading.

TIGHT ON COLEMAN--There is a half smile on his lips; the same half smile we saw in the boxing ring.

TIGHTER ON THE BLOND--Her back is still to us.

COLEMAN'S VOICE OVER

Hi...

As she turns TO CAMERA we see her for the first time and realize that she really is that beautiful.

58 INT. COLEMAN'S GREENWICH VILLAGE APT. - DAY

58

ON THE DOOR--as it is unlocked and Coleman brings the blond in...

BLOND

I really shouldn't -

COLEMAN

One cup of coffee, that's all. I promise. Library stays open til five...

As he leads her inside we see his apartment for the first time. It is an attractive one room apartment with a simple fireplace and a kitchenette off to one side.

58 CONTINUED:

58

The walls are white, there are reproductions of Paul Klee and Chagall. The bookshelves are one by eights with bricks at each end serving as risers. There are books everywhere, on every surface; on the table we see a pair of boxing gloves (not the kind you use in the ring, but lighter ones, the kind fighters use for work on the heavy bag). The bed has been carefully made, dishes put away; the impression we get is one of order and neatness.

STEENA

GI bill pays for all this..?

ON COLEMAN--as he begins fixing coffee.

COLEMAN

How do you take it..? I'm sorry, say your name again..? Steena -?

BLOND

Steena Palsson... black is fine... How'd you get that cut over your eye?

COLEMAN

Steena... What is that, Swedish?

STEENA

Close. Norwegian. I really should-

COLEMAN

You're not from New York...

STEENA

(embarrassed smile)

How could you tell? Fergus Falls, Minnesota.

He walks over to her, smiling -

COLEMAN

You're making that up, right?

STEENA

No, I -

He's standing so close, she's desperate for a diversion- sees something...

STEENA

(continuing)

You weren't kidding... that cut...

She picks up his BOXING GLOVES -

58 CONTINUED: (2)

58

COLEMAN
It's just a hobby. Ever tried?

STEENA
Me? Are you -

COLEMAN
Here... very therapeutic...

STEENA
I dunno...

COLEMAN
(holding up his
hands, palms out)
C'mon, try it. Live a little.

STEENA
Coleman -

COLEMAN
Don't be afraid. Now -
(he helps her adjust
her arms)
Right handed? Okay, you use your
right to punch, but you keep your
left up, like so...
(he gently positions
her left hand beside
her face)
..this protects you. Now you jab
with your right. Try a few jabs.

She does; aiming at his open palms.

COLEMAN
(continuing)
That's it...Now, use your feet,
dance with me.

She continues to throw jabs, relaxing, laughing.

COLEMAN
(continuing)
Are you smart - ?

STEENA
(breathless)
Smart - ?

He easily takes hold of both her hands in his; now he is very close to her.

58 CONTINUED: (3)

58

COLEMAN

Boxing is really all about how
smart you are...

He leans forward, kissing her lightly. Then again. Then
again, this time she moves toward the kiss.

STEENA

(sudden thought)

Do you do this a lot..?

COLEMAN

(smiles reassuringly)

Practice makes perfect.

He's kissing her again.

DISSOLVE TO:

59 INT. COLEMAN'S APARTMENT - LATER

59

The GLOVES on the floor, RISE UP TO REVEAL the two of them
lying in bed together. She's stunned.

STEENA

I can't believe this.

Coleman grins -

STEENA

(continuing)

I mean I can't believe I did
something like this...

COLEMAN

Waiting for lightning to strike
you dead..?

STEENA

Well... Where I come from -

COLEMAN

Fergus Falls, Minnesota...

STEENA

People don't just hop into -

COLEMAN

Let me guess. First there's
eyeing one another in church on
Sundays...

59 CONTINUED:

59

COLEMAN (cont'd)
 then, as fall slips into winter
 and the air turns cold, there's
 sleigh rides, skating on frozen
 lakes, singing Carols around the
 Yuletide-

STEENA
 Very funny...

COLEMAN
 Go on then, give me the straight
 dope. Tell me about real American
 courtship...

STEENA
 (startled)
 You're American. Jews are American.

He's kissing her again - and again she's succumbing -

60 EXT. STREET - DAY

60

ON COLEMAN AND STEENA--as they round the corner of a street
 near NYU. THE CAMERA MOVES WITH STEENA AND COLEMAN as they
 walk, their arms around one another.

STEENA
 So all I'm saying is that Achilles
 is the first real individual in
 all of western litera--

COLEMAN
 (shakes his head)
 Not a chance...
 (grins)
 Look, Achilles succumbed to to
 group pressure, right? I mean, he
 gave up the girl - a girl he
 really wanted - so the Greeks
 could keep going with the Trojan
 war. He gave in to group pressure.

STEENA
 From which you conclude what -
 that groups are -?

COLEMAN
 How tall are you?

STEENA
 Is this the same conversation?

60 CONTINUED:

60

COLEMAN

I'd say you were maybe five, ten,
right?

STEENA

Where is this le-

COLEMAN

Did you play basketball in high
school?

STEENA

Sure...

COLEMAN

And I bet you were good.

STEENA

Well, I -

COLEMAN

But let me ask you this. Did you
want to play?

STEENA

Did I -?

COLEMAN

In America, if you're a girl and
you're five ten they make you play
basketball. It's a given. They
don't ask if you want to play, if
you're interested in the game.
Height equals fate. You play.
You do what the group says.

STEENA

I like basketball...

COLEMAN

What if it were something you
didn't like? Say all girls over
five ten had to shave their heads.

They are both laughing, Steena turns and looks at Coleman
with a look of total adoration

STEENA

Oh, God, Coleman... I think I'm in
love with you.

At that moment we HEAR a click. The picture freezes and turns
to black and white. It is the snapshot Nathan Zuckerman saw
in Coleman's house earlier.

60 CONTINUED: (2)

60

ON A STREET PHOTOGRAPHER--He has just taken the photograph we saw earlier in the scene with Nathan. The one Coleman has kept all these years and now we know why.

STREET PHOTOGRAPHER
(handing Coleman a
card)
Picture of you and your sweetheart
for a dollar?

As Coleman happily digs in his pocket we HEAR: Dick Haymes singing "Our Love Is Here To Stay."

61 INT. RECORD STORE - DAY

61

It is in the days when LPs and 45s first came out; there are bins filled with hit singles. Dick Haymes continues to sing as we see Steena and Coleman in a listening booth. Coleman comes out to look for another record as Steena remains in the booth continuing to listen to a record. THE CAMERA PANS AHEAD OF HIM TO REVEAL a very pretty young salesgirl, she is a coffee colored African American. Her name is ELLIE and she watches Coleman with interest. We move with her as she crosses to a bin where Coleman is flipping through 78s.

ELLIE
Can I help you?

COLEMAN
(glancing up)
I was...looking for Edith Piaf,
"La Vie un Rose."

ELLIE
This way..

THE CAMERA MOVES WITH THEM--she walks very close to him so that they brush against one another.

ELLIE
(continuing; innocent)
Have you heard the new Louis
Armstrong?

COLEMAN
No, I'm not--

ELLIE
(amused)
What about "Black and Tan Suite?"
It's the best thing Ellington's
done in--

61 CONTINUED:

61

COLEMAN
I'm sorry, I'm really not--

ELLIE
(nodding O.S.)
That your girlfriend?

HER POV: Steena in the booth, moving gently in time to the music.

COLEMAN
Yeah.

ELLIE
(flirting)
Here...
(she hands him a 78
record)
Take this, Roy Eldridge, "The Man
I Love." This'll do the job a hell
of a lot better than Edith Piaf.

We HEAR - THE MAN I LOVE.

62 INT. COLEMAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

62

CLOSE ON COLEMAN AND STEENA--in a passionate embrace, as they come up for air. Although "The Man I Love" continues to play; we are close enough to Coleman and Steena to be aware of their breathing.

COLEMAN
(a whisper)
Dance for me...

CLOSER ON STEENA--She steps away, looking Coleman in the eye for a long, long beat as she comes to a decision. Then, with the arest trace of a smile, she removes first one earring and then the other.

She begins a languid, undulating motion as she takes Coleman's hand, opens it and drops the two earrings into his palm. Then, continuing the slow rhythmic movements begins to undress slowly.

This should be a very different Steena from the girl who first walked into Coleman's apartment; some deep, erotic part of her has been unlocked and at moments she displays a way of moving that is uncannily like Faunia's. In a series of SLOW DISSOLVES we watch as she strips to the sensual music of Gershwin.

62 CONTINUED:

62

By the end, when she has removed her last undergarment and dances in front of Coleman absolutely naked, the record comes to an end and we hear the scratching of the needle of the record player on vinyl. It is as though at that moment she comes out of a trance. She immediately puts her hands to her face to cover her embarrassment.

REVERSE ON COLEMAN

COLEMAN

(continuing)

That has got to be the single most sexy dance ever to be danced by a girl from Fergus Falls in the history of the world.

ON STEENA--her hands remain covering her face; both mortally embarrassed and profoundly exhilarated.

STEENA

Oh, God, Coleman, I love you. I want to spend my life with you.

COLEMAN

What are you doing Sunday?

CLOSER ON STEENA--She lowers her hands from her face.

STEENA

(in answer to the question we heard the older Coleman ask)

Sunday? Nothing. Why?

REVERSE ON THE YOUNGER COLEMAN

COLEMAN

On Sunday we're taking the train to New Jersey...

(a beat)

To have dinner with my mother.

63 EXT. CENTRAL AVENUE, EAST ORANGE, NEW JERSEY - DUSK

63

Coleman and Steena walk towards his house. Steena is carrying FLOWERS. Coleman points out various landmarks.

COLEMAN

...that's where I crashed my bike into old man Harris' front porch... My dad made me pay--

Just then we HEAR:

63 CONTINUED:

63

A MAN'S VOICE
(calling out)
Coleman.

Coleman looks O.S. waves.

THEIR POV: Across the street a young man (African American), a few years older than Coleman waves.

ON COLEMAN AND STEENA--Coleman waves back, then quickly glances in Steena's direction to see her reaction.

64 EXT. THE SILK FAMILY HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

64

ON COLEMAN AND STEENA--His arm is around her, he leans forward, presses the bell and turns to Steena.

COLEMAN
(very nervous)
I love you, you know that don't
you?

Before she can answer the door opens and there is Mrs. Silk, her hair is grayer, but otherwise she looks the same.

MRS. SILK
Well, isn't this lovely.
(she kisses her son,
then to Steena)
Hello, you must be Steena...Please
Come in...

TIGHT ON STEENA--She has been brought up very well and, although her world has just collapsed around her, her manners are impeccable.

STEENA
I brought you these...

MRS. SILK
Aren't they beautiful? I'll just
put them in water...

She leads them in as the DOOR closes on us.

65 INT. SILK DINING ROOM, NJ. - NIGHT

65

Coleman, his mother and Steena at dinner - the dining room looks a little empty with only three... As she speaks, Steena seems to be breathing in all the wrong places...

Mrs. Silk is wise enough to understand what her son has not told Steena; therefore she does everything in her power to make this poor girl more comfortable.

65 CONTINUED:

65

STEENA

...it's a beautiful city, Fergus Falls, unusual because it has the Otter Tail Lake just to the East... My father has a hardware supply store and a small lumberyard - he's the disorganized one, cuts himself and doesn't even bother to wash it; they're tough, those Icelanders - I didn't even know they were called Icelanders. My mother, she's a Rasmussen - she's the opposite: sets the table for Saturday dinner at five the night before. I guess I was caught between the two extremes, so I decided to get away for college, you know, out of their reach, and...that's how I came to New York...

A caesura in her breathless delivery... Steena looking pathetically around, then -

MRS. SILK

I've never been to the mid-west but I'm sure I'd like it. Coleman, wouldn't you like to see the mid west? Steena, would you like another biscuit?

Steena's look of gratitude.

STEENA

Thank you. Thank you so much.

66 INT. PENNSYLVANIA RR TRAIN - NIGHT

66

Coleman and Steena, virtually alone in the chair car, heading back for the city. Steena leans against the window, silent, staring out into the night. Coleman sits next to her, watching her carefully, holding her hand.

COLEMAN

Steena?

Silence, then with the screeching of brakes the train pulls to a stop. The conductor (black) walks through the car, announcing Penn Station, the final stop. The people get up and leave the car, still Steena doesn't move.

COLEMAN

(continuing)

Honey...?

66 CONTINUED:

66

CLOSE ON STEENA--as she turns to Coleman, we see for the first time that she has been crying. She looks at him for a long beat, just shaking her head.

STEENA

I'm sorry. Coleman, I...I love you
but--

(she breaks off)

I can't. I'm really sorry, but...

(shaking her head)

I just...can't...I'm sorry...I'm
sorry...

And without another word, blind with tears, she flees. Coleman doesn't go after her. He just sits there. Alone.

As we FADE TO BLACK we hear the roar of a crowd.

67 INT. ST. NICHOLAS ARENA - NIGHT

67

WIDE SHOT--of the crows, still relatively sparse since it is the first or decond match of the evening. THE CAMERA PANS ACROSS TO THE RING where an AFRICAN AMERICAN BOXER waits, bouncing up and down, throwing punches at the air,

REVERSE ON THE YOUNG COLEMAN as he climbs through the ropes along with his CORNERMAN who is African- American. SOLLY, a small time fight promoter who manages Coleman, climbs up leans in and whispers to Coleman.

SOLLY

Hey, Silky...Take it easy with the
nigger, okay? Let's give the
people their money's worth.

Coleman stares O.S. at the fighter, his face a mask.

SOLLY

(continuing; smiling)

Dance him around for three, four
rounds, then go to work.

The bell sounds, Coleman moves into the ring more rapidly than usual. The formalities over, the men begin to feel one another out. We notice that the usual smile is gone from Coleman's face; it has been replaced by a look of grim determination.

After one or two punches, Coleman nails his opponent with a right cross and then methodically begins to pound the black fighter, knocking him out before the round is half way over. There are boos from the crowd.

68 INT. COLEMAN'S READY ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

68

Coleman's African American cornerman stripping off his gloves, gear, as Solly returns, studies Coleman, who doesn't look up-

SOLLY

I ask you nicely to give folks their money's worth. You could have stopped the nigger in the fourth round instead of the first.

COLEMAN

(doesn't look up)

I'm a hundred thirty-nine pounds, five foot nine and this guy's one forty-five, five foot eleven. I'm supposed to let him hit me in the head five, ten extra times to put on a show?

(looks up)

I ain't holding up no nigger.

The cornerman doesn't react -

69 INT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

69

It is a nightclub in the Village, late at night. Coleman is dancing with ELLIE (the pretty girl from the record store). The music is slow and they are dancing very close together.

ELLIE

What are you anyway, Coleman Silk?

COLEMAN

What am I? Play it anyway you like.

ELLIE

So white girls thinks you're white?

COLEMAN

Whatever they think, I let them think.

ELLIE

And what about your family, do they know about this?

COLEMAN

I don't see what good it would do to tell them.

ELLIE

And me? What about me?

69 CONTINUED:

69

COLEMAN

A guy from school saw us the other day and said, "What's it like with a colored girl." And I told him, "Man, they are completely hot."

Ellie laughs, moves even closer to him.

ELLIE

(a whisper)

Then let's let them know how right you were.

She leans up and kisses him; he kisses her back.

70 INT. COLEMAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

70

The room is dark. HOLD FOR A BEAT then:

ELLIE'S VOICE

Coleman?

COLEMAN'S VOICE OVER

You think what I'm doing is wrong?

ON COLEMAN--He stands at a window, looking out into the night.

ON ELLIE--as she reaches across, turns on a bedside lamp.

ELLIE

(reaching for a cigarette)

Passing?

CLOSER ON COLEMAN--as he turns to her.

COLEMAN

But that's just it. I don't tell people I'm white; I don't tell them I'm Jewish. Oh, I know it's passing in one sense, but it's not because I want to be white. It isn't. I don't want to be white.

ELLIE

(weary)

Well, honey, you sure don't want to be colored.

(then:)

What happened with your girlfriend?

COLEMAN

We broke up.

70 CONTINUED:

70

ELLIE
Did she know you were passing?

Silence.

ELLIE
(continuing)
Did you ever tell her you were
paying for your Ph.D in a boxing
ring?

Silence.

ELLIE
(continuing)
How come?

Nothing.

ELLIE
(continuing; with a
sigh)
I'm starting to think you're
right. This isn't about you being
colored or white. Coleman Silk,
I'm starting to think this is
about you being the kind of man
who just loves having secrets.

71 EXT. NYU CAMPUS & GREENWICH VILLAGE ST. 1951 - DAY 71

A rally to save the Rosenbergs from execution. IRIS GITTELMAN (20's), waving a PLACARD and awkwardly offering a PETITION. Attractive, she's dressed in earth tones and Navajo jewelry. We recognize her at once because of her flamboyant hair...

IRIS
Save the Rosenbergs! Sign now!
There's no time to lose! Save the
Rosenbergs! Hey, buddy -! Justice-

She literally yanks the guy around to face her. It's Coleman. He wears a smart tie with his tweed jacket and, as always, packs BOOKS - which now go flying...

Iris is doubly startled - and flustered. Coleman is movie star handsome. He crackles with sexual electricity.

IRIS
(continuing)
Hey, sorry...

Embarrassed by his great looks, she clumsily ditches her placard, clunking him on the head with it - Oy!

71 CONTINUED:

71

As she squats to help him retrieve the volumes, she's blushing-

IRIS
(continuing)
So, you gonna sign the petition..?

COLEMAN
(picking up books)
I'm not really a political person -

IRIS
What's that mean? You'll potchke in front of a blackboard while the Rosenbergs get the chair?

COLEMAN
(amused)
I suppose you think Alger Hiss is innocent, as well...

IRIS
Alger Hiss is as innocent as you are!

FREEZE FRAME on Coleman's reaction: she thinks I'm innocent.

CLOSE ON A PHOTOGRAPH OF IRIS, featuring her fly away hair.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL;

72 INT. MRS. SILKS' PARLOR, EAST ORANGE, NJ - DAY

72

As Coleman's mother studies the photo. Coleman sits opposite her.

MRS. SILK
Iris. Nice name. And when is the happy day?

COLEMAN
June 14.

MRS. SILK
June 14. She's white, of course.
(pause)
Have you told her?

COLEMAN
...No.

72 CONTINUED:

72

MRS. SILK

When will you?

(no reply)

You plan on bringing her here for
dinner?

COLEMAN

You saw what happened when I tried
that.

Their eyes lock. Mrs. Silks suddenly understands - pow.

COLEMAN

(continuing; quietly)

I told her my parents are dead.

MRS. SILK

Dead... that you have no brother,
you have no sister. There is no
Ernestine. There is no Walter.

COLEMAN

I don't want to be Coleman Silk,
the Negro classics professor - and
that's how it would always come
out, Mom. You know it and I know
it.

He speaks urgently, desperate for her to understand -

MRS. SILK

Funny, I never thought of you as
black or white. Gold. You were my
golden child...

COLEMAN

Mom, look, I haven't worked the
whole thing out, I'm just -

MRS. SILK

Will you have children?

COLEMAN

I suppose...

Mrs. Silk won't raise her voice -

MRS. SILK

You're never going to let them see
me, are you? My grandchildren?
Mom, you'll tell me, sit in the
waiting room in Penn Station at
11:25am. I'll walk by with my kids
in their Sunday best.

72 CONTINUED: (2)

72

MRS. SILK (cont'd)

That'll be my birthday present five years from now. And you know I'll be there. The train station, the zoo, Central Park - wherever you say. Or maybe you can hire me to come over as Mrs. Brown to baby sit. I'll do it. Put them to bed and clean your house. But aren't you taking a risk having children? The suspense will be unbearable. Suppose they don't emerge from her womb as white as you? Won't you have some explaining to do? Will you accuse her of adultery? With a Negro? But she'll know that isn't true...

She picks up Iris' photo and realizes -

MRS. SILK

(continuing)

Maybe it won't come to that. Look at that hair. Coleman, you seem to have thought of everything. If they have hair like their mother's, that will explain away a lot, won't it? Are you marrying her for her hair?

COLEMAN

(stiff)

Of course not.

(getting to his feet)

I have to go now, Mom...

MRS. SILK

You think like a prisoner, Coleman. You're white as snow and you think like a slave.

He bends down kiss her; she pulls her head away.

MRS. SILK

(continuing)

Murderer...

ON COLEMAN--He straightens up, turns and as THE CAMERA TRACKS WITH HIM, walks from the parlor, through the living room and into the front hallway. Just as he is about to open the front door, he pauses, sensing something behind him as he turns we CUT TO:

72 CONTINUED: (3)

72

HIS POV: Standing in the shadows in the dining room we see Mr. Silk (Coleman's father). He wears the white jacket of a waiter in a railroad car; his hands are clasped in front of him. He stares straight at his son.

DISSOLVE TO:

73 INT. COLEMAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

73

CLOSE ON COLEMAN--He reads, or pretends he is reading. We HOLD ON HIM as we HEAR: the angry noise of the buzzer from the vestibule. Coleman's head turns at the sound, but he doesn't move. A moment later Iris appears behind him, she is wearing a loose fitting robe and is in the process of drying her hair.

IRIS

Who could it be, this late?

Instantly Coleman is on his feet.

COLEMAN

I'll get it.

74 INT. HALLWAY JUST OUTSIDE COLEMAN'S APARTMENT - SAME

74

As Coleman steps outside.

HIS POV: Through the mesh grill we see a shadowy figure in the vestibule.

ON THE DOOR as Coleman opens it to reveal Walter, older, heavier and now wearing civilian clothes. Walter grabs Coleman shoves him against the wall.

WALTER

Don't you ever come near Mom again.

COLEMAN

Walt, wait a--

WALTER

You don't call, you don't write,
you don't nothing!

He lets go of his brother, looks at him with utter contempt.

WALTER

(continuing)

I never want to see your lily-
white face again.

And he turns and walks away. Over this we HEAR:

74 CONTINUED:

74

NATHAN'S VOICE OVER
 With Coleman's decision his fate
 was decided...

DISSOLVE TO:

75 EXT. HARMONY PALACE CHINESE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

75

The screen is black. THE CAMERA PANS DOWN and we see the roof of a brightly lit Chinese restaurant. THE CAMERA CONTINUES IT'S MOVE and we see a scattering of cars in the parking lot. As we watch a black van pulls to a stop in front of the restaurant..

NATHAN'S VOICE OVER
 Everything was prepared for what
 was now inevitable.

One of the van doors opens and a man in his fifties (BOBCAT) gets out.

NATHAN'S VOICE OVER
 (continuing)
 Though many years in the future.

CLOSER IN ON LESTER FARLEY--He sits in the passenger seat, staring straight ahead; he has a cigarette in his mouth and is trying to light it, but his hand is shaking so that he can't

LOUIE
 Come on, Les...

LES
 Can't do it, Louie...

CROSS-CUTTING BETWEEN THEM:

LOUIE
 Yes you can. It'ss just a Chinese restaurant.

LES
 You don't get it they're gooks in there

BOBCAT
 They're Chinese Les, not Vietnamese.

75 CONTINUED:

75

LES
 (turning on him in a
 fury)
 Asshole! I don't care what the
 fuck they are! They count as gooks!

LOUIE
 (calming Les down)
 I know how hard it is, buddy, but
 you know you can trust me and I'm
 telling you: you can do this.

Still Lester Farley doesn't move.

LOUIE
 (continuing)
 Tell you what - you wanna leave
 after soup and we're out of here,
 'kay? We're gone. Say the word.

LES
 What word - ?

LOUIE
 We'll have a code word. Say the
 code word and we split, we're
 gone. Les, listen to me: how you
 gonna see the Wall when it comes
 to Pittsfield if you don't-

LES
 Told you! Ain't going to see the
 fuckin' wall...

LOUIE
 That's what they all say at first.
 Les, I know, I been there. Look
 at me, Les - I'm twelve years off
 drugs. I'm clean. I stick to my
 meds. I know what the Wall does
 for vets like us. Trust me, it'll
 work for you...

76 INT. HARMONY PALACE CHINESE RESTAURANT, LENNOX - NIGHT 76

ON A LARGE TABLE--The Vets are all seated - Chet and Bobcat
 flank Les, in case anything goes wrong. Swift is doing all
 the talking.

SWIFT
 You know what pisses me off about
 these pussies from the Gulf War?
 Their biggest problem is they
 can't go to the fuckin' beach.

76 CONTINUED:

76

SWIFT (cont'd)

They--

LES

(startled by
something O.S.)

What's he doin'?

LOUIE

He's the owner, Les. His name is
Henry. He only wants to help...

LES

I gotta' get out of here.

LOUIE

Not yet. Let's focus on soup -
what kind of soup are you having,
Les?

LES

Uh. Uh... What are you guys having?

SWIFT

Wonton -

BOBCAT

Wonton -

LOUIE

What about it Les?

Lester manages a nod.

LOUIE

(continuing)

'kay we're all having Wonton. Now
we're gonna order the other stuff.
Les, you want chicken, vegetables,
pork? You want lo mein? Noodles -?From the corner of his eye, Les sees a CHINESE WAITER begin
his approach - his eyes widen with hatred and fear...

LES

What the fuck -

LOUIE

Can you stay back please? Five
wonton soups! Just give us a
minute; we'll come to you -

Baffled, the man steps back uncertainly; Louis turns to Les-

76 CONTINUED: (2)

76

LOUIE

(continuing)

Double sauteed pork? Double sauteed pork for Les. Okay, concentrate, Les - Chet, will you pour some tea?

The Waiter moves forward to help again - Chet pours tea...

LES

Just keep the fucking waiter -

LOUIE

Sir, sir! Sir, if you just stay there, we'll come to you with our order - just... keep a distance. Okay? Right. You stay there. Perfect. Okay, Les?

SWIFT

You're doing real good. I remember my first time. Thought I'd never make it. Couldn't even open the fucking menu...

LES

What's the fucking code word?

LOUIE

Tea leaf. Just say tea leaf and we're out of here...

The waiter emerges from the kitchen with the soup. Instantly, Chet and Swift head off the waiter and take the tray...

LES

(to Louie, his voice low)

This almost over? Because I'm tellin' you now I can't take much more. I can't fucking take any more...

LOUIE

I don't hear the code word, Les, so we're gonna keep going - SIR, will you please stay back! Just, stay back - ! We'll bring our order...

The Waiter stops.

CLOSE ON LES--trying to spoon his soup - his hand is shaking.

76 CONTINUED: (3)

76

LOUIE
 (continuing)
 You're doing great, Les...You're
 doin' just great.

Over this we HEAR a pianist playing Prokofiev.

77 INT. CONCERT HALL, TANGLEWOOD - DAY

77

ON A PIANIST--wearing a sweater and jeans is playing Prokofiev. Behind him we see a small chamber group also casually dressed. The pianist stops almost mid-phrase as a violinist comes over to him and the two men begin to discuss the music in whispers. Over this we HEAR:

NATHAN'S VOICE OVER
 I had been both missing Coleman
 and missing the experience of
 having an intimate friend,..

ON THE AUDIENCE--a handful of people, dressed as casually as the performers are scattered around the concert hall used for chamber groups. Behind them, through a large opening we can see the Berkshires in the distance.

ON NATHAN--He appears at the side moving through rows of empty seats (some of which have sweaters draped over the back to mark them as occupied) looking for a chair. Meanwhile the rehearsal begins again.

NATHAN'S VOICE OVER
 (continuing)
 ...so I drove to Tanglewood to
 listen to a rehearsal of the
 evening's performance.

CLOSER IN ON NATHAN--as he takes his seat and spots something O.S.:

HIS POV: Coleman and Faunia are seated several rows ahead of Nathan. We see Coleman lean across and whisper something to Faunia. She smiles, but says nothing in response.

78 EXT. LAWN OUTSIDE THE CONCERT HALL - LATE

78

It is intermission, Coleman and Faunia are huddled together, he is talking as she lights a cigarette. She is listening, although it is obvious that she is very uncomfortable.

NATHAN (O.S.)
 Coleman.

Coleman looks up, a flash of panic in his eyes.

78 CONTINUED:

78

COLEMAN
 (then smiling)
 Nathan, I thought I saw you...
 what a surprise...
 (to Faunia)
 You remember Nathan Zuckerman.

Coleman takes a gentle hold of Faunia's arm so that she will not bolt this time.

FAUNIA
 (neutral)
 I remember.

COLEMAN
 (stepping quickly in)
 Mr. Bronfman's something isn't he?
 I was telling Faunia that he took
 ten years at least out of that
 piano

CROSS-CUTTING BETWEEN THEM:

NATHAN
 I was thinking along those lines
 myself.
 (a beat, then:)
 I've missed you, Coleman. Maybe I
 can take you two to dinner some
 night.

COLEMAN
 (once more a flicker
 of panic)
 Good idea. Yes. Let's do that.

The Intermission BELL RINGS. Coleman tries to hide relief.

COLEMAN
 (continuing)
 Uh oh, we've got to run.

He's pulling Faunia away but Nathan can't help himself.

NATHAN
 Coleman!

COLEMAN
 I'll call you!

As he hurries her away into the crowd we HEAR:

78 CONTINUED: (2)

78

NATHAN'S VOICE OVER

I tried to use my imagination -
not to speculate where they went.
That wasn't hard. But rather to
ponder what their mutual rage had
made of them: outcasts, alone
together, they were now stripped
down to the simplest version of
themselves. With nothing between
them and their destiny.

79 INT. BEDROOM, COLEMAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

79

CLOSE ON FAUNIA--as she leans over, kisses Coleman.

FAUNIA

I have to go.

COLEMAN

Stay here tonight.

She shakes her head, smiles...

FAUNIA

How many times do I have to tell
you...

(kissing him again)

I never stay the night.

Although she has said this many times, her heart isn't in it

COLEMAN

(leaning forward to
kiss her gently)

Just this once.

We FADE TO BLACK:

80 INT. COLEMAN'S KITCHEN - NEXT MORNING

80

ON COLEMAN--He sits at the kitchen table, reading the New
York Times. A cup of coffee is in front of him and laid out
on the table is an elegant breakfast: orange juice, toast in
a silver toast rack, eggs benedict (in a covered plate to
keep them warm). He looks up, smiles.

COLEMAN

(cheerfully)

Good morning.

REVERSE ON FAUNIA--She stands in the doorway, wearing
sweatpants and a worn tee shirt.

80 CONTINUED:

80

COLEMAN
(continuing)
Sit down, your eggs will get cold.

Faunia sits; she has the look of an animal whose instincts sense a trap.

COLEMAN
(continuing; making
conversation)
Doesn't look like Monica is going
to find a job in New York any time
soon.

Faunia stares at the plate in front of her -

HER POV - beautifully prepared eggs benedict... Coleman reads-

COLEMAN
(continuing)
"According to Vernon Jordan--

FAUNIA
Can't you avoid the fucking
seminar?

COLEMAN
(looks up at her)
I was only -

Faunia hurls her cup of coffee across the room, shattering it
and its contents against the cabinets -

FAUNIA
I don't give a fuck that poor
Monica can't find a job! Does
fucking Monica worry if my back
hurts from milking those fucking
cows? Does she worry about me
sweeping up people's shit at the
fucking post office? You think
losing your job when you're about
to retire anyway is a big deal,
it's not, I hate to tell you.
Having your step-father put his
fingers in your cunt, that's a big
deal; a husband who comes up
behind you with an iron pipe and
hits you in the head that's a big
deal...having two kids suffocating
and dying, that's a big deal!

80 CONTINUED: (2)

80

FAUNIA (cont'd)
 (tears starting)
 Shit...
 (looking around like
 a trapped animal)
 Why did I fucking stay?! It was a
 mistake. Even fucking whores know
 better: "Men don't pay you to
 sleep with them. They pay you to
 go home."

And she runs out of the house and leaving him alone.

81 EXT. ROAD - LATE

81

The same twisting two lane we saw at the start. Faunia's Chevy squealing around curves...

The Chevy passes the SIGN at the head of a dirt road: AUDUBON SOCIETY - where Coleman first gave her a lift. Her big car squeals to a STOP out of FRAME.

82 INT. FAUNIA'S CHEVY - DAY

82

Faunia leaning on the wheel, thinking. Crying.

83 EXT. AUDUBON SOCIETY BUILDING - DAY

83

A gray-shingled two story house nestled in the woods. WIND CHIMES. Once a residence, now the start of trails into the bird sanctuary...

Faunia's Chevy bumps uncertainly into the parking area and stops. Faunia gets out, walks to the door.

84 INT. AUDUBON SOCIETY BUILDING -DAY

84

CLOSE ON A CAGE with a crow (PRINCE) inside; he moves back and forth in an excited manner.

FAUNIA'S VOICE
 Hi Prince...

THE CAMERA WIDENS IT'S ANGLE--and we see Faunia approaching the cage and the bird getting as close to her as it can.

FAUNIA
 (softly)
 How are you doing my Prince?

ON A DOOR LEADING TO THE OFFICE--inside a young girl is feeding an animal; she sees Faunia, who is obviously a regular visitor.

84 CONTINUED:

84

GIRL

Oh, hi.

(nodding toward the
cage)

He got out the other day.

CROSS-CUTTING BETWEEN THEM:

FAUNIA

But he always comes back, don't
you, boy? Can I have him on my
shoulder? Honey, it's Faunia...

The Bird watches her from within its cage.

GIRL

You can try, but he won't come out
of his cage if he thinks you want
him to -Faunia opens the cage and holds out her hand, but Prince
won't budge -

FAUNIA

Oh, I know all his little tricks,
don't I, Prince?

(over her shoulder)

He was famous in Seely Falls when
I lived there, used to go for all
the bright objects in the parking
lot, barrettes in the girls' hair,
keys and tin foil. The newspaper
wrote him up... all about the
folks who raised him after the
nest was destroyed...one.

GIRL

Yeah, we used to have the article
on the bulletin board, but he
pecked it all to pieces...

FAUNIA

(laughs)

He tore up his clippings? Ashamed
of your background? Didn't want
anyone to know about your past?
Oh, you good boy, you good crow...

GIRL

He was flying around outside like
I said, but the other crows
started attacking him - they
would've killed him. He doesn't
have the right voice.

84 CONTINUED: (2)

84

FAUNIA

It's from being hand raised...
 (stroking the bird's
 breast)

Hanging around all his life with
 people like us. The human stain...

Suddenly Prince erupts in his own strange CAW -

GIRL

See, he imitates the school kids
 who come here, but it's not the
 crow language and they catch on.
 Prince is a crow that doesn't know
 how to be a crow. Careful, he
 bites.

TIGHT ON PRINCE

FAUNIA (O.S.)

Oh, I know. Listen, he's humming!
 Listen, children... oh, children...

CLOSE ON FAUNIA--to THE CAMERA:

FAUNIA

The first time I tried was a month
 after they died...Oh, I was
 ecstatic, getting myself ready,
 that first time...I tried so
 hard... I was so happy. I remember
 the gin and the valium and the rat
 poison. It tasted bitter so I
 folded it into the butterscotch
 pudding... I was so happy... Why
 did they break down the door? I
 still don't know who did that, who
 ruined it... The second time my
 heart wasn't in it. It was just
 impulse and I slashed.

TIGHT ON THE BIRD--watching her.

FAUNIA (V.O.)

You remember, don't you, boy...

ON FAUNIA--leaning close to the cage, whispering to the bird.

FAUNIA

This morning I made a mistake.
 (she takes a last
 look)
 Farewell, my Prince.

85 EXT. SHOPPING MALL, PITTSFIELD MA. - DAY

85

ESTABLISHING SHOT--The travelling wall (a reproduction of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington) has been set up outside a shopping mall in Pittsfield. There are a number people (family members along with Veterans) searching for the names of comrades or relatives who were killed in action. In spite of the fact that it is a large crowd it is more quiet than you would expect as people move about, talking quietly among themselves. From the distance we hear a speaker.

SPEAKER

The people whose names are
inscribed on this wall are your
relatives, friends and neighbors.

As the speaker continues we CUT TO:

CLOSE ON THE WALL (TRACKING SHOT)--Row upon row of the names of the dead.

ON LES, BOBCAT AND LOUIE (TRACKING WITH THEM)

LOUIE

What's Kenny's last name?

Nothing. Les is mesmerized by the wall.

LES

Les?

LES

(continuing)

Peterson. Kenneth Peterson...

What FOLLOWS is a MONTAGE as we see couples, their arms around one another looking at the wall. A child placing a small bouquet of flowers by the wall. A man about fifty, kneeling beside the wall his hand resting against the wall as though it held some magical power. And all the time we continually CROSS-CUT TIGHTER AND TIGHTER ON THE NAMES. TIGHTER AND TIGHTER ON LESTER FARLEY. Finally THE CAMERA COMES TO REST ON KENNETH BRIGGS.

LOUIE

(nodding O.S.)

He's right over there, Les.

Lester Farley doesn't move.

LOUIE

(continuing; quietly)

Kenny's right over there; he's waiting for you.

85 CONTINUED:

85

Finally Les crosses to the wall, stands in front of Kenny's name for a long beat, then drops to his knees.

JUMP CUT IN TIGHT ON LES as he touches the letters a spasm of pain crosses his face; then he leans forward and kisses the name.

ON LOUIE AND BOBCAT--deeply moved.

LOUIE

(continuing)

I told you the Wall would work.

He's gonna' be okay.

(tears in his eyes)

Les is gonna' be okay, now...

86 INT. COLEMAN'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

86

Coleman enters and reacts -

Faunia is there. She's cleaned the whole place, putting away saucepans and wiping off the coffee-stained cupboard from the morning's debacle.

COLEMAN

Hi...

FAUNIA

Hi... Custodial Staff... Just doing my thing...

He says nothing.

FAUNIA

(continuing)

Where were you?

COLEMAN

I went to the movies.

Another pause.

FAUNIA

I'm sorry. For what I did. For what I said.

COLEMAN

You were right. What happened to me is nothing.

FAUNIA

They took away everything you had, everything you did - all over one stupid word... That isn't nothing.

86 CONTINUED:

86

FAUNIA (cont'd)
Anyways, I don't think you can
measure sorrow...

They've drifted towards one another; she's in his arms. They stand in the middle of the kitchen, holding one another.

VERY CLOSE IN: Coleman's head rests against Faunia.

COLEMAN
(a whisper)
Can you keep a secret?...

She pulls away, takes his head between her hands,

FAUNIA
Later.

As she kisses him we DISSOLVE TO:

87 EXT. ROAD - DAWN

87

ON THE PICK-UP TRUCK--It is parked by the side of the road, the lights are off; it sits silent and ominous in the gray light just before dawn. Over this we HEAR:

LES' VOICE
(exhausted)
Numb. Fuckin' numb. No emotions.

As Lester Farley continues THE CAMERA SLOWLY MOVES IN ON THE TRUCK.

LES' VOICE
(continuing)
Numb to the death of my own kids. Vietnam. That's why I never did cry for my kids. He was five and she was eight. She was a stranger, my little girl. That fucking Vietnam, you caused this. My feelings are all fucked up. I said to myself, "Why can't I feel?" I said, "Why didn't I save them? Why couldn't I save them?" I kept thinking about Vietnam. About all the times I think I died.

By now we are close enough to see the silhouette of Lester Farley, slumped down on the driver's side. He lights a cigarette and for an instant we see his face.

87 CONTINUED:

87

LES' VOICE
 (continuing)
 That's how I began to know I can't
 die. Because I died already.

LESTER'S POV; (TELEPHOTO SHOT): In the distance, from around
 a turn we see the lights of a car approaching. It is the
 identical shot from the opening of the film.

LES' VOICE
 (continuing)
 Because I died already in Vietnam.

TIGHT ON LESTER--he leans forward, turns on the ignition
 ON THE TRUCK--as the headlights turn on. Again, it is the
 identical shot from the opening of the film. As the truck
 pulls away we CUT TO:

TELEPHONE RINGING OVER:

88 INT. NATHAN'S BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

88

Nathan asleep, is awakened by the telephone. Groggily, he
 fumbles for the receiver.

NATHAN
 Hello..?

As he listens we hear from the distance, "Bewitched, Bothered
 and Bewildered." playing on the radio:

89 EXT. COLEMAN'S HOUSE

89

WIDE SHOT--It is a summer night, Coleman and Nathan are
 dancing. Over this we HEAR:

COLEMAN
 I hear that and everything within
 me unclenches and the wish not to
 die, never to die is almost too
 great to bear.

90 EXT. WATERFALL, OUTSIDE ATHENA -DAY

90

ON A GRAY SKY--we see crows circling overhead THE CAMERA PANS
 DOWN past a frozen waterfall; in the F.G. is a precipice
 where a handful of people have gathered. THE CAMERA COMES TO
 REST ON NATHAN ZUCKERMAN standing at the edge of the crowd.

HIS POV: of the mourners. A small woman with granny glasses
 (SALLY) is speaking.

90 CONTINUED:

90

A WOMAN'S VOICE

We all lived with Faunia up at the farm and that's why we are here this morning, to celebrate a life. Faunia Farley was, as you know, a deeply spiritual person.

As Sally's eulogy continues we PAN ACROSS TO NATHAN who is looking O.S.

HIS POV: Among the mourners we notice an older, aristocratic looking couple (FAUNIA'S MOTHER AND STEP-FATHER); she wears a fur coat, he is perfectly groomed. They look very out of place.

NATHAN'S VOICE OVER

Not a word about the accident itself. And certainly not a word to suggest what I knew without a doubt - that it had been no accident.

CLOSE ON A PAIR OF HANDS--holding an urn; as we watch it is tipped and Faunia's ashes spill out into the river below; a moment later the box containing the ashes of Faunia's children is held up and it is overturned as well.

91 INT. NORTH HAMPTON VA HOSPITAL CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

91

We see a blank wall, the lighting is fluorescent and institutional. In the FOREGROUND we see Lester Farley. He is being interviewed by a PSYCHOLOGIST. What we are watching is videotape.

LES

They thought the Wall had saved me, but I faked them out. Use my vehicle, that was the plan. Along the river, come right at them, same lane... suicide mission...

PSYCHOLOGIST

At what point did you get in your truck?

LES

This is all confidential, right?

PSYCHOLOGIST

Ummm...

LES

After dark.

91 CONTINUED:

91

PSYCHOLOGIST
Had you had dinner?

LES
No dinner.

PSYCHOLOGIST
Why did you get in the truck?

LES
To get him.

PSYCHOLOGIST
To get who?

LES
The Jew professor.

PSYCHOLOGIST
Why were you going to get him?

LES
Because I had to.

PSYCHOLOGIST
Why did you have to?

Silence.

PSYCHOLOGIST
(continuing)
You were going to kill him.

LES
Oh, yes, all of us.

PSYCHOLOGIST
There was planning then.

LES
No planning.

PSYCHOLOGIST
You knew what you were doing?

LES
Yes.

PSYCHOLOGIST
But you didn't plan it.

LES
No.

91 CONTINUED: (2)

91

PSYCHOLOGIST

Did you think you were back in Vietnam?

LES

No Vietnam.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Were you thinking about the kids? You told me this woman killed your children. Was this payback?

LES

No payback.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Weren't you trying to get revenge, to take revenge for that?

LES

No revenge.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Were you depressed?

LES

No, no depression.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Angry?

LES

No more anger.

PSYCHOLOGIST

But you drove your truck into their car?

LES

I didn't kill them.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Then who killed them?

LES

(he smiles for the first time)

They killed themselves.

With that the screen suddenly goes black and we CUT TO:

92 INT. ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE, NORTH HAMPTON HOSPITAL - DAY 92

We see the PSYCHOLOGIST who interviewed Lester Farley with his SUPERVISING DOCTOR; they have been watching a videotape.

DOCTOR

Well?

SUPERVISOR

Did you check the police report?

PSYCHOLOGIST

Yes.

DOCTOR

(writing as he is
talking)

Were there any marks on Farley's truck that would indicate a collision with Silk's car?

PSYCHOLOGIST

No, but he could--

DOCTOR

(he continues to
write)

Any signs on Coleman Silk's car that he was sideswiped by Farley's truck?

The psychologist shakes his head.

DOCTOR

(continuing; he looks
up, smiles)

Delusional. Lester Farley is completely delusional, but harmless. Continue with the regular outpatient treatment. Thorazine where indicated.

As he closes Lester Farley's folder we CUT TO:

93 EXT. PATHWAY IN THE WOODS - DAY

93

A path, leading from the place where Faunia's service was conducted toward the road. THE CAMERA TRACKS WITH Faunia's mother and her husband (FAUNIA'S STEPFATHER).

FAUNIA'S MOTHER

(agitated)

But I'm her mother! If she kept a diary--

93 CONTINUED:

93

As they walk past THE CAMERA we see Nathan behind them, listening.

NATHAN'S VOICE OVER
So Faunia knew how to read.

FAUNIA'S STEPFATHER
It's filth!

FAUNIA'S MOTHER (O.S.)
But it's all I have left.

Just then Nathan catches up to them.

NATHAN
Excuse me, I wonder if I could
have a word with--

FAUNIA'S STEPFATHER
(stiff)
We're catching a plane.

NATHAN
(pressing on)
Coleman Silk was a friend of mine
and--

The following is all overlapping.

FAUNIA'S STEPFATHER
(growing angry)
I told you we have no--

NATHAN
(raising his voice)
He did not drive his car off the--

FAUNIA'S MOTHER
Listen to the man, Charles--

FAUNIA'S STEPFATHER
This is insane!

FAUNIA'S MOTHER
(to her husband)
Stop pushing me,

NATHAN
It was your daughter's ex-husband.
He killed them--

FAUNIA'S STEPFATHER
This woman is seriously ill--

93 CONTINUED: (2)

93

NATHAN

But you have her diary--

FAUNIA'S STEPFATHER

There is no diary. I have burned
the diary.

He takes his wife by the arm and they walk away we HOLD ON
NATHAN watching them.

NATHAN'S VOICE OVER

Although, I knew beyond a shadow
of a doubt that Lester Farley had
murdered Coleman and Faunia;
whatever proof I had was gone.
What could I do about it? What
should I do about it?

We HEAR: BACH'S FUGUE in D MINOR -

94 INT. RISHANGER CHAPEL, ATHENA COLLEGE - DAY

94

ON A STAINED GLASS WINDOW

NATHAN'S VOICE OVER

By contrast to Faunia's funeral,
Coleman's was stage managed to the
nth degree by his family. This was
to be Coleman's formal
rehabilitation into the Athena
College pantheon of heroes -and
Coleman's children had spared no
pains to get out the vote. They
had even found a sacrificial lamb.

PAN DOWN FROM to Herb Keeble as he mounts the pulpit. There
is a beat of silence.

HERB

(quietly)

My name is Herbert Keble. I am
chairman of the Political Science
Department - and I was among those
who did not rise to Coleman's
defense when he was accused of
racism.

Throughout this we CROSS CUT TO THE SILK PEW - where
Coleman's children sit: Jeff, Mark (wearing a yarmulke) and
Lisa in tears. We also see all the characters from the
college we've met, from the couple who avoided Coleman
outside the library, even a stoic Delphine Roux along with
Nelson Primus and his wife. And near the back Nathan
Zuckerman off by himself, listening, watching.

94 CONTINUED:

94

HERB

(continuing)

"Coleman, I can't be with you on this." That is what I said, to my everlasting shame. Oh, I had my reasons. I thought I could help better behind the scenes. If I allied myself publicly, I told myself, I risked being labeled an Uncle Tom and thereby useless. I was wrong! I should never have said to my friend, "I can't be with you on this." I should have said, "I MUST be with you on this." I should have spoken up to say what I want to say now in the presence of his former colleagues and especially in the presence of his children: that the alleged misconduct never took place. Coleman Silk and his wife Iris were betrayed by the moral stupidity of a censorious, coercive community and I was a member of that community. We all were.

Nathan looks around. People are crying.

95 EXT. CEMETERY - LATER

95

The service is over, people drift away from the gravesite.

CLOSE ON TWO ADJOINING TOMBSTONES which read:

IRIS SILK 1934-1998

COLEMAN SILK 1930-

Nathan remains, lost in thought as people disappear around him. Only gradually is he aware...

There's a WOMAN perhaps 62, still standing by the grave, primly holding her purse, a blank expression on her face.

She is a light-skinned African American.

NATHAN

Mrs. Keble?

(she looks at him)

I believe your husband's eulogy changed everything today.

The woman turns to him.

95 CONTINUED:

95

WOMAN

I'm not Mrs. Keble.

TIGHT ON NATHAN, as he slowly realizes -

NATHAN

You're...Are you Coleman's sister?

96 INT. MADAMASKA INN - LATER

96

Nathan and Ernestine are sitting in the lounge of a quaint, country inn.

TIGHT ON THE HAND OF A WAITER--as he serves them tea.

NATHAN

Lemon or milk?

ERNESTINE

Milk.

(then:)

That day Walter told Coleman never to contact mother again - he froze everything forever.

NATHAN

Your mother obeyed Walter?

ERNESTINE

All the Silk men from my father on down are very decisive, Mr. Zuckerman. Yes, she did. But I didn't. I'd phone Coleman on his birthday, things like that... I was trying to reach him two days ago, his seventieth birthday... the day after he was killed.

(realizes)

I must have spoken to one of my nephews-

(she looks away for a moment then regaining her composure)

I don't blame Walter; he was trying to spare my mother more heartache.

NATHAN

Did he succeed?

ERNESTINE

When she died in the hospital, she was delirious.

96 CONTINUED:

96

ERNESTINE (cont'd)

She kept saying, "Oh nurse, get me to the train, I got a sick baby at home..." Over and over. Walter and I knew who that sick baby was.

NATHAN

Is Walter still alive?

ERNESTINE

Oh, yes. We're all a family of teachers, Mr. Zuckerman, imagine. Even Coleman's side of the family - I wish our parents had known that. And Walter was the first colored superintendant of schools in the state of New Jersey.

(smiles)

I guess you can tell what generation I am - I say "colored" and "Negro".

NATHAN

Did you know why your brother resigned from the college?

ERNESTINE

I gather he was accused of racism.
(smiles sadly)
That beats all, doesn't it?

NATHAN

For using the word "spooks".

ERNESTINE

Sounds like from what I've heard today that anything is possible nowadays. People are just getting dumber - but more opinionated. The year I retired, youngsters were telling me that for Black History Month they would only read a biography of a black BY a black. What kind of silly idea is "Black History Month" anyway? If you're going to study Charles Drew, you do him when you do "science", don't segregate him in "Black History Month", for heavens sake.

NATHAN

I'm afraid I don't know who Charles Drew is.

96 CONTINUED: (2)

96

ERNESTINE

Shame on you, Mr. Zuckerman. Dr. Charles Drew discovered how to prevent blood from clotting so it could be banked. Then he was injured in a car accident and the nearest hospital would not take colored, so he bled to death.

Silence as Nathan contemplates this. She looks at him -

ERNESTINE

(continuing)

You know what's sad, Mr. Zuckerman? Nowadays it's impossible to imagine anyone doing what my brother felt he had to do then... constructing his whole life around a lie. He could have stopped that racism charge in its tracks - I wonder if that solution even occurred to him. Tell me something, Mr. Zuckerman. Did he ever acknowledge what he'd done? To anyone?

CLOSE ON NATHAN--He is silent for a long beat.

NATHAN

No, I don't think so. I don't think he did.

ERNESTINE

(a rueful smile)

So he was Coleman until the end. Set out to do something and do it all the way. Even to the point of being buried as Jew.

(sadly)

Oh, Coleman...

She stands; Nathan stands as well.

ERNESTINE

(continuing)

Well, It's been quite a day...

THE CAMERA MOVES WITH THEM as they start towards the door.

NATHAN

Are you going to tell Walter?

ERNESTINE

Not unless he asks.

96 CONTINUED: (3)

96

NATHAN

What about Coleman's children?

ERNESTINE

It was for Coleman to tell them;
not me.

NATHAN

But you told me.

ERNESTINE

No, you said, "You're Coleman's
sister," and I admitted it. I'm
not the one with something to hide.

ERNESTINE

(continuing; she
extends a hand)

Thank you for your hospitality...

NATHAN

May I come and visit you in New
Jersey? I'd very much like to meet
Walter.

ERNESTINE

Let me think about it...

And she walks out the door.

97 INT. NATHAN'S CAR - DUSK

97

Nathan driving carefully, lost in thought. Abruptly he reacts-
HIS POV - PARKED BY THE ROADSIDE, A SNOW-COVERED, RED
PICKUP.

Nathan studies the car, slows down... Stops.

Gets out - the middle of nowhere on a chilly twilight. Nathan
walks around the truck, studying it... the murder weapon...

On the rear bumper: MIA/POW...

FOOTSTEPS in the SNOW lead into the woods...

Nathan looks around, hesitates, decides to follow them...

98 EXT. WOODS - TWILIGHT

98

SEVERAL ANGLES - Nathan making his way cautiously through the
whiteness of trees... until he comes out onto -

99 EXT. FROZEN LAKE - TWILIGHT

99

As Nathan emerges from the woods, looking...

NATHAN'S POV - a stunning vista of white... the LAKE is frozen over. No signs of civilization, but-

In the middle of the lake, a lone FIGURE sits on an upturned yellow BUCKET, hunched over a HOLE in the ice, a fishing line in his hands: LESTER, dressed in black wool CAP, pulled down over his forehead and ears... heavy overalls, boots, etc.

Nathan doesn't move. But the FIGURE sees him. Now or never. Nathan's expression of fear and determination...

CLOSE: NATHAN'S FOOT steps gingerly onto the ice. It HOLDS. Then his OTHER FOOT. The feet start walking...

LOW POV - Nathan's FEET, the figure of Lester getting CLOSER. Finally, Nathan's feet stop, twenty feet away from him...

LES
(doesn't look up)
You're on thin ice.

The men look at one another.

NATHAN
I'd say we both are. Fish biting?

LES
Not too good; not too bad...

He glances away. Nathan does too and perceives several neat CIRCULAR HOLES dug randomly in the ice -

AND A FOUR FOOT METAL SHAFT ending in a CORKSCREW BLADE: a lethal-looking AUGER, rotated by the cranked handle on top.

Nathan's glance up from the deadly tool bumps into Les' eyes.

NATHAN
Beautiful spot.

LES
Why I'm here...

NATHAN
Peaceful.

LES
Away from all the craziness. I'm out of it.
(steals another glance)
Long as I can keep it secret...

99 CONTINUED:

99

NATHAN

True enough. Only now I know.

Les glances up again, then back at his fishing line-

LES

You look like a man who can keep a secret. Aren't you the writer?

NATHAN

What do you think about if the fish aren't biting?

He doesn't answer for a moment, then -

LES

I was thinking if I had a son he'd be out here with me now, fishing. That's what I was thinking when you walked out here. Thought you might have been my son.

NATHAN

Do you have a son?

LES

No.

NATHAN

Never married?

Another pause. Then, finally, he makes a face -

LES

Doomed.

(he jiggles the line)

When I came back from Vietnam I couldn't relate to anybody.

(looking around)

Clean clothes, folks saying Hello, going to parties - I couldn't relate to it anymore. Used to get in my car and drive around. My buddies were afraid I was going to die in a car accident, they were-

NATHAN

Were you ever in a car accident?

LES

(smiles)

Wouldn't know if I was.

99 CONTINUED: (2)

99

NATHAN

You still have PTSD? Post
Traumatic Stress Disorder?

LES

Well, I tend to isolate, don't I?
What do you think I'm doing out
here?

NATHAN

But no more car accidents...

LES

There were never any accidents.
Don't you listen?

NATHAN

And no kids.

LES

Nope. You?

NATHAN

No.

LES

Married?

NATHAN

No more.

LES

So, you and me in the same boat.
What kind of books you write?

NATHAN

I write about people like you.

LES

Is that so? What's the name of
one of your books?

NATHAN

(hesitates)

The Human Stain. It's not finished.

LES

When it is, I'll buy it.

NATHAN

I'll send you a copy. What's your
name?

99 CONTINUED: (3)

99

LES

Les Farley; send it care of Pete's
Garage...

NATHAN

I will if you promise to read it.

Les rises, putting down the fishing line and picking up the
dreadful-looking corkscrew AUGER.

As Nathan, transfixed with fear watches, Les brings it over
to him, crunching ominously on the thin ice, holding it under
Nathan's nose.

Do we hear the ICE CRACKING under their combined weight?

LES

I started ice fishing after my
wife left me. All you have to do
is dress warm and own the right
equipment - like this auger. You
drill a hole through the ice.
This'll cut through just about
anything - and drop your line with
your favorite lure right through.

Nathan so frightened he can't speak -

LES

(continuing)

Any flash down there and the fish
are attracted. They're sensitive
to movement. The smallest
vibration can alert them - even in
the dark. And it's way dark down
there...

Satisfied that Nathan is frightened, his tone changes -

LES

(continuing)

If I had a son, Little Les, a son
of my own, I reckon I'd be
teaching him all this stuff
instead of you.

NATHAN

It's cold out here...

LES

You better believe it.

99 CONTINUED: (4)

99

NATHAN
 (taking a step
 backwards)
 I should be going...

LES
 But you know your ice fishing now,
 don't you? You can put it in your
 book...

Nathan continues backing up, still facing Les and that DRILL -

NATHAN
 Don't worry - I will...

LES
 And you know my secret place here.
 You know everything now, don't
 you? But you won't tell, will you?

NATHAN
 I hear you...

LES
 (a beat then)
 And, hey, Mr. Zuckerman.

ON NATHAN--He freezes.

LES
 (continuing)
 What about the book?

NATHAN
 You got it, it's in the mail.

WIDE ANGLE (NATHAN'S POV): Les stands motionless on the ice, holding the auger, as Nathan slowly, cautiously, turns and walks back towards shore. Snow begins to fall and as we HOLD ON LES FARLEY the snow grows thicker until the screen is white. We HOLD FOR A BEAT

SOUND OVER: THE LIGHT CLICKING SOUNDS OF TYPING ON A COMPUTER KEYBOARD...

100 CLOSE ON COMPUTER SCREEN AS TYPING APPEARS -

100

This is the story of the tricky life and bitter downfall of Coleman Silk.

Nathan's VOICE mumbles the words over his typing...

WIDEN TO REVEAL

NATHAN'S STUDY - NIGHT

Nathan frowns at this sentence and reaches to amend it...

After "This is the story of the tricky life and bitter downfall of - "

Nathan types in the words "my friend" before "Coleman Silk".

This is the story of the tricky life and bitter downfall of my friend, Coleman Silk. -

FADE TO BLACK.