

The Russell Girl

by

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REPRESENTED BY

apa.

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OPENING CREDITS ROLL AS WE FADE IN ON:

EXT. CHICAGO SKYLINE - SWEEPING AERIAL VIEW - DAY

The city is gorgeous, shimmering under the early summer sun. Lake Michigan sparkles. Soldier Field lends a flash of color. The Sears Tower adds a touch of grandeur.

As the CAMERA descends, we see movement -- millions of people on their lunch hour. Finally, on the steps of the Art Museum, we see one cog in the machine who seems to be motionless, deep in thought.

EXT. ART MUSEUM - DAY

Sitting next to one of the famous lions is SARAH RUSSELL -- 24 years-old and "girl next door" pretty. With dark smudges of fatigue under her eyes, she resembles a delicate china doll up past her bedtime.

She seems to be concentrating on the traffic at this busy intersection. The remains of a half-eaten sack lunch are beside her.

SARAH (V.O.)

If I had to choose one word to describe my life, it would have to be "random". Events don't happen in a logical progression. No rhyme. No reason.

Sarah stands. She walks down the last two steps, throws her trash away and strides down the street.

EXT. MARSHALL FIELDS - DAY

Sarah enters the imposing Art Deco building with tastefully-arranged window displays.

INT. MARSHALL FIELDS

As she walks past various counters, people smile and wave at her. Friendly, but not too friendly.

SARAH (V.O.)

In fact, I thrive on the surprises life seems determined to keep throwing at me. For instance, though I graduated from the University of Chicago at the top of my class, I didn't make it into Harvard Med School. Two years later, I'm an assistant buyer at Marshall Fields. And I don't even like to shop.

She enters an office and takes a seat at one of the many identically-functional desks. She does paperwork as people begin to trickle back from lunch.

Sarah smiles as various employees greet her, but no one engages her in conversation.

SARAH (V.O.)
I don't have any friends. Well,
not really.

CUT TO:

INT. SARAH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

An open plan apartment with hardwood floors -- the living room, kitchen and dining room all share the same space.

A too-hip woman with brilliant curly red hair plays a keyboard. The volume is way up. Her name is CARLA.

SARAH (V.O.).
Even my roommate and I. We have
more of a truce than a friendship.

Sarah comes padding out of a room in her pajamas, squinting and rubbing her eyes.

CARLA
Too loud?

Though the words imply she may be sorry, the tone implies she also wouldn't mind starting a fight.

SARAH
Getting some water.

As Sarah fills a glass at the sink, Carla turns the volume up a notch. Sarah glances at a clock on the wall. It's 1:30 AM.

SARAH (V.O.)
Carla wonders why I never say
anything. Most people would kill
for a roommate like me. I think
she assumes I'm scolding her for
being too loud by being too quiet.

Sarah pads back to her bedroom as Carla digs into a spectacular solo.

CUT TO:

INT. MARSHALL FIELDS - MARTINE'S OFFICE - DAY

MARTINE, Sarah's boss and the very picture of chic sits in a plush chair watching six-foot-tall models come and go in formal dresses. Sarah sits beside Martine, taking notes on her decisions.

A Chilean designer named RODRIGO stands nearby giving the details on each outfit. An ASSISTANT runs up and whispers in Rodrigo's ear. He is annoyed by the news.

RODRIGO
(apologetically,
to Martine)

My Mimi ... she has sickness.

Rodrigo eyes Sarah speculatively. So does Martine. Sarah cringes.

CUT TO:

ON THE MOCK STAGE:

Sarah is dressed in a flippy faux-leopard skin coat, cream leggings and knee-high brown suede boots. Other models wear fur jackets, wool coats and lycra ski-wear.

SARAH (V.O.)
Martine does not realize how much
this humiliates me. She thinks I
get a thrill from playing a poor
man's Cindy Crawford.

But, Sarah seems resigned to her newest job requirement. At Martine's urging, she adds a slight burlesque swing to her walk. Martine LAUGHS and applauds.

SARAH (V.O.)
Fur coats in May. It's a twisted
business.

Getting into it, Sarah twirls so the coat swings around Marlo Thomas-style. Suddenly, without warning, mid-twirl even, Sarah collapses to the stage. Unconscious. Martine runs up to her.

MARTINE

Sarah?!

Martine dials "911" on her cell phone. Rodrigo tsk tsk's.

RODRIGO
(disapproving)
So unprofessional.

Rodrigo comforts the other models, who run to his protective arms as if unconsciousness were contagious.

CUT TO:

OVER BLACKNESS:

SARAH (V.O.)

My mother has an inexplicable fear of doctors. She has never been in a serious accident or hospitalized for anything except the birth of her children. Perhaps, it's the fear of knowing what's wrong and having to face it.

(beat)

Whether it's hereditary or psychological, I have inherited this fear.

END CREDIT SEQUENCE:

INT. CHICAGO MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - SARAH'S ROOM - DAY

Sarah wakes up in a sterile gray room, in a stiff white bed, surrounded by all that medical stuff.

SARAH (V.O.)

And it doesn't matter that I want to become one, I still don't like waking up in a hospital bed face-to-face with--

DR. GORDON

I'm Dr. Gordon.

A slightly-balding doctor in his mid-40's, DR. GORDON, looks up briefly from a chart when he hears her stir.

Sarah struggles to sit up.

SARAH

(hoarse)

Can I go now?

Sarah is surprised at how cracked and weak her voice sounds.

Slipping into the role of able person to her helpless patient, Dr. Gordon pours her a glass of water.

DOCTOR GORDON

No, Sarah, I'm afraid we need you to stay while we run a few tests.

SARAH (V.O.)
 And run a few tubes up my nose and
 stick an I.V. in my hand ...

sarah looks down and sees the needle already in her hand.

SARAH
 (laughing to
 herself)
 Too late.
 (beat)
 Look, I got dizzy and passed out.
 Since when does that call for tests?

DOCTOR GORDON
 That doesn't. It's the 14 hours you
 spent unconscious afterwards.

SARAH (V.O.)
 Now this is news.

DOCTOR GORDON
 It's a sign the body's dealing with
 something. If we can identify that
 something perhaps we can help your
 body deal with it.

sarah lies back dejectedly.

CUT TO:

A MONTAGE of evil-looking tests being run ...

- An extremely cold-looking CAT-Scan machine swallows Sarah like a cat devouring a tasty bird.
- More blood is taken from an already pale Sarah.
- Probes are placed on and in every part of Sarah's defenseless body. Even though you don't know Sarah very well yet ... you gotta sympathize.

CUT TO:

INT. SARAH'S HOSPITAL ROOM - EVENING

Sarah sits up in her bed. Physically, she looks better, but judging from the shocked look on her face, she's just gotten some bad news.

SARAH
 Leukemia?

Dr. Gordon speaks seriously but soothingly.

DR. GORDON

(nodding)

Acute myelogenous.

(quickly)

It's not as bad as it sounds, Sarah.

SARAH

(sarcastic)

I didn't mean to jump to conclusions.
Please tell me the positive side of
having cancer.

DR. GORDON

Sarah, I know it all sounds pretty
grim, but we have very effective
treatment programs. Many people go
into remission and continue to live
full healthy lives ...

Dr. Gordon's voice drones on, but Sarah isn't listening anymore.
Her eyes stray to the clothes hanging in her closet. The
ridiculous leopard-skin coat, leggings and boots.

SARAH (V.O.)

I want to go home.

CUT TO:

INT. KANKAKEE - 7-11 PHONE BOOTH - NIGHT

Sarah, dressed in the leopard-skin coat, tights and boots, is
making a call. Tourists in shorts and t-shirts stare at her
curiously as they buy their Snapple and Cheetoes. It's 85°.

SARAH

(into phone)

Just call me at home if anything
urgent comes up.

Sarah moves to hang up, then glances at the hospital bracelet
still encircling her wrist. She tries to pull it off, but it isn't
budging.

SARAH

(cont.)

Carla? Yeah. If a Doctor Gordon
calls, you don't know where I am.

Sarah hangs up. After a moment, she picks the phone back up, drops
coins in, dials another number and waits as the line RINGS and
RINGS. Finally, a machine picks up on the other end and the BEEP
is heard. Sarah hesitates, uncertain ... then finally speaks.

SARAH
 (faltering)
 Mom, dad, it's Sarah ...
 (long pause)
 I'm coming home for a visit. I should
 get in around 7:00 tomorrow morning.

INT. 7-11 - NIGHT

Sarah stands in line, waiting to check out. She bites an incision in the bracelet and finally tears it off.

SARAH (V.O.)
 I'm not going home for the reasons
 you might think: love, comfort,
 parental support. I've always been
 kind of ... self-sufficient.

Sarah walks up to the counter and puts down a 1-liter Mountain Dew. The teenage CLERK stares curiously at her outlandish outfit and the ripped hospital bracelet as he rings up her purchase.

CUT TO:

INT. SARAH'S CAR - NIGHT

Sarah is obviously exhausted as she drives down the almost-deserted highway. She drinks her Mountain Dew and has Smashing Pumpkins cranked as loud as her speakers will allow.

SARAH (V.O.)
 You might think the fact that I
 happen to be one of the 25,000
 adults diagnosed with leukemia
 annually would support my random
 theory, but for once it appears
 cosmic justice has caught up with
 me. Because, as it happens, I
 deserve to die.

(beat)
 But, that's just not the kind of
 message you leave on your parents'
 answering machine.

She passes a cop that has pulled someone over. Instinctively, she taps the brakes.

SARAH (V.O.)
 Why do I slow down? I don't know.
 It's not like the cop is going to
 throw down his ticket pad and come
 after me. (MORE)

SARAH (V.O., CONT.)

(beat)

Even if he did, I now have the perfect excuse: I'm dying and I've got to hurry up and do some shit.

Pulsing beat or no, Sarah's eyelids are drooping.

ON FLASHING RED LIGHT MATCH CUT TO:

FLASHBACK - THE OPENING CREDITS OF "THE A-TEAM" ON A TV SCREEN

INT. LIVING ROOM

Two little boys -- JON and RICKY -- avidly watch Mr. T and the rest of his vigilante gang wreak havoc in the name of justice. For no particular reason, Jon shoves Ricky. Ricky shoves back. It's a free for all.

JON/RICKY

(peak volume)

Sarah!

INT. KITCHEN

In the kitchen, a gawky 12-year-old Sarah makes popcorn at the stove. An adorable one-year-old, JENNIFER, watches curiously from her walker. Jon and Ricky can be heard yelling at each other.

SARAH

(yelling)

Guys! Truce now or the tv goes off and the pajamas go on!

The sound of the two boys fighting in the living room grows to a deafening pitch. Sarah looks at Jennifer and raises her eyebrows.

SARAH

You're much too good to be related to those two.

Jennifer smiles in response. As soon as the POPS issuing from the covered pot subside, Sarah turns off the burner and sets the pot on the counter. Jennifer can't take her eyes off the popcorn.

Sarah pushes Jennifer's walker into the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Sarah has to step in and physically separate the brawling brothers.

SARAH

Okay, what's the problem?

JON

He started it.

RICKY

You hit me, jerkwad.

Unnoticed, Jennifer starts to scoot back toward the kitchen.

JON

Your fat head was in my way.

Jon tries to get at Ricky again, but Sarah holds them apart.

SARAH

I'd hate to have to throw all that popcorn away.

Jon and Ricky eye each other, pondering a truce borne out of mutual hunger. Suddenly, Sarah looks around.

SARAH

Where's Jennifer?

And then she hears a strange NOISE as of something THUMPING against something else. It builds and turns into a horrible GRATING SOUND.

CUT TO:

INT. SARAH'S CAR - DAWN

The GRATING SOUND is Sarah's car SCRAPING against the guard rail on the right side of the road. She fell asleep.

Waking and panicking, she overcompensates and swerves left across two lanes and onto the grassy median, where she slams on her brakes. Luckily, the road is deserted.

Sarah's face is streaked with tears. She buries her head in her hands.

Slowly, she looks up and is taken aback by the subtle beauty of a Midwest sunrise ... the palest lavenders, pinks and grays streaked with wispy clouds.

How could anything be wrong on a day like this?

CUT TO:

EXT. STANTON, ILLINOIS - RAY'S SUNOCO - EARLY MORNING

The sun is a little higher in the sky when Sarah pulls into this filling station.

BUDDY CARROLL, a good-looking 21-year-old, walks over and eyes the scrape along the passenger side of the car.

BUDDY

You know, I could take care of that--

He walks around the car and bends down to the driver's side window as Sarah, not looking, opens the door. The window frame CRACKS against his head and he falls to the ground.

SARAH

Ohmigod, I'm sorry.
(helping him up)
Are you okay?

Reeling like a punch-drunk fighter, he blinks his eyes as he looks up at her. The sun is behind her and he only sees an angelic silhouette.

BUDDY

Sarah?

SARAH

(incredulous)

Buddy?

BUDDY

It's Henry now.

He points to the namepatch on his chambray workshirt to prove it. Sure enough, it says "Henry".

Sarah helps him up and seems amazed when he towers over her at over six feet tall.

SARAH

You're so ... big.

BUDDY

's been six years ... you know, I drink milk.

Buddy can't believe he said that. These two speak in the shorthand of people who have known each other all their lives, but the undercurrent is strange ... almost embarrassed.

SARAH

I'm sorry. I'm so used to self-serve.

BUDDY

I'll get it.

Buddy and Sarah surreptitiously size each other up as he pumps gas.

INT. RAY'S SUNOCO

Buddy leads Sarah in. He rings up the gas.

BUDDY
That'll be twelve even.

Sarah hands him a credit card and he shakes his head apologetically.

BUDDY
Sorry, Sarah. Cash only.

Buddy is staring at her bizarre coat. Sarah notices, but doesn't offer an explanation.

SARAH
Forget where I am.
(smiles)
You know you're the only gas station
on earth that doesn't take credit
cards.

BUDDY
Talk to my dad. Progress marched on
and left him in the dust.

SARAH
How's he doin'?

Sarah catches herself with a grimace. She's been home for ten minutes and is already picking up the native drawl she worked so hard to get rid of.

BUDDY
Good ... good.

Sarah hands him a twenty. Buddy nods toward her car as he makes change.

BUDDY
I-I was saying before, I can give
you a good deal on a little body
work.

Sarah smiles at his words.

SARAH
Now there's an offer I don't get
every day.

Buddy shakes his head, embarrassed.

BUDDY
The scrape ... on your car.

SARAH
Ohhh. Thanks. I'll think about it.

BUDDY
How's Daniel doing?

SARAH
I was gonna ask you.

BUDDY
Oh, I've seen him home on breaks,
but we don't ... you know ... hang
out that much. We're both really
busy.

Sarah is walking out. Buddy speaks up before he loses his nerve.

BUDDY
Hey would you maybe want to go see
a movie sometime?

SARAH
I really don't think I'm gonna be
home long, Buddy, but thanks ...

There is an awkward beat as Sarah hesitates before leaving.

SARAH
(cont.)
It's good to see you.

BUDDY
Yeah. Same here.

Then she's gone. Buddy watches her get in her car and head for town. He couldn't take his eyes off her if he tried.

BUDDY
(to himself)
I drink milk? Idiot.

CUT TO:

INT. SARAH'S CAR

Sarah drives through the almost-deserted Main Street then turns onto a residential street.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET

Two WOMEN in their 50's dressed in hideous sweatsuits are racewalking. Their breathing is labored and they seem near collapse. They stop to watch Sarah's car pass.

WOMAN 1

Wonder what could bring her home.

WOMAN 2

Trouble, most likely.

The two women try to shrug it off, but their curiosity is as tangible as their fatigue.

FURTHER DOWN THE STREET ...

Sarah pulls into the driveway of a red-brick house. She gets out and walks inside through a side screen door.

EXT. MORRISEY HOUSE

Across the street, a WOMAN watches Sarah enter the house.

In her mid-40's, LORRAINE MORRISEY is just starting to go gray. Though her eyes are cold, a vague afterimage of the attractive woman she once was persists.

She stares at the door Sarah went through for a few moments. Then she picks up her clippers and goes back to pruning her spectacular rose bushes, fixating on the roses as she clips methodically.

MATCH CUT TO FLASHBACK:

The same roses bathed in the shadows of ...

Night. Flashing lights. Urgent but unintelligible VOICES. The CLANG of metal against metal.

A BEVY OF EMT's TRAMPLE the rosebushes as they run past, pulling a stretcher.

EXT. MORRISEY HOUSE - NIGHT

A younger Lorraine and her husband, HOWARD, arrive home to find an ambulance and police car parked in front of the house.

A few NEIGHBORS mill about the front yard, speculating what the trouble might be. They stop whispering and turn to stare when they see Lorraine approaching. She eyes them back, terrified.

LORRAINE
 (to crowd)
 What are you looking at?

A ghostly male voice OVERLAPS her own at this question.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. MORRISEY HOUSE - BATHROOM - MORNING - PRESENT

Lorraine is washing the dirt from her hands and staring in the mirror above the sink, mesmerized. Her husband, Howard, watches her for a moment before repeating his question. He has kind eyes and a patient smile.

HOWARD
 Lorraine, what are you looking at?

Lorraine snaps out of it with a start. She seems surprised to find herself in the bathroom, but recovers quickly.

LORRAINE
 (isn't it obvious?)
 The mirror.

She walks out, leaving him staring after her from the doorway.

INT. MORRISEY HOUSE - KITCHEN

Lorraine walks into the kitchen and pours a cup of coffee. Howard follows, sits at the table and glances at the newspaper.

LORRAINE
 The Russell girl is home.

Howard looks up, surprised and cautious. He tries a light-hearted tone.

HOWARD
 Which one?

Lorraine sits down across from her husband and makes it clear she's not amused.

LORRAINE
 The only one.

HOWARD
 So ... Sarah's home.

He looks at her over the top of his paper. She avoids his eyes and drinks her coffee.

CUT TO:

INT. RUSSELL HOUSE - MORNING

Sarah hears voices talking excitedly in the kitchen as she walks in the doorway.

SARAH

Hello?

The voices abruptly stop. Sarah pauses, a little confused, then walks into ...

INT. RUSSELL HOUSE - KITCHEN

Corn-fed PHIL and GAYLE RUSSELL are the definitive Midwest parents. Phil wears a mailman's uniform and Gayle wears a Century 21 blazing yellow blazer.

They stand by the kitchen table. Both seem strangely tense as if they're suppressing something. The only noise is THE TODAY SHOW squawking from the small tv on the counter.

SARAH

Hi.

PHIL

Hi honey.

Gayle exchanges a look with Phil.

GAYLE

We just talked to Carla. Apparently, you got an important call this morning.

Sarah can't believe her ears. This is definitely not how she wanted them to hear about her illness.

SARAH

I can explain ...

GAYLE

You did it, sweetheart.

Sarah is completely confused by these words.

PHIL

Harvard Med School. You made the cut.

Sarah is stunned. Her parents run to her and envelop her in hugs.

CUT TO:

INT. MORRISEY HOUSE - MORNING

Jon and Rick, now in high school, zip around the kitchen gathering breakfast on the go. Lorraine sorts laundry from a hamper. She looks at her box of detergent.

LORRAINE

Howard, I need some detergent.
Could you pick it up?

Now dressed in a suit, Howard is walking out the door.

HOWARD

I'm in meetings 'til 6:15. Jon?

Jon is walking out the back door.

JON

Baseball, Dad.

Rick doesn't wait to be asked as he follows Jon out the back door, smoothly picking up a set of car keys as he goes.

RICK

Can't Dad. Yearbook meeting.

LORRAINE

Richard! Come back here.

Rick eases back into the house guiltily.

LORRAINE

Your brother's driving.

Rick turns to Howard. He obviously knows it's useless to argue with Lorraine.

RICK

Dad, I've got my permit. How am I supposed to learn if I never drive?

HOWARD

(quiet)

Jon's driving. I'll take you out to Reservoir Road this weekend for a few practice runs.

RICK

Thanks Dad.

Rick doesn't even address Lorraine as he runs out the door. Howard moves to leave. Lorraine puts the last of the detergent in the washer and lets the lid "accidentally" close with a BANG.

HOWARD
 (turning back)
 Lorraine, can't you just--

She cuts him off with a look. There's tension here that Howard doesn't have the time or energy to deal with. He gives in.

HOWARD
 (cont., sighs)
 I'll try and bring some home at lunch.

LORRAINE
 Thank you.

Howard gives her a quick, awkward kiss on his way out the door.

CUT TO:

INT. RUSSELL HOUSE - DAY

The house is quiet. Everyone has left to live their lives.

Sarah sits in front of the tv. OPRAH is on, but she seems to be staring through the screen.

Slowly, she stands and approaches the bay window facing the street. Carefully remaining hidden behind the curtains, she stares at the Morrisey house.

CUT TO:

INT. LORRAINE'S WORKSHOP - DAY

This screened-in workshop is an extension of the house just off the kitchen. It's cluttered with antique furniture in various stages of restoration.

Motes of dust dance in the sunlight slanting in the windows as Lorraine sands the rough spots on a small wooden cedar chest. It's smaller than a hope chest, but bigger than a jewelry box.

Lorraine is completely caught up in her work.

CUT TO:

INT. RUSSELL HOUSE - DAY

It's difficult, but Sarah pulls herself away from the window. Suddenly, her attention is caught by Oprah's intro:

OPRAH WINFREY

(on screen)

Today's topic is "Pregnant Teens Who Try To Hide Their Condition From Their Parents." Are they solving the problem by dealing with it themselves or avoiding it by refusing to seek help and advice? We'll find out in just a moment.

CUT TO:

INT. RUSSELL HOUSE - GAYLE'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Gayle is sitting on her bed. Papers are spread around her and she sorts through them. Sarah KNOCKS softly and enters.

GAYLE

Hi.

SARAH

Got a minute?

Gayle is a little surprised. This isn't like Sarah. Gayle pats an empty spot on the bedspread.

GAYLE

Have a seat.

Gayle pages through a pile of property listings, obviously not able to find what she's looking for.

SARAH

You were probably wondering why I came home like I did ...

GAYLE

(distracted)

Hmm?

(beat)

I'm sorry if Carla ruined your surprise.

SARAH

It wasn't about med school.

When Gayle looks up, she notices Sarah's disheveled hair. She starts to smooth it.

GAYLE

Who cuts your hair? You probably pay good money ...

Sarah ducks her head away, trying to avoid her mother's hand.

SARAH

No mom, it's okay, I only use my
bad money.

Gayle is too preoccupied to catch Sarah's sarcasm ... or maybe she
just doesn't listen.

GAYLE

What do you pay? \$30? \$35?

SARAH

\$50.

(turns)

Look, mom, forget about my hair.

Gayle tries to forget about the hair, but it's difficult. She
finally notices that Sarah's upset about something.

GAYLE

Sarah, if it's the money, don't
worry. I already checked into a
student loan.

SARAH

It's not that. I just don't know if
this is the right thing for me to be
tackling right now--

Gayle is surprised by Sarah's reluctance, but laughs it off.

GAYLE

Oh come on. This is the only thing
you've wanted to tackle since you
graduated.

(beat)

You're just nervous.

Phil sticks his head in the door as he passes by.

PHIL

Just talked to Daniel. He'll be
home tomorrow afternoon.

Sarah is surprised by the news.

GAYLE

All my brilliant offspring under the
same roof. What more could a mother
ask for?

Gayle sees that something is still bothering Sarah.

GAYLE

(cont.)

I know this Harvard thing is weird.
You just resigned yourself to not
going and now you're going so stop
worrying.

Gayle reaches out and hugs Sarah. From Sarah's expression, we know this is very uncharacteristic -- she doesn't quite know how to react.

Sarah looks at her mom and herself in the mirror. Gayle is so happy. Sarah just doesn't know how to tell her the truth.

CUT TO:

INT. RUSSELL HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

The next day, we see Sarah sitting in the same spot deep in thought. She rubs the bridge of her nose as if trying to suppress some pain.

She tries to pull herself out of it by flipping through the channels.

SARAH (V.O.)

Why can't I just tell my mother?
Maybe I just want to hold onto my
normal life a little bit longer.
Well ...

(a little laugh)

... my reasonable facsimile of a
normal life.

OPRAH is on again. Sarah doesn't want to watch it, but something draws her to it.

OPRAH WINFREY

(on screen)

Okay ... we're back with "Victims
Of Repressed Guilt And Anger Who
Manifest That Guilt In An Actual
Physical Illness." My next guest
feels responsible--

Sarah CLICKS the tv off.

Once again, she stands and looks out the bay window at the Morrisey house.

Sarah makes what is probably the hardest decision of her life ... and heads for the door before she can change her mind.

CUT TO:

INT. LORRAINE'S WORKSHOP - DAY

Lorraine is again working on the cedar chest, carefully replacing pieces of mother-of-pearl in the intricate design on the box's lid. She is in a world of her own ...

An insulated world that she is in complete control of.

For now.

Until, the doorbell RINGS.

CUT TO:

EXT. MORRISEY HOUSE - FRONT DOOR

Sarah stands waiting. She suddenly realizes she's holding her breath and lets it out.

After several moments, she decides to walk around the side of the house.

CUT TO:

INT. LORRAINE'S WORKSHOP

Lorraine has ignored the doorbell. She seems satisfied when it isn't repeated. All is blissfully silent again.

But then a KNOCK sounds at the screen door that leads outside. Lorraine looks up with a start, like a rabbit caught in headlights.

SARAH
(through screen door)

Hi.

Lorraine recognizes Sarah instantly, but remains silent, as if hoping she will just go away.

EXT. WORKSHOP

Sarah may have psyched herself up for this, but now that she's here ... her resolve wants to abandon her. She's never been so nervous, but she forces herself to try conversation.

SARAH
(cont.)
Well, I just wanted to come over
and say "hi". Can I come in?

Lorraine still doesn't say anything. Sarah hesitates but then enters anyway.

INT. WORKSHOP

Sarah looks around curiously, like a tenant interested in renting the space. Lorraine looks up, surprised by Sarah's audacity.

"Awkward" doesn't begin to describe this meeting. It's obvious these two haven't spoken in years.

SARAH

I came by to--

Sarah stops abruptly. How is she supposed to do this? Blurt out "Can you forgive me?"? Lorraine looks up, almost as if she heard Sarah's thoughts.

Sarah avoids Lorraine's intense gaze and instead fingers various half-finished treasures until she sees the beautiful mother-of-pearl chest. She tries to use it to jump start a conversation.

SARAH

That's beautiful.

LORRAINE

Is that why you came over? You want something restored?

Sarah is startled by Lorraine's voice. She grabs onto the lifeline Lorraine has inadvertently tossed her.

SARAH

Maybe.

LORRAINE

It's pretty simple. Either you do or you don't.

SARAH

Well, I don't have a particular piece in mind. Does everyone bring stuff to you?

Lorraine realizes that she's going to have to converse.

LORRAINE

Not always. I have a partner who goes around to estate sales and picks up things. I restore them and she sells them.

Lorraine grabs a business card off a nearby rolltop desk and hands it to Sarah.

LORRAINE

(cont.)

Here's her number. Tell her what kind of piece you want and she'll give you an estimate if she can.

Lorraine goes back to work. Conversation over. Sarah's still looking around. After a moment, Lorraine looks up expectantly.

SARAH

(hesitant)

I was hoping you could help me find something.

Sarah's so tense she can't keep a quaver out of her voice. Struggling to be casual, Sarah leans against an ancient table. Unfortunately, one leg is loose and it teeters precariously.

Lorraine jumps up to steady it before it falls.

LORRAINE

(curt)

No. I don't do that.

SARAH

Are you sure? Maybe you could--

LORRAINE

(interrupting)

"No" is really the strongest negative I like to use with potential customers.

(motions to box)

Now I really need to get back to work.

SARAH

Well, thanks anyway.

Sarah backs out the door hesitantly.

EXT. MORRISEY HOUSE

Sarah leans against the house for a moment out of Lorraine's sightline before heading back to her house. It's obvious she's regretting her move.

INT. LORRAINE'S WORKSHOP

Lorraine struggles to concentrate on what she's doing. After a moment, she looks out the screen door and watches Sarah's departing back with an intense curiosity she couldn't let herself show before.

CUT TO:

EXT. RUSSELL HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

Sarah's 21-year-old brother, DANIEL, pulls up in front of their house in his battered Ford Escort. The car is loaded with luggage and bags of dirty laundry.

Rather than unload his car, Daniel pulls a basketball out and starts shooting baskets on their driveway. He is tall and lanky with an outgoing exuberance.

SARAH (O.C.)

Hey! Welcome home stranger.

Daniel looks up to see Sarah returning from the Morrisey house. She runs up and gives him a hug.

DANIEL

Welcome home yourself. What're you doing over there?

He gestures to the Morrisey house.

SARAH

Just saying "hi".

DANIEL

And did you get a reply?

SARAH

(shrugging it off)
Of course. Does she ever leave?

DANIEL

According to mom, no.
(in a creepy Vincent
Price voice)
She only comes out to trim her rose
bushes.

At that moment, Buddy drives up in a white pick-up truck. He gets out and approaches them.

BUDDY

Hey.

Daniel smiles strangely at Buddy, then looks pointedly at Sarah.

DANIEL

Seems like old times.

Sarah ignores Daniel and goes to meet Buddy.

SARAH

How's your head?

Buddy lifts his hair to show the bruised bump on his forehead.

SARAH

Ooooh. God, I am so sorry. I really whacked you.

BUDDY

It's okay ... really.

(beat)

I thought I'd take a look at your car ... the estimate?

The phone starts RINGING inside the house.

SARAH

Oh ... sure. Let me just get that. I'll be right back.

Sarah runs into the house. Daniel and Buddy eye each other. Daniel breaks the tense silence.

DANIEL

How's it going?

BUDDY

Good. How was year three?

Daniel throws the basketball at Buddy hard. Buddy catches it with finesse and an instant game of one-on-one springs up.

DANIEL

Over. Thank God. Advanced thermo was hell.

Buddy dribbles past Daniel and sinks a basket.

BUDDY

My heart goes out to you.

Daniel smiles faintly at his tone; it implies some long-forgotten ritual of friendship.

CUT TO:

INT. RUSSELL HOUSE - KITCHEN

Breathless, Sarah races in and picks up the phone.

SARAH

Hello?

There is silence for a moment and Sarah instantly senses who it is.

LORRAINE
 (filtered)
 I just realized that I was being
 very rude.

SARAH
 No ... it was me. I don't know what
 I was thinking just barging in like
 that. I had no right--

LORRAINE
 (filtered)
 If you want to come by tomorrow, I
 can show you some samples and help
 you figure out what you want.

SARAH
 (relieved)
 Okay.

INT. MORRISEY HOUSE - WORKSHOP

Lorraine's voice is icy confident, but she doesn't look so sure
 about her decision.

LORRAINE
 10 AM.

Lorraine hangs up abruptly.

CUT TO:

EXT. RUSSELL HOUSE - DAY

Daniel takes the ball back then tries to sneak past Buddy, but he
 seems to be everywhere he turns.

DANIEL
 You been practicin'?

BUDDY
 Not much else to do here.

Daniel tries a long shot. It misses and Buddy grabs the rebound.

DANIEL
 Well ... my heart goes out to you.

BUDDY
 (smiles)
 What's Sarah doing home?

DANIEL
 (a realization)
 You know ... I don't know.

Then Daniel turns to look at Buddy, who stands dribbling.

DANIEL
 (cont.)
 But, I don't have to guess why
 you're here.

Buddy throws the ball at Daniel -- hard -- as Sarah walks out the front door.

BUDDY
 I'm just being friendly.

Buddy gives Daniel a grin which isn't returned.

CUT TO:

EXT. RUSSELL HOUSE - DRIVEWAY

Around the back of the house is a separate garage where Sarah's car is parked. Buddy examines the scrape on her car closely. He makes notes on a pre-printed form on his clipboard then stands up.

BUDDY
 I could fix it for about ...
 (mentally figuring)
 \$60.

SARAH
 Are you kidding?

BUDDY
 That's just for materials ... well,
 the paint. I wouldn't charge you
 for labor.

SARAH
 Buddy, that's a great price, but
 it's no way to run a business.

BUDDY
 Sarah, it's Henry now. And you forget
 where you are. Customer relations are
 what matter in a small community.

SARAH
 Customer relations?
 (beat)
 Okay, Henry. Do I even need to ask
 what the catch is?

BUDDY

It's a request.

SARAH

Lemme guess ... a date?

BUDDY

Whatever you want to call it.

Sarah pauses to think about it. The last thing she needs in her life is a complication. Buddy is obviously itching to be one.

SARAH

Bud--

(catching herself)

Henry.

(beat)

I don't want you to take this the wrong way ...

Buddy looks down at the ground, humiliated. Sarah relents.

SARAH

(cont.)

... but okay.

He looks up and smiles.

CUT TO:

INT. LORRAINE'S WORKSHOP - DAY

Lorraine is putting a coat of varnish on the mother-of-pearl box.

Sarah is sitting in a beautiful old rocker paging through a photo album filled with pictures of Lorraine's work.

SARAH

How'd you get started doing this?

Lorraine continues to work, hoping the question will fade into the woodwork. But, it just hangs in the air.

LORRAINE

(finally)

My grandmother taught me.

SARAH

Wow. All I ever learned from my grandma was how to swear in Italian.

(off Lorraine's look)

Hey ... it's been useful.

Lorraine smiles faintly and notices as Sarah rubs her eyes.

SARAH

(cont.)

But, I don't remember you doing this before. How'd you start this business?

Lorraine does not appreciate anything vaguely resembling the third degree. But, Sarah's direct gaze says she's going to keep trying no matter what.

LORRAINE

Someone saw the cradle I made for Jennifer--

Lorraine hesitates on the name, but then goes on deliberately as if reciting a recipe to a friend.

LORRAINE

--and told me I should go into business. One job led to another...

Lorraine trails off and gestures to the workshop around her.

Desperate to change the subject, Sarah points to a beautiful painted chest in the photo album.

SARAH

What about one like this?

Relieved, Lorraine stands up and moves to look over Sarah's shoulder.

LORRAINE

That's Czechoslovakian. From the late 19th Century.

(thinks)

Maureen might be able to find something similar. But I'll warn you, it won't be cheap.

SARAH

But you could do it?

LORRAINE

Sure.

Sarah jumps up and grabs her car keys.

SARAH

Come with me to Malloy's and we'll see what he has.

Lorraine sits back down to her varnishing.

LORRAINE

That man wouldn't know an antique
from a lawn ornament.

SARAH

When's the last time you were up
there?

(no answer)

Come on. I need your expert eye.

LORRAINE

Maureen gets back next week. I'll
send her up there with you then.

Lorraine's tone dismisses the subject. Sarah stands by the door.

SARAH

Why wait?

LORRAINE

Because that's how I do it.

SARAH

(brief hesitation)

Is it because you don't want to leave
the house?

Lorraine looks up from her work slowly. Her eyes are flinty. Anger
smolders there.

LORRAINE

Why don't you just go home, Sarah.

Sarah wants to argue the point, but knows now isn't the time.

CUT TO:

INT. RUSSELL HOUSE - DINING ROOM - EVENING

Phil and Gayle Russell sit at opposite ends of the dining table.
Sarah and Daniel eat quietly.

PHIL

So, Sarah ... how long are you
home for?

Sarah looks up from her barely-touched meal.

SARAH

Oh, um. It's just a really quiet
time for Martine--

GAYLE
(interrupting,
to Phil)

What kind of a question is that to ask your daughter? She may be off on her own, but this is still her home.

Gayle turns to Sarah and speaks with the barest hint of reproach.

GAYLE
(cont.)

She doesn't have to answer to us.

Gayle and Phil both look to Sarah as if waiting for the answer she doesn't have to give. Silence.

DANIEL
(to Sarah)

You going out with Buddy tonight?

Though relieved by the interruption, Sarah gives him a look that could kill. Phil and Gayle are successfully distracted and highly amused by the subject.

PHIL
Buddy Carroll? You're finally giving him a chance?

GAYLE
Now, Phil. Buddy's turned into a nice-looking young man.

PHIL
Now that he weighs more than a hundred pounds you mean.

At that moment, the doorbell RINGS.

PHIL
Speaking of the devil?

He jumps up from his seat and goes into the living room. Gayle is close behind.

Sarah stares at Daniel across the table. He is drinking his milk when he notices the dagger-shooting look. Busting into laughter, he almost snorts the milk through his nose.

SARAH
(acid)
Thank you. Thank you very much.

Sarah reluctantly rises and follows her parents into the hall.

INT. RUSSELL HOUSE - FRONT DOOR

Phil and Gayle open the door.

Buddy is standing outside, dressed in a button-down and jeans. He holds something behind his back.

PHIL
Hey there, Buddy.

Phil motions for him to enter.

GAYLE
How's your dad?

Buddy walks in and Phil closes the door.

BUDDY
(a bit overwhelmed)
Thanks ... he's better.
(beat)
Is Sarah--?

Sarah appears from the dining room and quickly grabs her jacket.

SARAH
(to Buddy)
Hi.

BUDDY
(relieved)
Hi.

Sarah smiles at her parents and raises her eyebrows.

SARAH
Bye.

She takes a grateful Buddy by the arm and quickly pulls him out the door.

EXT. RUSSELL HOUSE - NIGHT

Buddy walks Sarah to his truck.

BUDDY
Is it my imagination or is this
prom night?

Sarah's clearly a little uncomfortable, but she's determined to be nice.

SARAH

I'm sorry. They've gotten kind of flaky in their old age. Stepford parents with brief flashes of lucidity.

As Buddy holds the door of his truck for her, he finally remembers to give Sarah the small bouquet of daisies from behind his back.

BUDDY

It's not a corsage but ...

Sarah takes them and breathes in their fragrance.

SARAH

Buddy Carroll, the romantic mechanic.
Who would have guessed?

Buddy is a little hurt by the hint of sarcasm Sarah can't keep out of her voice.

BUDDY

Well, that's why I'm giving you this once-in-a-lifetime chance to spend quality time with me ... and please call me "Henry".

Buddy smiles and slams the door. He runs around the front of the truck, slips and disappears from view. A moment later, he jumps up and raises his arms in the "touchdown" signal. Sarah LAUGHS.

CUT TO:

INT. WILLOUGHBY'S - NIGHT

This is a honky-tonk. It is not a subtle place. The beer flows freely, many a delicate foot is stepped on by a clunky boot and you might get scorched stepping between some of the smoldering glances being exchanged. Not Sarah's kind of place.

Buddy and Sarah are sitting at a small table near the dance floor nursing two draft beers. Buddy taps his foot as he watches the dancing. Sarah stares into her beer.

BUDDY

You wanna--
(turning to Sarah)
Sarah, you okay?

sarah's mind is elsewhere. She snaps herself out of it.

SARAH

Hmmm?

Buddy catches her glancing around apprehensively.

BUDDY
I was gonna ask if you ...
(feeling lame)
wanted to dance.

SARAH
Buddy, I hate to tell you, but line
dancing isn't really my thing.

Buddy stares at her until she drops her eyes.

BUDDY
Just like high school, huh? It
isn't cool so you'll just sit in
the bleachers?

SARAH
Buddy. I never did figure out the
rules in high school. Are you gonna
hold it against me that I was a senior
when you were a fresh--
(stops herself)
No. I'm not going to have this
conversation. I already hear myself
defending something that I have no
reason to be defensive about.

BUDDY
Sarah, Sarah, hold on ...

Buddy takes her hand and tries to pull her to the dance floor. She
resists.

BUDDY
I don't wanna talk.

SARAH
Fine, but I don't wanna dance.

Buddy obviously wants to bridge the gulf between them and he seems
convinced that this is the way. Sarah will take some convincing.

BUDDY
I'll let you lead.

He does a few casual steps and joins the line of dancing folk.

SARAH
Buddy! It's line dancing. I don't
know how to do it. I don't want to
know how to do it. How can I lead?

Sarah softens her words with a weak smile as she looks around for her escape, but Buddy's hand pulls her into the line.

She's horrible. It really doesn't look like any amount of practice is going to help.

CUT TO:

EXT. RUSSELL HOUSE - NIGHT

Buddy's truck pulls into the driveway.

INT. LORRAINE'S WORKSHOP - SAME TIME

Lorraine's hands carefully wrap the finished mother-of-pearl chest in protective brown paper.

She glances out the screen door and sees Buddy helping Sarah out of the truck. Lorraine gets up and approaches the door for a better view. She can't seem to look away.

EXT. RUSSELL HOUSE

Buddy walks Sarah to the front door. The porchlight is on. They stand in uncomfortable silence for a moment.

SARAH

Thanks. I had fun.

BUDDY

(quickly)

No you didn't, but ... thanks for humoring me.

He turns to go.

SARAH

Buddy, I'm not trying to be ...

She doesn't know how to verbalize what she's feeling. Buddy turns back reluctantly.

BUDDY

You know what? Keep calling me Buddy. It really helps put me in my place.

(beat)

Look, I'm sorry if I made you uncomfortable tonight. Nobody saw us out together if that's what you're worried about.

SARAH

Oh ... no.

Buddy turns away, but stops short. He can't face her and say what he has to say.

BUDDY
Sarah, remember when I followed you
around all the time?

SARAH
(quietly)
Yeah ...

BUDDY
Well, I wasn't stupid.
(beat)
I was just ... fourteen.

He walks away. Sarah watches him for a beat then runs down the steps and catches him as he's reaching for the truck's handle.

Sarah takes his face in her hands and kisses him deeply. Buddy is completely taken aback.

Without a word, Sarah runs inside and closes the front door.

ON BUDDY: He seems paralyzed, lips still slightly parted as if waiting for an instant replay of that kiss.

INT. LORRAINE'S WORKSHOP

Lorraine stands at the screen door watching the little drama unfold. Her expression is grim, but also a bit wistful.

INT. THE RUSSELL HOUSE - FRONT DOOR

Sarah closes the door behind her and leans against it.

SARAH (V.O.)
That was probably ... unwise.

But, it obviously felt good.

CUT TO:

INT. MORRISEY HOUSE - LORRAINE'S BEDROOM

Lorraine enters the room and watches Howard. His face is relaxed in sleep and he almost looks as young and hopeful as Buddy.

Lorraine lies down a safe distance from him. She reaches out and touches his cheek, smiling at the SCRATCH of his stubble. He stirs but doesn't wake. It's obvious Lorraine wouldn't have had the nerve to do it if he had been awake.

CUT TO:

EXT. BUDDY'S HOUSE

Buddy pulls up in front of a carefully-repaired gray shingle house behind the gas station. Seeing no lights on in the house, he walks around to the shop.

EXT. BODY SHOP

Behind the Carroll's house is a large garage with an assortment of cars in various stages of repair. Buddy approaches.

INT. BODY SHOP

Millions of stars provide the only canopy for this open air section of the shed. A tinny portable tv is tuned to Jay Leno.

RAY CARROLL dozes on a raggedy couch. Even asleep, his kind face is lined and careworn.

Buddy drapes an old thermal blanket over his father and turns the tv off.

CUT TO:

INT. MORRISEY HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Howard walks in. Jon and Rick are eating cereal and cramming for final exams.

HOWARD

Can you guys get your own lunches today? Your mom isn't ... feeling well.

Jon barely looks up from his biology text.

JON

Is it her time of the month or her time of life?

Rick shoves him in the shoulder as he gets up and rinses his dish.

RICK

No, you moron.

(with meaning)

It's that time of the year.

Jon stops to think and then shakes his head, depressed by some realization.

JON

Ah, shit. I forgot.

Howard makes a cup of instant coffee, grimacing at the taste.

HOWARD

Don't worry. It's not so bad. I just talked to her. She's okay.

INT. MORRISEY HOUSE - JENNIFER'S BEDROOM

This room has gone from bedroom to shrine. Dusty from disuse, diapers and lotions are still stacked on the changing table. Tiny dresses are visible hanging in the closet. A mobile dangles from the ceiling, destined never to be wound again.

Still in her robe with her hair tousled, Lorraine sits with her forehead resting on a gleaming wooden cradle. The movement of her body as she quietly SOBS makes the cradle rock gently.

CUT TO:

INT. MORRISEY HOUSE - FLASHBACK

We're back among the flashing lights and EMT's. Lorraine walks in the front door and through a house bustling with grim energy. But, everything is strangely silent.

IN THE KITCHEN:

12-year-old Sarah stands at the door to the basement crying. A POLICEWOMAN is taking Jon and Ricky upstairs to put them to bed. Lorraine glances at the boys, but we sense she wasn't worried about them.

Sarah runs up to Lorraine and tries to explain what happened, but Sarah's mouth works silently. All we hear is the blood RUSHING in Lorraine's ears. Lorraine pushes Sarah aside and goes down the stairs.

IN THE BASEMENT:

EMT's huddle around a tiny body sprawled on the unfinished concrete floor. Jennifer. Dead. Her walker lies on its side a few feet away like a wrecked roadster.

Lorraine ignores the sympathetic faces as she bends down to pick Jennifer up. Someone's hand reaches to stop her, but then withdraws.

SARAH'S POV AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS:

Sarah watches as Lorraine carries Jennifer's body up the stairs. The baby's Gerber pajamas are unmarked by blood. Lorraine's arm automatically supports Jennifer's broken neck. The baby could be sleeping ...

Lorraine looks up at Sarah. The sorrow in Lorraine's eyes is more devastating than any anger could ever be.

FLASH CUT TO:

INT. MORRISEY HOUSE - JENNIFER'S BEDROOM - THE PRESENT

The sorrowful look is still there in Lorraine's eyes. Twelve years have barely softened the pain.

Now anger has joined in the fray.

CUT TO:

INT. RUSSELL HOUSE - SARAH'S BEDROOM - THE PRESENT

Sarah wakes up with a start, as if remembering the same horrible night ... or perhaps even sensing Lorraine's anguish. Sweat has matted her hair to her forehead and her eyes are like saucers.

CUT TO:

INT. CARROLL HOUSE - KITCHEN

Buddy and Ray sit at the breakfast table. They sip coffee and eat cinnamon rolls out of a cheap plastic bakery package.

Ray is reading BODYWORKS, a trade magazine for "automotive craftsmen". He can't stop CHUCKLING at something he's reading.

BUDDY

(giving in)

Okay. What?

Ray looks at him with a villainous grin.

RAY

You ain't gonna believe this.

(beat)

It says here they did a survey of a hunnert attractive young females in Los Angeleeze, Dallas and Chicago, asking 'em what profession their ideal man would hafta be. Guess what they said?

BUDDY

(patient)

Doctor?

(no from Ray)

Lawyer?

(no again)

Candlestick maker?

RAY
 (cool)
 Auto-motive mechanic.

Buddy eyes his father suspiciously.

RAY
 (cont.)
 No, really. They figure they're
 gonna get in enough fender benders
 throughout their life ... it must
 be worth it.

A KNOCK sounds on the back door. Buddy jumps up to let Sarah in.
 She's a vision. Even in a white t-shirt and jeans she's better
 than anything the Carrolls have seen in the neighborhood for a
 long time.

SARAH
 (to Ray)
 Hi Mr. Carroll. It's been a long
 time.

She shakes his hand and he points to the table.

RAY
 How 'bout a cinn'mun roll Sarah?

SARAH
 No thanks.

RAY
 Sweet enough already, eh?

Sarah rolls her eyes, but still blushes. Buddy can't believe his
 father actually said that. Ray LAUGHS, pleased that he achieved
 the desired result on both counts.

RAY
 What can we do for ya?

SARAH
 Well, Buddy was going to fix a little
 scrape on my car.

Ray catches Buddy's eye long enough to raise an eyebrow
 speculatively. Buddy smiles but ignores him as he leads Sarah
 outside.

CUT TO:

INT. THE MORRISEY HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

Still dressed in her robe, Lorraine digs around in the small polished liquor cabinet. She comes up with an extremely dusty bottle of whiskey. She takes a drink and makes a face. She's not much of a drinker.

But there is something building in Lorraine and she's got to let it out. She reaches into the hall closet and pulls out ... a baseball bat.

With a sense of determination, she walks down the hall.

INT. JENNIFER'S BEDROOM

Frustration and anger pulse under her temple as she raises the bat high to destroy the cradle. It wavers there for a moment.

But, the cradle looks as defenseless as the child it was designed to hold. She can't.

She almost seems to be calming down until ... a flash of color outside the window catches her eye.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET IN FRONT OF MORRISEY'S - LUNCHTIME

Howard pulls into the driveway to a bizarre sight: an overweight WOMAN in a navy pantsuit is standing by the front door. Her hands flutter to her mouth and then back to her side as she tries to decide what to do. Howard turns to look where she's looking ...

With her hair flying loose and her robe whipping in the wind, a wild-looking Lorraine is POUNDING the rosebushes to a fragrant pulp with the baseball bat.

She mutters under her breath as she swings with methodical care, first left then right then left ...

Howard gets out of the car.

WOMAN

Howard, I didn't do anything. I just--

HOWARD

It's okay, Gladys.

GLADYS

--came to pick up the chest I ordered. My niece's graduation party is tomorrow.

She edges toward the workshop's screen door as Howard edges toward Lorraine.

ON LORRAINE:

Her muttering voice is barely audible as she swats half-heartedly at the broken stems. She's like a wind-up toy nearing the end of its run.

HOWARD
(softly)
Honey? Lorraine?

She looks up suddenly and sees Howard. She smiles sweetly ... like a child and holds up one finger in a "just a minute" gesture.

LORRAINE
Almost done.

HOWARD
(smiling too)
Honey, I'll finish that later. Let's go inside.

He slowly reaches out, takes the baseball bat from her hands and starts to lead her to the house.

HOWARD
(cont.)
We're going to plant something new there. How about some tulips?

LORRAINE
Tulips. Mums.
(laughing)
Mums the word.

Gladys steps out of the workshop, holding the finished box. She peeks under the protective brown paper as she walks rather quickly to the car.

GLADYS
I left the check on the desk.
(uncomfortable)
Thank you Lorraine. It looks just lovely.

Now standing on the stoop arm-in-arm, Howard and Lorraine almost look like a normal Norman Rockwell couple.

Lorraine looks after Gladys strangely, even managing a wave.

LORRAINE
 (to Howard)
 She took the box?

Howard nods as he tries to lead Lorraine inside. There is a small crowd of curious neighbors watching from a discreet distance.

INT. MORRISEY HOUSE

Howard quickly pulls the door shut behind them. Lorraine looks into Howard's eyes intently.

LORRAINE
 (cont.)
 She said she just wants a box.
 But, I think she wants more ...

Howard's hands hold Lorraine's arms with a firm but gentle grip.

HOWARD
 Lorraine, you get like this every
 year on her birthday.

Lorraine YANKS herself out of Howard's grip with a sudden violence. His eyes betray how much her rejection hurts before he can hide it, but his voice is full of patience.

HOWARD
 (cont., gently)
 You've just got to hold it together.

LORRAINE
 ... I think she wants to take
 everything else, too.

HOWARD
 (confused)
 Who?

Lorraine looks across the street.

LORRAINE
 The Russell girl.

CUT TO:

INT. BUDDY'S TRUCK - MOVING SHOT - AFTERNOON

Buddy is driving Sarah home in his truck. She looks around in wonder at the rural beauty.

SARAH
 I don't know what's gotten into me.
 I was up at 7 AM this morning. I'd (MORE)

SARAH (CONT.)
 never do that in the city unless I
 absolutely had to.

Buddy gestures expansively to the open fields.

BUDDY
 Well, you need a lot of time to
 observe all this "nothing".

Sarah's head is propped on her arm as she leans out the window.

SARAH
 All I have is time.

Buddy considers this statement, then suddenly pulls onto a quiet dirt road.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - AERIAL SHOT

Buddy's pick-up leaves a high plume of dust as it rockets toward the deep forest separated from the road by cultivated fields.

EXT. SHADY NOOK - AFTERNOON

Huge oaks shade this idyllic spot. A slow-moving but incredibly clear river sparkles in the afternoon sun. The stuff of dreams.

SARAH
 Oh, Buddy ... it's like a Coors
 commercial.

Buddy spreads his arms wide and breathes in a deep, exaggerated breath.

BUDDY
 (announcer's voice)
 God's Country.

Buddy pulls fishing poles and bait out of the back of the pick-up. Like line dancing, Sarah automatically resists.

SARAH
 (laughing)
 Oh, Buddy, no. I haven't done this
 since I was like ... seven?

Buddy expertly baits a hook and hands the rod to her then goes to work on his own.

SARAH
 (cont.)
 When I said all I have is time, I
 did not mean ...

BUDDY
 (a veiled challenge)
 What did you mean, Sarah?

Sarah looks at the pole, trying to remember how to cast. She smiles suddenly as she accepts the challenge.

SARAH
 Okay ... sure.
 (gaining confidence)
 I just ... do this ... thingie ...

Sarah holds her thumb down on the reel release as she pulls the rod back ...

SARAH
 ... and then let 'er rip!

Sarah's gusto takes her bait all the way across the river. It gets stuck in some rocks on the other side. Buddy starts LAUGHING.

MONTAGE OF BUDDY AND SARAH FISHING:

- Buddy stands behind Sarah and guides her arm, trying to get her cast under control.
- Buddy demonstrates a perfect catch as he reels in a wiggling trout.
- Sarah LAUGHS as her line gets stuck and Buddy falls in trying to release it.
- Sarah casually glances at Buddy, who is lying on a rock in the sun trying to dry out his wet clothes. He looks good.
- Now they're both lying on rocks, eyes closed as they soak up the sun.

SARAH
 Buddy, how did you know to bring me here?

BUDDY
 Well Sarah, you always were the last person to know what's good for you.

The stream GURGLES on, unaware of the forces of nature drawing Buddy and Sarah closer even as they lie, not touching, eyes still closed, on their respective rocks.

CUT TO:

INT. MORRISEY HOUSE - BATHROOM

Lorraine sits on the edge of the tub. She's covered with leaves, brambles and tiny cuts from the thorns on the rosebushes.

Howard kneels in front of her, washing her off with a washcloth. He gently applies antiseptic to her cuts and puts bandages on. Lorraine's eyes slowly regain focus. She's back among the living.

Howard looks up as if sensing this.

HOWARD

You okay?

Lorraine nods, but then starts crying.

LORRAINE

I'm sorry. How do you-- Why do you ...
(long hesitation)

Stay?

Howard just pulls Lorraine into a hug. She hangs on like a drowning woman as the sobs gradually lessen.

CUT TO:

INT. BUDDY'S PICKUP - MOVING SHOT - LATER

Buddy and Sarah are heading back to town. Buddy's hair is still damp from his accidental swim.

SARAH

(laughing)

I don't know if I really believe there are any fish in Silo Creek.

BUDDY

So you're saying I planted the two rainbow trout I caught?

SARAH

You just have more of an affinity with the local wildlife. They sense you're a townie.

Buddy looks at Sarah. A "townie" isn't what Buddy wants to be.

BUDDY

Yeah, I guess I am.

SARAH

(realizing)

Oh, Buddy. I'm sorry. I'm a dork. I talk ... then I think. It's a medical condition.

BUDDY

You gotta call 'em like you see 'em.

There is a hint of bitterness in his voice, but he smiles to show her he isn't mad.

SARAH

(hesitantly)

What about your plans for college?
You were gonna go to U of I, right?

BUDDY

(evasive)

Yeah, engineering. But, I didn't go.

SARAH

Didn't you try j.c. for a couple semesters?

BUDDY

(ironic)

Yeah. Real exciting.

Buddy isn't elaborating and Sarah decides not to push.

As they pass the park, Sarah notices Daniel playing basketball with friends. She also notices a young WOMAN with a TODDLER watching.

SARAH

(excitedly)

Can you drop me off here?
(glances in side mirror)
Do I look like a complete goober?

Buddy pulls over.

BUDDY

(looking at her)

Your nose is sunburned and the effect is charming.

Sarah smiles at his words and turns to him before climbing out.

SARAH

So you'll call me when it's done?

BUDDY

I'll call you sooner if I can come up with a good excuse.

She closes the door behind her and speaks through the open window.

SARAH

Well, we have sugar if you need a cup, my dad and I host a mean game of Scrabble ...

(she glances at the basketball game)

and I'm sure Daniel would love to catch up.

Buddy catches her meaning, but chooses to ignore it.

BUDDY

On second thought, I'll call you when it's done.

He drives off with a wave.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARK - BLEACHERS

Daniel waves to Sarah as she approaches, but can't take his eyes off the game for long.

The young woman, SUSAN, stands up when she sees Sarah, obviously not believing her eyes.

SUSAN

Sarah?!

Susan runs to greet Sarah. Her two-year-old toddler, DYLAN, follows her, caught up in his mother's excitement.

EXT. PARK - CONCESSION STAND

Dylan sucks all the juice out of a rainbow-colored snow cone then hands it to his mother. He runs off to play on the brightly-colored jungle gym. Susan and Sarah sit on a bench eating snow cones.

SUSAN

So if I take at least sixteen credits a semester -- yeah, right -- I can graduate next spring. Then there's RN certification, a placement program ...

SARAH

(amazed)

How do you ... do it?

SUSAN (MORE)

Don't ask. I mean, Jeff has been great. But just be glad you were smart enough

SUSAN (CONT.)

to do it the right way. My mom told me
about Harvard Med. That's great.

Sarah's mouth tightens in a brief flash of anger. She looks away quickly.

SARAH

I guess news travels fast.

SUSAN

You ain't in Chicago anymore, Dorothy.

SARAH

So you really think I'm the smart one?

SUSAN

Are you kidding? You're working
towards your goal, no distractions,
a career to die for ...

At that moment, Dylan comes barreling toward them and jumps into Susan's arms. Susan tries to get him to say "hello" to Sarah, but he burrows his head into her shoulder shyly.

SUSAN

(cont.)

... while I take two steps forward
and the tiger here pulls me three
steps back.

(Dylan growls
like a tiger)

Just imagine if you had kids!

Sarah looks at Dylan for a moment, imagining just that. His freckles and crooked smile only add to the angelic appearance.

CUT TO:

INT. RUSSELL HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - EVENING

A loud KNOCKING goes on and on. Sarah answers the door. Howard Morrisey stands there, exuding righteous anger.

HOWARD

I need to speak to you.

INT. RUSSELL HOUSE - DEN

Sarah leads Howard into the den, reassuring her parents that everything is fine and closing the door on their curious looks.

HOWARD

Have you been talking to my wife?

SARAH
(hesitant)
I've talked to her about a chest,
yeah.

HOWARD
Do you really think that's wise?

sarah pauses, mentally measuring her words before speaking.

SARAH
I certainly never meant-- I don't
mean to cause any ... harm.

HOWARD
Unfortunately, you in my wife's
life ... is causing harm.

sarah is visibly upset. Howard doesn't want to make her feel worse, but he's got to get his point across.

HOWARD
(cont.)
sarah ... it was an accident and
you've been able to put it behind
you.

sarah's eyes widen in disbelief at this statement. Howard doesn't notice.

HOWARD
(cont.)
But, Lorraine can't forget it and
seeing you does not help. We have
to live with it every day. In order
for us to do that, I have to ask you
to stay away from Lorraine while
you're home.

SARAH
What if I'm home for good?

HOWARD
It doesn't matter.
(quietly)
Please just let her be.

He doesn't wait for her answer or for her to show him out.

CUT TO:

INT. MORRISEY KITCHEN - NIGHT

Lorraine finishes drying the dinner dishes. She places them in their carefully designated places in the cupboard. She turns to the kitchen, needing something else to do ... but her home is in perfect order. There's nothing else she can do.

Howard walks in. He wants to touch her. To hug her. To soothe her.

HOWARD

(quiet)

No one's going to bother you anymore.

But, he just leaves. Lorraine watches him go and slowly drops into one of the kitchen chairs, lowering her head into her hands.

CUT TO:

EXT. RUSSELL BACK PORCH - NIGHT

Sarah sits in a lawn chair on the screened-in back porch, staring through the stars.

Daniel comes outside and sits on the step beside her. He holds a wicked-looking lawn dart with plastic wings. 50's era family fun.

DANIEL

Wanna play night jarts?

Sarah comes back to Earth and smiles.

SARAH

The most dangerous game in ten states? I'll pass.

DANIEL

Wanna tell me what you're doing with Buddy?

Sarah turns to look at Daniel.

SARAH

That was a shitty segue. Why don't you tell me what you're doing with Buddy?

DANIEL

That's between him and me.

SARAH

But, you two used to be inseparable.

(sighs)

He was your best friend.

Daniel is uncomfortable and doesn't want to talk about it.

DANIEL

Yeah, well, you're my only sister
and I have no fucking clue what's
going on with you.

Sarah LAUGHS and glances back inside to make sure her parents
aren't listening.

SARAH

Watch your language.
(beat)
What do you want to know?

DANIEL

What you're doing here. Really.

He looks at her closely when she doesn't answer.

DANIEL

(cont.)

I don't think you came back to
fulfill Buddy Carroll's high school
wet dreams.

(beat)

And, the folks and I are very
curious what Howard Morrisey had
to say to you.

Sarah nods her head as his plan becomes clear.

SARAH

Of course. Send the sweet-faced
one to get the dirt.

DANIEL

No. You're just ... acting really
weird.

Sarah stands up and heads back inside.

SARAH

I don't know what the big deal is.
I asked Mrs. Morrisey to make me
something. She said "no". That's
all there is to it.

She SLAMS the screen door behind her.

MATCH CUT TO:

A KNOCK echoes as we see a door opening and bright sunlight silhouetting a figure.

INT. RUSSELL HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - DAY

Sarah is astounded to see Lorraine Morrisey standing outside.

LORRAINE

Alright. Let's go.

SARAH

You ... crossed the street?

Lorraine looks around her as if realizing for the first time.

LORRAINE

To get to the other side. Yeah.

Lorraine smiles faintly.

CUT TO:

EXT. STANTON - MAIN STREET - DAY

Sarah parks Daniel's Escort at a meter on the main thoroughfare.

INT. ESCORT

Sarah turns the car off and looks at Lorraine, who is gripping the passenger seat as if it's her new best friend .

LORRAINE

I may have been a bit hasty.

Lorraine watches the people passing on the sidewalk as if eyeing sharks at an exhibit. She turns back to Sarah, emanating fear and potential panic.

LORRAINE

(cont.)

I don't think I can do this.

SARAH

(shrugs)

Whatever.

Sarah gets out and stands there waiting. Now people seem to stare at Lorraine even more. Finally, Lorraine opens her car door.

CUT TO:

EXT. STANTON - MAIN STREET SIDEWALK

Lorraine and Sarah walk down the sidewalk. Sarah casually windowshops. Lorraine resolutely stares straight ahead as if taking a sobriety test, struggling to stay oblivious to the curious stares of passing people.

As Lorraine continues on, we see ...

- An older WOMAN in a clothing store jumping out of her chair and craning her head for a better look.
- A young BOY walking with his mother, trying to figure out what's so unusual about Lorraine that everyone is staring at.
- The two racewalking women approach from the other direction and are so startled, they almost run into Lorraine.

As Lorraine and Sarah disappear into "Malloy's Antiques", Woman 1 bends to Woman 2's ear.

WOMAN 1

What on earth? Hasn't she caused that woman enough grief?

WOMAN 2

I told you ... trouble.

INT. MALLOY'S - DAY

This dusty old shop is full of piles of junk, which the ancient and clueless owner, IRV MALLOY, will insist are all "gen-u-ine coll-ectibles".

He sits up from his rickety chair as Lorraine and Sarah enter the shop. His cigarette falls from his lips into the newspaper he was reading and starts to smolder.

Lorraine takes a deep breath of air and seems comforted by the antiques surrounding her. She notices Irv's smoking paper and smiles.

LORRAINE

Irv, you really think you should be starting a fire in a shop full of hundred year old wood?

Irv throws the paper to the floor and stamps on it.

IRV

(under his breath)
Well I'll be damned.

Lorraine nods a greeting which Irv returns in a typically non-verbal Midwestern fashion.

Sarah pulls Lorraine over to a box similar to the one she saw in the book. Lorraine inspects it carefully before giving her whispered approval.

LORRAINE

You've got a good eye. I think it's Rumanian. Great lines. Solid.

She eyes the carved and painted design on the wooden lid. The colors have all faded, but the fine craftsmanship is self-evident.

Lorraine eyes Irv out of the corner of her eye.

LORRAINE

Irv will never know what he's got ... unless I try to buy this.

Sarah thinks for a moment then smiles.

SARAH

(loudly)

Well I don't care what you think. I'm gonna buy it anyway.

Lorraine stares at Sarah for a moment before catching on and raising her voice so Irv can hear.

LORRAINE

It's your money. But don't expect me to restore it. I've gotta have something to work with.

Lorraine points to the box's supposedly shoddy workmanship.

LORRAINE

(cont.)

I can't perform miracles.

Sarah grabs the box protectively and walks up to Irv.

SARAH

(defiantly)

Then I'll leave it just the way it is.

CUT TO:

INT. LORRAINE'S WORKSHOP

Lorraine and Sarah walk in the screen door. Sarah can't suppress a satisfied smile as she sets the box down gently.

SARAH

Thirty bucks.

Lorraine walks around the box, eyeing it from all angles. Her mind is already racing.

LORRAINE

Yeah ... I can do this.

Sarah takes a seat on an old rocker and rocks excitedly.

SARAH

Can I watch?

Lorraine stares at Sarah for a long moment.

LORRAINE

Well, that's not really how I work.

SARAH

Oh please. I'd really like to learn how to do it.

Sarah is pushing Lorraine's limits.

LORRAINE

Sarah, I'm doing this.

(beat)

Why don't we just let it go at that.

Lorraine voice is gentle but firm. It brooks no argument. Sarah nods slowly. The exertion of the day is starting to show in her face.

SARAH

I'm sorry. You're right.

Sarah stands to go and almost falls over. Lorraine reaches out to steady her.

LORRAINE

You okay?

SARAH

(nodding)

I got too much sun yesterday. And the rocker ...

Sarah trails off. Lorraine smiles curiously -- since when has three minutes on a rocker ever made anyone dizzy?

LORRAINE

Yeah, it rocks. They're funny that way.

As Sarah heads for the screen door, Lorraine relents.

LORRAINE

Look, Sarah ... the door's usually open if you want to, you know, check on my progress.

SARAH

Maybe I'll do that.

And then Sarah's gone.

CUT TO:

INT. SARAH'S BEDROOM

Sarah is sick in bed. Gayle stands over her, looking at a thermometer.

GAYLE

You've stumped me, Sarah. You've got a fever but no flu symptoms.

Gayle is a bit unnerved by illness of any kind, but she smiles brightly to hide her discomfort.

GAYLE

(cont.)

I'm just going in for a half day. I'll be back by one.

(beat)

You'll be okay?

Sarah looks like hell. She nods wearily, but stops her mother before she can leave the room

SARAH

Mom?

GAYLE

Yeah?

SARAH

Did you tell everyone about Harvard?

Gayle looks at Sarah strangely, sensing she's not happy about it.

GAYLE

Well, just, you know ... Bill and Connie and ... Gladys--

(beat)

Is there some reason I shouldn't?

Sarah pulls herself up to a sitting position.

SARAH

I'm not sure what I want to do, but I need to know I can talk to you about it without word ... spreading.

GAYLE

Honey, I'm sorry. I don't understand why it bothers you, but if that's what you want ...

sarah slowly sinks back down to the pillows as Gayle leaves.

CUT TO:

INT. SARAH'S APARTMENT IN CHICAGO - DAY

Carla answers the RINGING PHONE. Her face falls as she listens.

CARLA

Dr. Gordon, I'm not gonna tell you this again. She's not here and I don't know where she is.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. CHICAGO MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - DAY

Dr. Gordon is looking at the results of Sarah's tests.

DR. GORDON

Look, this is serious. She left the hospital without my knowledge.

ON CARLA:

CARLA

Well if she's mobile, she can't be too sick.

ON DR. GORDON:

DR. GORDON

She has leukemia, Ms. Spalding. If she doesn't get treatment, she's not going to be mobile for long ... or breathing for that matter.

ON CARLA:

Dr. Gordon is starting to get through even Carla's attitude.

CARLA
These aren't scare tactics, are
they?

(beat)
I'll make some calls.

ON DR. GORDON:

He senses this is the most he's going to get from this tough
cookie.

DR. GORDON
Thank you.

CUT TO:

EXT. AUTO SHOP

Buddy is working up a sweat as he paints Sarah's car.

He steps back and eyes it critically, then removes the protective
breathing gear from his face. It's getting there.

CUT TO:

INT. MORRISEY HOUSE - DAY

Lorraine has finished the prep work on Sarah's box. She begins the
general bodywork by sanding the rough edges.

CUT TO:

INT. DRUG STORE

Drowning in too-big sweats, a very pale Sarah eyes the shelves of
over-the-counter medication. She sneaks a glance at the pharmacist
doling out prescriptions.

Finally, she grabs a bottle of Aleve, pays for it and leaves.

EXT. DRUG STORE

Daniel is waiting outside for her in his idling Escort. She climbs
in.

INT. ESCORT - MOVING SHOT

Daniel looks worriedly at Sarah.

DANIEL
Is this something I'm going to catch?

Sarah looks out the window.

SARAH

Not unless you're cursed by God.

Sarah is speaking literally, but her tone is light-hearted.

DANIEL

Oh, it's the curse?
 (looks at her
 again)
 shit. I'm glad I'm a guy.

CUT TO:

INT. LORRAINE'S WORKSHOP - NIGHT

It's late, but Lorraine is still working. She uses a rag to rub oil into the century-old wood of the box, which is starting to take on a gorgeous sheen.

She glances out the screen door to the Russell house.

CUT TO:

INT. SARAH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sarah's face is as white as her sheets. She takes two more of the powerful pain relievers and buries herself under her covers.

A soft KNOCK is heard on her door and then her mother's voice.

GAYLE (O.C.)

You need anything honey?

SARAH

(barely audible)

No.

But, Sarah's haunted eyes tell a different story.

CUT TO:

INT. LORRAINE'S WORKSHOP - MORNING

Lorraine is just beginning to restore the painted design on the lid of the box.

Carrying book bags, Jon and Rick race through the kitchen as they head for the front door.

JON/RICK

Bye mom.

Lorraine looks up and smiles, perhaps a bit more animated than usual.

LORRAINE

Goodbye.

Howard walks in from the kitchen, dressed for work and carrying his coffee.

LORRAINE

(good-natured)

Keep that coffee cup a safe distance away.

Howard sets the cup on Lorraine's desk.

HOWARD

Don't worry. I've been trained by the best.

LORRAINE

Coaster?

Howard LAUGHS and reaches over to place the coffee cup on a coaster.

HOWARD

You have paint on your nose.

Lorraine pauses to wipe it, spreading more pale green paint on her nose and even getting a smear on her cheek.

LORRAINE

How's that?

HOWARD

Good. You're starting to look like the Wicked Witch of the West.

Lorraine looks at Howard for a moment, wondering if that's a veiled comment on her attitude. But, his smile is innocent enough.

He takes a rag and very carefully wipes the paint off her face. They are very close and we see a brief hint of the chemistry that brought these two together.

Lorraine steps back awkwardly and the spell is broken.

LORRAINE

(taking rag)

Thank you.

Howard stares at the new box as he retrieves his coffee and sips.

HOWARD

Who's this one for?

LORRAINE

Sarah Russell.

Howard looks at her and narrows his eyebrows.

HOWARD

Do you realize that's the first time
I've heard you call her "Sarah" in
twelve years?

LORRAINE

Well, it is the girl's name.

HOWARD

I thought ... you didn't want to have
anything to do with her.

LORRAINE

I never said that.

HOWARD

But--

Howard hesitates, but then lets it go. He doesn't really want to
say "You said it after you demolished the rose bushes". He glances
at his watch.

HOWARD

--you're right and I'm late.

He gives her a peck on the cheek and heads out.

CUT TO:

INT. SARAH'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Sarah lies in bed reading a thick sheaf of forms printed on
Harvard letterhead. Physically, she looks better than yesterday,
but that isn't saying much.

Most of the form's questions are standard information, but one
essay question catches her eye:

"Why do you want to become a doctor?"

CUT TO:

INT. MORRISEY HOUSE - BASEMENT - FLASHBACK

12-year-old Sarah appears at the top of the basement stairs and
sees Jennifer's twisted body lying on the floor.

She's almost hyperventilating as she races down the stairs and kneels down next to the tiny body. But, there's nothing she can do. CPR won't help. A tourniquet won't help. She's gone.

CUT TO:

INT. SARAH'S BEDROOM

Sarah will never forget the moment of frustrated helplessness that established the course of her career.

But, she isn't about to relate that story in answer to the essay question. She runs her hands through her hair as if trying to push the memory out of her head. But, she can't.

The phone RINGS and a moment later, Gayle sticks her head in the door.

GAYLE

Phone for you.
(whispers)
It's Buddy.

Sarah pulls herself together and puts on a happy face for her mother.

SARAH

(whispers)
Thank you. Why are you whispering?

GAYLE

No idea. You feeling better?

Sarah nods as she picks up the phone and Gayle discreetly retreats.

SARAH

Hello?

BUDDY

(filtered)
Hey. What are you doing later?

SARAH

I sense a loaded question.

sarah's voice is deliberately casual.

SARAH

(cont.)

I was either gonna fly to Paris for lunch on the Seine or stay in bed all day. I can't quite decide.

BUDDY
 (filtered)
 Great. I'll pick you up at 5.

CLICK. He's gone.

CUT TO:

INT. LORRAINE'S WORKSHOP - AFTERNOON

A KNOCKING is heard at the screen door. Lorraine looks up to see Sarah standing there.

LORRAINE
 Hi. Come on in.

Sarah enters, looking a bit worse for wear, but smiling brightly to cover it.

SARAH
 I was just on my way ...
 (stops short)
 nowhere so I thought I'd drop by.

Sarah admires the work Lorraine has already done on the box.

LORRAINE
 Sarah. I told you to come by any time you wanted.

SARAH
 I thought maybe you were just being polite.

LORRAINE
 Well I think it's been a while since anyone has interpreted my behavior as "polite".

Sarah starts walking around the workshop as Lorraine continues. Lorraine's voice implies she doesn't care what people think, but Sarah can't help but wonder.

LORRAINE
 (cont.)
 I'm sure most of the terms people use around town are decidedly not polite.

Unwilling to comment, Sarah examines an old quilt hanging on a quilt-rack. The beautiful antique is composed of thousands of tiny triangles of every sort of material, none larger than a paper clip.

SARAH

Did you make this?

LORRAINE

No. My great-great-great grandmother started that in 1855. Everything is hand-stitched.

CLOSE ON THE QUILT: Intricate curligues decorate the seams. The amount of work put into it is staggeringly obvious. It's truly a work of art.

SARAH

(disbelieving)

Yeah right. Wouldn't it ... fall apart or something?

LORRAINE

Apparently not. I still use it. It went to the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis and would have taken the top prize if my idiot Aunt Moria hadn't machine stitched the border.

SARAH

You shouldn't talk about her like that.

LORRAINE

Why not? Just because she was born a hundred years ago doesn't mean she had the wisdom of the ages.

(beat)

Everyone makes mistakes.

Sarah looks up quickly at that ... is it directed towards her? Lorraine's face betrays nothing.

SARAH

Would you ever consider selling it?

LORRAINE

Impossible. It's been passed down through the women in my family for five generations--

Lorraine stops abruptly as she realizes that she has no daughter to pass it on to. Sarah realizes at the same time.

SARAH

I'm sorry. I'm gonna go. I mean, I've got to go ... something to go to. Maybe tomorrow, I can help ...

LORRAINE

Maybe.

CUT TO:

EXT. MUSICAL AMPHITHEATER - DUSK

Buddy and Sarah sit on a blanket as the small town orchestra warms up before playing their program of classical music. Fireflies provide mood lighting as the sun prepares to set.

It's a gorgeous evening on the brink of summer.

Buddy unpacks a picnic hamper: wine, cheese, bread, fruit. Sarah can't suppress a smile as she watches Buddy's efforts. The goal is definitely to impress Sarah.

BUDDY

Granted it isn't lunch on the Seine ...

SARAH

It's très continental.

(notices something)

I can't believe they carry paté
at the Stanton IGA.

BUDDY

I had to go to Alton for that.

Buddy tries to uncork the wine, but only manages to break the cork halfway, sealing the wine in the bottle forever.

BUDDY

Ten points for trying.

He pulls two cold beers out of the hamper. Sarah LAUGHS as he hands her one.

SARAH

So ... what was it that was so
important? Why was I meeting you
here?

BUDDY

To celebrate.

SARAH

To celebraaate ... what?

Buddy pauses to think.

BUDDY

Memorial Day.
(decisively)
Yep. Monday's Memorial Day.

SARAH

(nodding)
Definite cause for celebration.

BUDDY

Okay ... how about your triumphant
return?

He raises his beer to toast her.

SARAH

(ironic, to herself)
You were closer with Memorial Day.

BUDDY

What?

SARAH

I said ... salud!

She clinks bottles with him.

LATER ...

The orchestra plays surprisingly well. In a small town, there's plenty of time to practice. A lilting Brahms melody is putting everyone in the mood.

Buddy reaches over tentatively and takes Sarah's hand. He pulls her closer and kisses her softly. Electricity is in the air. Sarah has to make a real effort to retain her composure.

SARAH

(smiling)
You have created a situation that
is simultaneously very cheesy and
incredibly romantic.

(beat)

How do you do that?

BUDDY

(shrugs)
You inspire me to push the boundaries
of the imagination.

SARAH

I do, huh?

BUDDY

Oh yeah. In fact, if you knew how long I've been imagining a scenario like this ...

Sarah laughs as she returns his very direct gaze.

SARAH

Well, I don't know if I've ever inspired anyone bef--

Buddy cuts her off with a kiss both passionate and sweet.
'nough talking.

CUT TO:

INT. LORRAINE'S WORKSHOP - DAY

Sarah sits next to a wooden chair, diligently sanding one leg.

Lorraine has given her a practice piece, but she may be regretting the impulse. She looks over at Sarah and sighs.

LORRAINE

Sarah, you're making a gallant effort, but ...

SARAH

But what?

Sarah's enthusiasm makes it difficult to criticize.

LORRAINE

Lemme see that.

Sarah grins as she steps back to let Lorraine see the chair.

They both realize that the leg she has been sanding is now much skinnier than the others. Sarah is humiliated but Lorraine smiles encouragingly.

LORRAINE

You've got the right idea. Just don't think about it so much.

Sarah furrows her brow, not quite getting it.

LORRAINE

(cont.)

sanding is like sex. It's all in the rhythms.

SARAH

Gee. Those are two worlds I never
thought would collide.

Lorraine smiles. Sarah stands up, holding the small of her back.

LORRAINE

You're pretty young to have a bad
back.

Sarah smiles and tries to cover the very real pain.

SARAH

(light)

This is what a desk job does to you.

Sarah goes to the closet where Lorraine keeps supplies for a fresh piece of sandpaper. Inside, she finds the cradle hidden under a pile of old blankets and bends down to examine it.

SARAH

Hey, what's-- Is this the famous
cradle that started the business?

Lorraine NOTICES and the mood darkens.

LORRAINE

Just let that be.

Lorraine's voice is sharper than she intended it to be. Sarah stands, unsure what she did wrong.

SARAH

I'm- I'm sorry.

Lorraine doesn't say anything, but Sarah notices that her hands are shaking. Sarah looks closely at the cradle and remembers whose it was.

SARAH

(gently)

You really shouldn't let that sit
unused.

LORRAINE

Why? You planning on having a baby?

SARAH

(wincing)

No. I'm not going to have any.

Lorraine eyes Sarah strangely, perhaps picking up on something in her voice that everyone else has been ignoring.

But, her building anger is overwhelming her concern.

LORRAINE

You're awfully young to be making
a statement like that.

Lorraine goes back to the detailed painting, but her hands are still shaking. She messes up.

LORRAINE

Godammit! Look at that.

Sarah grabs the paint thinner. She dabs some on the end of what looks like a long q-tip.

SARAH

Here.

Sarah holds the swab out to Lorraine.

But, Lorraine's shaking has increased. Sarah looks at her, guessing what's really wrong, but unable to fix it.

Slowly, Lorraine lowers her face into her hands and SOBS.

After several moments, Lorraine looks up at Sarah and examines her face, looking deep into her eyes.

LORRAINE

(finally)

What are you doing here Sarah?

SARAH

I ... you're making me--

She gestures to the box -- the self-evident answer.

LORRAINE

I thought I could do this.

(beat)

When you walked in that door last
week, I thought maybe you'd finally
come to apologize for what happened.

EXT. MORRISEY HOUSE

Howard pulls in the driveway. He gets out of the car and walks in the front door.

INT. MORRISEY HOUSE - KITCHEN

Howard walks in and hears Lorraine's voice raised in the workshop.

INT. LORRAINE'S WORKSHOP

Lorraine has taken the swab and dabs at the mistake, struggling to remain calm. It's a losing battle.

LORRAINE

But, you're just making it worse.

Sarah's voice struggles to stay even.

SARAH

I'm sorry.

Lorraine angrily throws the swab to the ground.

LORRAINE

(voice cracking)

Is that supposed to help? Why didn't you just-- Why weren't you there? Why didn't you stop her? Her neck was ... broken. No one that little should hurt like that. She was a baby. You have to watch them.

Sarah's cool facade shows signs of cracking.

SARAH

I did. I tried.

LORRAINE

(overlapping)

We left you in charge. You were responsible!

SARAH

(a whisper)

I'm sorry.

LORRAINE

Sorry? You keep saying that like it means something. That doesn't change--

A harsh voice of reason interrupts Lorraine's hysterics.

HOWARD (O.C.)

(interrupting)

Lorraine, stop it.

Startled, Lorraine and Sarah look up to see Howard, who has entered unnoticed.

LORRAINE

(a plea)

But, she's got to tell me why.

HOWARD

No Lorraine.

LORRAINE

If I just understood why--

HOWARD

(interrupting)

What? It would all be okay? You'd be a whole person? We'd be a normal family again?

Howard rips his coat off and throws it over a chair. There is an ember of frustration that's been smoldering in Howard for years. Now it's igniting.

HOWARD

(cont.)

You know, Lorraine, for twelve years, every look you gave me said "Why didn't you fix the latch on the basement door like you promised you would?".

(beat)

Every look you gave the boys said "Why did you fight and distract Sarah?"

This information is a revelation to Lorraine.

LORRAINE

No. I never ...

HOWARD

Don't you think I've been hurting? Or the boys? We miss her every day.

(beat)

There are no answers for your "why"'s Lorraine. Bad things happen to good people. All the time. It's no one's fault.

Howard is getting through to Lorraine. For once, she's able to put her own sorrow aside and see another point-of-view.

LORRAINE

I hurt the boys?

HOWARD

Yeah. They used to have a mother. They really liked her too.

The screen door, caught by the wind, SLAMS behind Sarah, who has left unnoticed.

HOWARD
(quietly)
Everyone used to like her.

After a moment, Howard runs out after Sarah.

EXT. MORRISEY HOUSE - FRONT YARD

Sarah is running across the street towards her house. Howard YELLS after her.

HOWARD
Sarah! Wait!

Sarah doesn't slow and Howard runs after her.

EXT. RUSSELL HOUSE - FRONT YARD

Howard reaches Sarah and stops her from entering her house. When she turns, he sees that the dam has finally burst and she can't stop crying.

SARAH
I didn't go back over! She came to my door. And I was-- she was so happy that she came across the street. I didn't ask her-- I never meant ...

Sarah SOBS uncontrollably. Howard hugs her to him and tries to comfort her.

HOWARD
Oh God, Sarah. I wasn't gonna yell at you. I know it's not your fault.

SARAH
(muffled, into his shirt)
But, it is. I have proof.

He holds her face so she can see how serious he is.

HOWARD
None of it is your fault. Okay?

Howard isn't satisfied until Sarah meets his eyes and nods almost imperceptibly.

Howard suddenly realizes the intimacy of their situation there on the front yard. He draws his hands back and laughs self-consciously.

HOWARD

She actually walked across the street?

Sarah's breath hitches in her throat as she struggles to regain her usually-impregnable composure.

SARAH

(nodding)

We went downtown too.

Howard's face fills with amazement.

HOWARD

She didn't say a word to me.

SARAH

I think she's still getting her ... sea legs.

Howard turns to walk back to his house, but gets in one last parting shot.

HOWARD

Well, if that's the fault of anyone we know ... tell her "thank you".

CUT TO:

INT. RUSSELL HOUSE - BASEMENT - NIGHT

It looks like the cover of a 1970's-era Milton Bradley game. Phil, Gayle, Daniel and Sarah sit at a rumpus room card table playing scrabble. Sarah takes her turn.

She's had a hell of a day, feels like shit and isn't really concentrating.

PHIL

Sarah, are you losing your edge?
You've never left me a triple
word score in your life.

Phil starts to place tiles when Buddy appears at the door and walks halfway down the stairs.

BUDDY

Hi. Sorry to interrupt. I knocked on the door, but ...

Everyone GREETs Buddy. Though obviously not prepared to deal with this, Sarah gets up and follows Buddy out.

EXT. RUSSELL HOUSE - FRONT YARD - NIGHT

Sarah's car gleams like a newly-minted dime in the harsh glare of the street lamp.

She walks all around it in wonder. She points to another place on her car.

SARAH

You fixed the--

BUDDY

It was no problem. I mean I was just working away and figured I'd do it right.

SARAH

Uh-huh.

Buddy can't help but notice Sarah's fatigue.

BUDDY

Hey, are you okay?

Sarah looks at Buddy and knows then and there ... he loves her and it's an impossible situation.

SARAH

Of course.

She hands him a check with a polite little smile.

SARAH

Thank you, Henry.

Buddy hesitates, unsure why she seems to be giving him the brush-off.

SARAH

(cold)
I'm sorry, do you need that in cash?

BUDDY

No, this is fine.

(beat)
Why do I suddenly want you to call me Buddy again?

Sarah shrugs. Her cold shoulder is hard to miss, but Buddy tries anyway.

BUDDY

I was gonna see if you wanted to--

SARAH

(interrupting)

I don't think we can do this.

(beat)

I'm seeing someone in the city. We'll probably be engaged by Christmas. I just don't want to ... mess anything up, you know?

Buddy is floored. It takes a moment for him to take it all in.

BUDDY

I see. So somewhere along the line, I went from being a "romantic" to being a "mess". And you just remembered this "someone" now?

SARAH

Buddy ... you and I had a couple beers together. That's it.

BUDDY

Yeah, sure. I was just--

Buddy doesn't know what he was just--

Angry and frustrated, he turns to leave and remembers that he drove Sarah's car over. He was obviously going to ask her for a ride home.

BUDDY

You're right. I guess I let my imagination get the best of me.

(angry)

Or maybe I just imagined what's best in you.

As Buddy walks down the street heading for home, he misses the look on Sarah's face. The look that says "Come back".

CUT TO:

INT. MORRISEY HOUSE - WORKSHOP

Her hair still wet from a shower, Lorraine watches them from her screen door. She sees Sarah's look and recognizes it. It's the look she's been hiding from her own husband for twelve years as she's pushed him farther and farther away.

Some people have soap operas; Lorraine has Sarah and Buddy.

As Lorraine turns from the window, she just catches the tail end of a conversation in the kitchen.

JON (O.C.)
Sectionals tomorrow, dad. We're playing Roxana at 4:00.

HOWARD (O.C.)
They still got Harding?

JON (O.C.)
Nah. He graduated, but their new shortstop's a demon.

HOWARD (O.C.)
I'll get there as soon as I can.
Try to save the major ass-kicking for the later innings.

Lorraine smiles and she can almost hear Jon smiling as he replies.

JON (O.C.)
Sorry. I kick ass at will. G 'night.

Jon's face appears in the doorway. He speaks tentatively, unsure of her mood. He obviously knows better than to invite her to the game.

JON
Night, mom.

LORRAINE
Goodnight.

Lorraine sits back down to work. Sarah's box is almost done. After a moment, Howard appears at the door, watching her work.

HOWARD
(softly)
Hi. I'm going to bed.

Howard walks over to kiss her goodnight. Lorraine hesitates, then turns the chaste kiss into a real one. Howard breathes in the scent of her freshly-washed hair and is surprised to find himself aroused. Lorraine rinses her paintbrush.

LORRAINE
I'll go with you.

Howard is a bit stunned to say the least. He gestures to the box.

HOWARD
Are you done with that?

LORRAINE

For now. Unless you want to stand here, hold hands and watch the paint dry.

Howard stares at his wife as if he doesn't quite recognize her.

Slowly and very deliberately, she takes his face in her hands and kisses him thoroughly.

He tentatively touches her back, trailing his fingers along her jawline as he kisses her.

They're like teenagers discovering the magic of sexual attraction for the first time. She leads him inside the house and down the hall to their bedroom.

INT. MORRISEY HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM

The bed is pleasantly ruffled. Howard lies back and pulls Lorraine to him tightly. She fits perfectly in the crook of his arm.

HOWARD

God, you feel good. I can't remember--

He stops himself abruptly.

LORRAINE

Go ahead, say it. The last time we made love.

HOWARD

No, I remember. I think Reagan was President.

They laugh and kiss lingeringly.

LORRAINE

Howard, I know sometimes I make you crazy, but ... you know I still love you, don't you?

HOWARD

(wicked)

Well, if I didn't before ...

Howard props himself up on an elbow and looks at his wife's face. He runs a finger down her jawline, seemingly mesmerized by her.

HOWARD

(suddenly serious)

Yeah ... I guess I do.

CUT TO:

EXT. STANTON HIGH SCHOOL - BASEBALL DIAMOND

A high school baseball game is in full swing. Jon plays third base for the Stanton Bulldogs.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL PARKING LOT

Lorraine gets out of her car and follows the sound of bats CRACKING against balls and the ROAR of spectators.

EXT. BASEBALL DIAMOND - BLEACHERS

Several spectators do doubletakes as Lorraine sits down on the bleachers. She smiles at them before turning her attention to the game.

ANGLE ON GAME:

The game is heating up. There's a runner on second as Jon steps up to bat for Stanton.

He hits a long hard fly to center. The fielder can't get to it.

The runner makes it home as Jon is rounding third. The crowd is going wild. Lorraine is standing and clapping with the rest of them.

The ball flies back into the infield and the shortstop snags it. Jon is trapped between third and home. He turns and seems to have every intention of returning to third. The COACH there claps his encouragement.

But then Jon fakes out the shortstop, turning tail as soon as he throws to third. Jon pulls out all the stops and ... SLIDES into home as the ball sails to the catcher. It's close. But, the ump rules "SAFE". The Stanton team members ROAR their approval along with the home crowd.

But, Jon isn't basking in the adulation of his team. From the dirt at home base, he spots Lorraine. He stands up slowly, his amazed eyes locked with hers.

Lorraine continues to CLAP. Jon slowly smiles as he dusts off his knees and gives her a tiny wave of acknowledgement. She nods her head.

ANGLE ON LORRAINE:

Lorraine slowly sits down, energized by the game, being outside, pleasing her son and just plain living again.

VOICE

Hey lady. Could you make room?

Lorraine looks up to see Howard smiling down at her. Rick is with him.

LORRAINE

Sorry. No room. But maybe ...

Lorraine pats her lap invitingly. Howard LAUGHS as he and Rick squeeze onto the bleacher seat next to her.

LORRAINE

I'm afraid there's some bad news.

Howard's smile fades. What now?

HOWARD

What?

LORRAINE

Our son has been kicking ass without you.

Lorraine kisses Howard lightly. He takes her hand.

LATER ...

The game is over. Howard and Rick are heading down to the field to congratulate Jon. They look back at Lorraine expectantly.

HOWARD

You coming?

LORRAINE

I need to go by the library before they close. They're holding a book on Eastern European Folk Art for me.

Howard raises his eyebrows. Huh?

LORRAINE

(cont.)

I need to check the colors for Sarah's box.

(beat, to Rick)

I was hoping maybe you could drive me.

Rick hesitates. If this is a test, he's not sure what he's supposed to say. He looks to Howard, who shrugs.

RICK

I could do that.

LORRAINE

(smiles brightly)

Great.

SMASH CUT TO:

SARAH THROWING UP VIOLENTLY.

INT. PUBLIC RESTROOM

Sarah is bent over the toilet. When she wipes her mouth, we see a trace of blood.

Sarah exits the stall and washes her face at the sink. She pauses to take a few deep breaths before exiting.

INT. STANTON PUBLIC LIBRARY - DAY

As Sarah walks out of the restroom, an elderly MAN looks up from his reading carrel. He obviously heard her. She catches him staring at her, but he doesn't look away. Sarah tries to smile reassuringly, but it just doesn't look right on her too-pale face.

CLOSE ON COMPUTER SCREEN:

Information on leukemia scrolls up on the computerized library catalogue. Sarah writes down call numbers on a scrap of paper.

AT A TABLE:

Sarah drops several books on a table. She sits down and is quickly engrossed.

LORRAINE (O.C.)

Well hello.

Sarah SLAMS the book closed and covers it with her backpack as she turns to see Lorraine standing behind her.

SARAH

Hello.

There is a new tension here. Lorraine assumes it's from their last encounter. She pulls one of the books out from under the bag.

LORRAINE

What're you reading?
(reading)
Coping With Cancer.

SARAH

Research. One of the essay questions for my Harvard follow-up. You know ... what's my chosen area of expertise--

Lorraine nods her head as Sarah stops abruptly, nervously realizing she's giving more information than she needs to.

SARAH

(cont.)

What are you doing here?

Sarah is desperate to deflect attention anywhere else than on her.

LORRAINE

Well, it's research for your box.

Sarah starts piling her books together and glances at the door. Lorraine misinterprets Sarah's nervousness as hostility.

LORRAINE

(cont., cool)

I'm sorry. I wasn't aware this was your personal library.

Lorraine catches herself and curbs her hostile response.

LORRAINE

(cont.)

Sarah, the last thing I want to do is fight with you.

Sarah fidgets, increasingly uncomfortable. She quickly gathers up all of the books and stuffs them in her backpack.

SARAH

I think you were right all along. This isn't a good idea.

(beat)

I never wanted to make you feel bad. I'll just send Daniel over to get the box ... when it's done.

Sarah voice trails off. She zips her backpack closed and leaves before Lorraine can even reply. Lorraine stares after her, completely confused.

CUT TO:

INT. WILLOUGHBY'S - EVENING

It's still too early for this place to be crowded. Buddy stands up and motions Daniel over to his table.

BUDDY

Hey ... thanks for coming.

Daniel sits down across from Buddy. They eye each other awkwardly.

DANIEL

So, what's up?

BUDDY

Just thought we could catch up.

Buddy motions to the WAITRESS.

BUDDY

Can we get a pitcher of Bud?

WAITRESS

Can I see some ID?

Buddy and Daniel pull driver's licenses out of their wallets.

The waitress looks at the ID's. As she walks away, Daniel sees Buddy's old fake license in his wallet and LAUGHS.

DANIEL

Ah, ye olde fake license. Why haven't you thrown this away or passed it on to some deserving high schooler?

BUDDY

(taking license)

It's a priceless symbol of my adolescence.

DANIEL

It's so bad. I still can't figure out how it worked so well all those years.

BUDDY

How many times do I have to tell you? Using "Morton" as my first name always got me sympathy and sympathy made me less suspicious.

Daniel nods wisely.

DANIEL

As if the name "Buddy" doesn't get you enough sympathy.

BUDDY

Oooh. Touché.

DISSOLVE TO:

A few pitchers later. It's apparent these guys have gotten drunk together many times over the years. They pour 'em and throw 'em back with practiced ease.

BUDDY
so ... you seein' anybody?

DANIEL
I dated this one girl, Heidi, last semester, but then she joined a sorority and went psycho on me.

Buddy nods as if he knows what that means.

DANIEL
What about you?

BUDDY
(casual)
Nobody steady.

Daniel stares at Buddy unflinchingly.

BUDDY
Okay, fine. Nobody at all.

Daniel bursts out LAUGHING. Buddy joins him.

BUDDY
So that's pretty exciting about Sarah.

DANIEL
Buddy, you find Sarah's right instep exciting. You're gonna have to be more specific.
(realizes)
Oh, you mean Harvard.

BUDDY
No ... I meant her being engaged.

Daniel spits out the swallow of beer he just downed and COUGHS.

DANIEL
What ... are you talking about?

BUDDY
You didn't know?

Daniel is processing Sarah's strange behavior from the last couple of days and her evasive answers to his questions. It's all making sense now. Or at least it seems to.

DANIEL
Of course I knew. I just didn't know you knew ... too. (MORE)

DANIEL (CONT.)

(defensive)

So what else do you want to know about Sarah? If you print up a questionnaire, I could take it home and ask her to fill it out.

Buddy stands up and almost falls over.

BUDDY

I don't know what the hell your problem is. You're the one who stopped talking to me.

Daniel attempts to stand up, but weaves in mid-air and sits back down heavily.

DANIEL

I did not.

Seeing that Daniel isn't rising to the challenge, Buddy drops back down to his own seat.

BUDDY

You just love that you have Sarah as an excuse to turn it around.

DANIEL

Oh, if I've got Sarah, you've got your dad. You're the one who backed out of school the day before we were supposed to leave.

(to himself)

Left me in a fucking empty dorm room. It was embarrassing.

BUDDY

I told you I couldn't leave my dad just then. The man had a heart attack.

DANIEL

Your dad's fine. You were just too scared to leave.

BUDDY

I was not. He just asked me to wait.

They stare at each other defiantly for a minute, then realization dawns on Daniel's face.

DANIEL

You mean you--?

Buddy throws an envelope with the "University of Illinois" logo on the table.

BUDDY

Just got word today.

(beat)

My junior college credits are good.
I'm officially a sophomore in the
Fall.

Daniel takes a minute to process this.

DANIEL

So ... I guess you're gonna need
an experienced upperclassman to
show you around.

BUDDY

Well, I'd prefer you, but ...

Buddy raises his glass as if to toast.

BUDDY

(tentatively)

Friends?

Daniel hesitates, but smiles reluctantly as he raises his glass
and CLINKS it with Buddy's.

DANIEL

(yes)

Never.

Buddy smiles in response.

CUT TO:

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Daniel and Sarah are filling their cart with party platters, cases
of soda, bags of chips and assorted barbeque sundries.

SARAH

Tell me again why we're having a
Memorial Day barbeque.

DANIEL

Beats me. Mom invited all her clients
and I think dad just likes an excuse
to drink before five.

SARAH

(sarcastic)

Well now I'm giddy with anticipation.

DANIEL

(slyly)

So ... I hear you're engaged.

Sarah is completely confused until she makes the mental connections.

SARAH

Ahh ... you and Buddy are friends again?

DANIEL

When were we not?

She rolls her eyes at this.

SARAH

I'm glad.

Sarah pushes the cart to the vegetable section and eyes the carrot and celery selection.

DANIEL

Your intense crudite scrutiny will not deter me from the still-unanswered question.

SARAH

Glad to hear your rhetoric class has paid off.

Daniel gives Sarah some intense scrutiny of his own.

DANIEL

(suspicions confirmed)

You're not getting married. You're just blowing my best friend off.

SARAH

I'm living my life Daniel. If Buddy isn't a part of it, well ... are you really that surprised?

DANIEL

No. If you actually let someone be a part of it ... then I'd be surprised.

The truth of that comment stings Sarah.

CUT TO:

INT. DANIEL'S FORD - MOVING SHOT

The groceries are bagged in the back as they drive home.

Sarah eyes the worn-out upholstery. The engine noise is deafening.

SARAH

I hate to say it, but this car is not gonna get you through four years.

DANIEL

Well, that's the difference between us ... I'm an optimist.

SARAH

I'm an opti-- I can see the good in ... things.

Daniel is skeptical, but he tries to nod encouragingly.

DANIEL

Good. Hold that thought.

Daniel pulls into the driveway of their house and Sarah instantly understands what he's talking about.

CUT TO:

EXT. RUSSELL HOUSE - DAY

A huge banner is draped across the front of the house:

"CONGRATULATIONS SARAH -- OUR LOSS IS HARVARD'S GAIN".

People fill the front lawn, drinking from paper cups and chatting.

No one pays any attention as Daniel and Sarah start to get out of the car, but then Phil and Gayle walk out the door and notice them.

PHIL

Oh shit. Hey everybody ... 1-2-3.

The milling people notice Sarah and try to recover the element of:

EVERYONE

Surprise!

Sarah glares at obvious-accomplice Daniel and tries to smile brightly.

SARAH

Wow ... this is great.

No it isn't.

EXT. RUSSELL HOUSE - DAY

As Daniel unloads the groceries, Phil and Gayle lead Sarah around to say "hi" to everyone. Sarah is doing a slow boil, but hides it.

SARAH
(aside to Gayle)
Mom, we really should have talked about this.

GAYLE
Well that would have ruined the surprise, honey.

PHIL
Come on, Sarah. Even you have to appreciate the comedic irony of grocery shopping for your own surprise party.

True enough. The buffet tables are now covered with the party platters and supplies that Daniel and Sarah bought.

Gayle pulls Sarah aside to speak confidentially.

GAYLE
Did you and Buddy have a fight? I had to practically drag him to the party.

SARAH
Mom, you didn't ...

BUDDY (O.C.)
Hi Sarah.

Sarah turns to face Buddy. He hesitantly hands her a small gift-wrapped package.

SARAH
Hi ...
(taking package)
... you didn't have to--

BUDDY
Your mother was nice enough to invite me ...

Read: I'm sorry. This isn't my fault. I couldn't get out of it.

BUDDY

(cont.)

... but, I've really got to get back to the station.

GAYLE

Oh Buddy, you can't be serious. You just got here.

BUDDY

No, really. A lot of boaters are heading up to the lake for the weekend.

(beat, to Sarah)

I gotta sell 'em gas.

Buddy obviously thinks his gas jockey status contributed to her rejection of him.

PHIL

Daniel tells me you're joining him up at U of I in the Fall.

BUDDY

Yeah, I thought I might.

Sarah is surprised by this ... and that Buddy didn't tell her.

SARAH

Buddy that's great.

BUDDY

Yeah, well ... great.
(awkward beat)
Goodbye Sarah.

He makes a hasty retreat.

DISSOLVE TO:

It's later in the day. Sarah is playing a game of jarts with Daniel, Susan and her husband JEFF. She stops when she sees Lorraine crossing the street with a determined stride.

SARAH

I'll be back.

Sarah runs to intercept Lorraine, who looks like she's been up all night. Her gaze bores into Sarah's.

LORRAINE

You're sick, aren't you?

Sarah looks around quickly to make sure no one can hear them.

LORRAINE
(cont., softer)
What is it? Hodgkins?

SARAH
(glibly)
Maybe I'm just pregnant.

LORRAINE
No, you're not gonna have any kids,
remember?

SARAH
I'm fine. Just leave me alone.

LORRAINE
Headaches, backaches, dizziness.
Probably worse symptoms you're not
gonna tell me about.

Sarah stays silent.

LORRAINE
(realizing)
You haven't told anyone, have you?

Sarah stares at the grass at her feet.

SARAH
It's leukemia.

Sarah seems relieved that someone else finally knows. Lorraine nods, simultaneously satisfied and horrified that her suspicions are confirmed.

LORRAINE
Why on earth would you want to go
through something like this alone?

Lorraine's confusion turns into yet another realization.

LORRAINE
(cont.)
Sarah ... you can't think that you
deserve this.

The compassion in Lorraine's voice is too much. Sarah's eyes are welling up with tears. But she can't let herself break down in front of everyone.

SARAH
(willing her to stop)
Lorraine, I can't do this ... now.

But, Lorraine can't let it go.

LORRAINE
(bare whisper)
You do think you deserve it, don't
you?

Sarah's eyes meet Lorraine's. That's exactly what she thinks.
The tension is broken when Phil TAPS a glass loudly.

PHIL
Hey! Can I have your attention for
a minute.

The crowd quiets down. As Daniel walks over and pulls her towards
Phil, Sarah's eyes swear Lorraine to secrecy.

Phil drapes his arm around Sarah proudly.

PHIL
First of all, thanks to everyone for
coming by and helping us celebrate.

Gayle steps out of the house with a plate of burgers for the
grill. She quickly puts it down and joins Phil and Sarah.

PHIL
(cont.)
Since Sarah's mother and I believe
that nothing but the best will do,
we're sending her to Harvard. There
will be sacrifices ... we'll be moving
into our son Daniel's dorm and selling
our house so if anyone wants to make a
bid today, just talk to Gayle.

The crowd LAUGHS on cue.

PHIL
(cont.)
Okay, we can't hide the fact that
we're incredibly proud of our daughter.
She's not only the first Russell to
go to Harvard, I believe she's also
the first Stanton resident to go.

The crowd CHEERS loyally.

PHIL
(cont.)
So ... to Sarah.

He and Gayle raise their glasses.

GAYLE
We're sending Harvard our first and
our best.

DANIEL
(mock outrage)
Hey!!

Everyone LAUGHS and drinks. Sarah gives a weak smile.

INT. RUSSELL HOUSE - LATER THAT DAY

Daniel finishes telling Sarah a joke as they walk in the front door.

INT. KITCHEN

Gayle is hanging up the phone with a devastated expression on her face as Lorraine walks in from the back door.

LORRAINE
Gayle, Phil wanted me to tell you
he needs more ice--

She stops when she sees the look on Gayle's face.

Daniel and Sarah are still LAUGHING at the punchline to his joke when they enter the kitchen from the other direction. Gayle looks at them with tears in her eyes.

DANIEL
Mom, what is it?

Gayle is staring at Sarah, who is conspicuously silent.

GAYLE
Why don't you ask your sister?

Daniel looks from Gayle to Sarah, clueless. Sarah glares at Lorraine in disbelief.

SARAH
(to Lorraine)
What gives you the right--

GAYLE
(interrupting)
Carla just called. You got another
important phone call ... from a Dr.
Gordon.

The dam of Gayle's grief and anger bursts.

GAYLE

(loud)

What the hell kind of game are you playing Sarah? I mean, what were you gonna do ... just die in your room? Let me find out later that you were sick?

DANIEL

Mom, she was just--

Gayle turns on Daniel angrily.

GAYLE

She's got leukemia, Daniel ... and I guess she just didn't feel like telling us.

Daniel turns to stare at Sarah, hoping she will deny it.

DANIEL

Sarah ...?

Sarah wishes she could just disappear into the linoleum. Finally:

SARAH

(evenly)

It sounds like you got the full report, mom. I'd appreciate it if you didn't announce it to the party guests.

Gayle stares at Sarah in shock, amazed by her emotionless tone. Then more tumblers click into place as she looks at Lorraine and realizes that she knew.

GAYLE

(incredulous)

You couldn't tell your own mother, but you told her?

LORRAINE

(softly)

I ... figured it out.

Though it isn't there, Gayle hears another accusation -- why didn't she pick up on the signs and figure it out?

GAYLE

(to Sarah)

Are you trying to hurt me?

Gayle's tears start up again as she crosses the floor and hugs her daughter tightly.

GAYLE

(muffled)

Don't ... don't.

We're not sure what Gayle is telling Sarah not to do. Don't hurt her? Don't die? Sarah pats her mother's back and locks eyes with Lorraine. This is why she didn't want to tell anyone.

CUT TO:

INT. DR. GORDON'S OFFICE - DAY

Phil, Gayle, Daniel and Sarah sit in Dr. Gordon's office.

SARAH (V.O.)

I persuaded my mother not to tell anyone about my illness, but had to agree to go back to Dr. Gordon ... who really didn't have anything new to say.

Dr. Gordon has just finished explaining the results of Sarah's tests in layman's terms.

GAYLE

So ... what do we do now? Is there treatment? Chemotherapy? What?

Sarah barely appears to be listening to this discussion about her future. Dr. Gordon is baffled by her behavior. He has to deliberately pull his attention back to Gayle.

DR. GORDON

Yes, of course. We have an excellent chemo program. Once the disease goes into remission, depending on the patient's status, we look at the options: radiotherapy, bone marrow transplant, an umbilical cord blood trans--

Dr. Gordon stops abruptly and looks at Sarah. He turns to Phil and Gayle.

DR. GORDON

May I speak to you two outside?

Dr. Gordon leads a confused Phil and Gayle into the hall.

INT. CHICAGO MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - HALLWAY

Dr. Gordon can't contain his curiosity.

DR. GORDON

It just hit me that ... Sarah doesn't seem to care whether she lives or dies. Can you shed any light?

GAYLE

(outraged)

What? Doesn't ca--

DR. GORDON

(interrupting)

Mrs. Russell, there's no time here for hurt feelings or indignation. I'm sorry, but you have to be frank with me. Sarah may need a psychiatrist as well as a doctor right now.

(beat)

Has she been acting strangely? Depressed, suicidal, feelings of rage, guilt, hopelessness?

GAYLE

Well, she doesn't really--
(glances at Phil)
Sarah's always been a quiet girl.

Phil ignores Gayle's look.

PHIL

Dr. Gordon, Sarah hasn't always been the way she is.

Phil hesitates. He doesn't want to go into this, but he knows it's important. Dr. Gordon nods for him to continue.

PHIL

(cont.)

About twelve years ago while she was babysitting for the family across the street ...

Dr. Gordon listens carefully as Phil tells the story.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CHICAGO - SARAH'S APARTMENT - DAY

Sarah is packing books from a modular shelf into cardboard boxes. Carla sits nearby tapping out a new melody on her keyboard.

CARLA

How the hell was I supposed to know you hadn't told your mother? I just said I was sorry you were sick and ...

Carla trails off lamely. Sarah doesn't say anything as she flips through a stack of CD's, pulling out several and throwing them in the box.

CARLA

(cont.)

I mean that's one fucked up home life. I thought that's why you went back ... you know ... the whole chicken soup, mom's-comforting-paw-on-your-brow kinda thing.

Sarah exits into her bedroom and returns in a moment with two large suitcases.

Daniel enters the apartment, smiles awkwardly at Carla and takes the suitcases for Sarah, who lifts the box and starts to follow him out the door.

CARLA

(cont.)

So Lyle is gonna move in, but I don't know if he has any cash.

(petulant)

You are still responsible for your half of the rent until December you know.

Sarah turns at the door.

SARAH

I'll be sure to make a note in my will.

CARLA

(rolling her eyes)

Oh, sure, Sarah ... be like that.

SARAH

Carla ... it's so ironic. I don't know where you got this idea that my life is so perfect. But, I wish you'd get over it and just ... well, you don't have to be my friend ... it's a little late for that, but--

Carla walks to Sarah and takes the heavy box out of her arms.

CARLA

Sarah ... I just wanted you to talk to me like a normal person. Like I was here.

(beat)

What you just said was great. Very bitchy. Lots of potential.

Sarah smiles incredulously as she follows Carla out of the apartment.

SARAH

(to herself)

If only I'd known it was so easy.

EXT. CHICAGO - STREET OUTSIDE OF SARAH'S APARTMENT

Daniel waits in the driver's seat of Sarah's car, which is fully-loaded with her belongings. Carla wedges the last box into the back seat.

CARLA

So you'll be at Chicago Memorial?

SARAH

No. I want to be close to home.

(writes note)

Here's the number at St. Mary's in Alton. I start chemo on Monday.

CARLA

I always thought you'd look better bald. Kind of the "Sinead in Auschwitz" look.

SARAH

(laughs)

Bitter 'til the end.

CARLA

Yeah, well ... hurry back. Lyle is much more difficult to annoy than you.

Carla smiles and gives Sarah a hug.

CUT TO:

EXT. GATEWOOD CEMETARY - DAY

Howard leads Lorraine to a small rose-colored marker stone. She's obviously never been to Jennifer's grave. It reads:

JENNIFER RAE MORRISEY
 "Beloved Daughter & Sister"
 Born: 5/21/83
 Died: 6/3/84

They stand looking down at it for several moments. Lorraine bends and places some tea roses at the marker. Her hand lingers on the sun-warmed granite. As she stands her knees POP loudly.

Lorraine's eyes scan the surrounding countryside. It's a lovely view of rolling hills and a nearby orchard.

LORRAINE
 You found her a really nice spot,
 Howard.

HOWARD
 Mmm-hmmm.

LORRAINE
 I guess I wasn't much help at the
 time.

Howard stays silent. His look tells her he doesn't blame her for anything. She takes his hand as they walk back to the car.

CUT TO:

EXT. MORRISEY HOUSE - LATER THAT DAY

Sarah is just knocking at their front door as Howard and Lorraine pull into the driveway.

IN THE CAR:

Howard glances at Lorraine. He knows she's getting better, but doesn't know how deeply the cemetery affected her.

Lorraine turns to give him a kiss.

LORRAINE
 Go to work. I'll see you later.

Lorraine gets out of the car and Howard backs out of the driveway.

EXT. MORRISEY HOUSE

Lorraine walks up the sidewalk as Sarah turns.

SARAH
 Now that we got you out, I can never
 catch you at home.

Sarah smiles, trying to determine if Lorraine is going to talk to her. Lorraine is silent for a long moment before answering with a tentative smile of her own.

LORRAINE
(finally)
It's good to be out.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARK - CONCESSION STAND - LATE AFTERNOON

Sarah and Lorraine turn from the concession stand window with snow cones. They sit on a picnic table with their feet up on the bench.

A group of pre-teen GIRLS walk by, all carefully dressed and coiffed to resemble each other.

Lorraine and Sarah are silent, enjoying crushed ice and peace.

LORRAINE
You know, Jennifer would've turned thirteen last week.

(beat)
I keep trying to imagine what she would look like. It's so easy to look back at baby pictures and see the people they've become. But, without a point of reference ...

Sarah takes a deep breath, relieved that the subject is no longer taboo.

SARAH
She was beautiful.

LORRAINE
... she just got stuck in my mind. A baby. Then I try again and I picture myself at thirteen. Boy, did I hate the way I looked.

SARAH
Everyone hates the way they look at that age. At least every girl.

Lorraine glances at Sarah's profile then at the girls as they disappear around a corner.

LORRAINE
Lately, when I try to see Jennifer, I've been picturing you ... the way you were the night it happened. So young trying to be so adult.

SARAH

... and so responsible.

Lorraine hears it in Sarah's voice -- years of guilt and self-recrimination. She realizes she's just been pouring the salt of her own sorrow on Sarah's emotional wounds.

LORRAINE

You're not responsible Sarah.

Sarah doesn't respond. Lorraine turns to see tears in her eyes that she just won't let fall.

LORRAINE

(cont.)

You never were.

Sarah finally cries. Lorraine holds her.

LORRAINE

The only thing you're responsible for is saving my life.

SARAH

What?

LORRAINE

You gave it back to me.

(frustrated)

So just don't be so eager to give yours up without a fight.

SARAH

But I don't know what to do. I don't know what I'm doing.

LORRAINE

Sarah, just promise me one thing. If you want to get through this, you're gonna have to accept some help ... and let some people get close and let yourself off the hook.

It's obvious that Lorraine is speaking from experience.

SARAH

That's three things.

LORRAINE

Then just work on number three. Please forgive yourself.

(beat)

I do.

INT. RUSSELL HOUSE - FRONT DOOR

Sarah runs in and SLAMS the front door behind her. Shaking, she sinks to the floor.

SARAH (V.O.)

There it was. I had it. The forgiveness I needed to die in peace. So why don't I feel better?

CUT TO:

EXT. STANTON - MAIN STREET - DUSK

Sarah drives down Main Street, pausing at the town's single stoplight.

SARAH (V.O.)

Maybe it's because ... for the first time in twelve years I'm realizing ... I don't want to die.

She barely hesitates before taking the turn that leads to the interstate.

CUT TO:

INT. RAY'S SUNOCO

Sarah enters the station and approaches Ray, who snoozes in a leather chair.

SARAH

Mr. Carroll? Is Buddy around?

RAY

(looking up)

Well, hey Sarah. I don't really know if he's here. To tell the truth, I was takin' a little nap.

(beat)

You need some gas pumped? Maybe a dent fixed?

Sarah narrows her eyes at the veiled accusation in Ray's voice.

SARAH

Mr. Carroll. I don't want you to think that I ... don't care--

RAY

(interrupting)

Ain't too many other ways to look (MORE)

RAY (CONT.)

at it when you get the brush-off
from a girl you--

Ray stops himself, realizing he's talking too much.

SARAH

Buddy's a ... really nice guy.

RAY

You bet he is.

(beat)

Ten years ago, he came in that same
doorway you're standing in. I'd
never seen him so excited. He was
talkin' so fast I caught about one
word in five. But, one of the ones
I kept catchin' was Sarah ... Sarah ...
Sarah.

Unseen by either Ray or Sarah, Buddy almost walks in from the back
of the garage. He quickly steps back into the lengthening shadows
when he hears them.

ON BUDDY'S FACE:

RAY (O.C.)

Now remember this was the boy who'd
give his Matchbox cars away if another
kid didn't have none. Or his comics
or his baseball cards. He was generous
to a fault.

(beat)

But, the way he said your name ... I
knew if he had ya he'd never let you
go. And the way he'd treat ya, you'd
never wanna leave.

A wave of emotion washes over Buddy's face. Corny as the
expression of it may be, every word his father says is true.

ON RAY:

RAY

(shrugs)

Maybe I was readin' a bit much into
the ramblin's of an eleven year old.

Sarah is speechless. Ray suddenly realizes how much he's said.

RAY

And I know I definitely talk too
much. You want me to tell him you
came by?

SARAH

Tell him I'm going away and I'm--

ON BUDDY:

It's obvious Buddy wants to go into the next room and sweep Sarah off her feet.

SARAH (O.C.)

I'm not sure when I'll be back.

But, her words just sound like another rejection to him.

CUT TO:

INT. SARAH'S CAR

Sarah takes deep breaths to control her runaway emotions, but it's a losing battle.

CUT TO:

INT. RAY'S SUNOCO

Ray is neither startled nor surprised when Buddy walks in from the back.

RAY

Didja catch all that?

BUDDY

I think I caught it the first time she told me to fuck off.

Ray sits up angrily.

RAY

Hey! What do I got to do? When did it get so hard for people to just come out and say somethin'? You two care about each other. That's more than most people start with.

(frustrated)

If you'd just get past your stupid soap opera posturin' and say two words to each other.

BUDDY

Dad, what am I supposed to think? What am I supposed to say? She told me she's getting engaged at Christmas.

RAY

Son, I don't know what she told ya
but she came here. Now. To see you.

(flustered)

A moron could see this!

Buddy wants to believe but can't let himself.

BUDDY

I don't know. She must get some
strange pleasure from torturing me.

RAY

No more than you get from torturin'
yourself.

(finally)

You didn't see her face, Buddy.

Buddy finally looks directly at his father. Slowly, he nods.

BUDDY

(softly)

Okay ... okay, dad.

CUT TO:

INT. RUSSELL HOUSE - SARAH'S ROOM

Sarah runs in and closes the door behind her. There is a half-packed open suitcase sitting on the floor. Sarah begins rapidly folding clothes and placing them in the suitcase.

A KNOCK is heard at her door. Sarah looks up, a glimmer of hope in her eyes.

GAYLE (V.O.)

Sarah ... you okay?

SARAH

I'm fine, mom.

Sarah starts throwing toiletries from her dresser into a smaller duffel bag. She pauses when she notices a small wrapped PACKAGE.

Sarah realizes it's the gift Buddy gave her at the party.

Slowly, she sinks to the bed and undoes the wrapping.

A small velvet jewel box reveals its treasure: a ring of solid burnished pewter, finely wrought with a simple scrollwork design.

Sarah covers her mouth with her hand, amazed by the beautiful gift. She notices a card and opens it.

The card reads: "Dear Sarah, Congratulations. Don't worry, it's just a friendship ring. This wasn't meant to be a last minute 'Going Away To Med School' gift and it won't be the kind of wedding gift I wanted it to be. Did I just write that? Now I definitely have to rip this card up. Yours, Buddy"

But, he didn't rip the card up.

BUDDY (O.C.)

It was my mother's.

Startled, Sarah looks up and sees Buddy standing in the doorway.

SARAH

Your mother's friendship ring?

BUDDY

(reluctant admission)

Her wedding ring. It's passed down through the women in my family, but ... I don't have a sister.

Buddy walks in and sits down on the bed next to Sarah.

SARAH

So she trusted your judgment? About the woman to give it to?

BUDDY

(nods)

Even then I was wise beyond my years.

Encouraged by Sarah's words, Buddy throws caution to the wind. He takes the ring out of the velvet box and moves to put it on Sarah's finger.

SARAH

Buddy, I have to tell you something.

BUDDY

(a question/plea)

You're not getting married to this guy from Chicago ...

Buddy trails off, hoping against hope she's not going to destroy him with a word.

SARAH

No.

Buddy smiles his relief and slips the ring on Sarah's finger. His gaze is direct and his voice is sure as he proposes.

BUDDY

Then marry me.

Sarah is shocked. After a moment, she realizes she wants to say "yes", but can't. Still ... she needs him.

SARAH

Can you just ... stay?

CUT TO:

IN SARAH'S DARK BEDROOM:

Two fully-clothed bodies lie spooned together on top of the bedspread ... fast asleep. Buddy and Sarah.

CLOSE ON: SARAH'S PALE FACE

MATCH DISSOLVE TO:

SARAH'S EVEN PALER FACE lying against a stark white sheet. Her eyes open slowly and we see ...

INT. ST. MARY'S HOSPITAL - SARAH'S ROOM - MORNING

Sarah is in a hospital bed. As she wakes up, she notices a roomful of people around her: Phil, Gayle, Daniel, Dr. SHELLY WINTHROP ... and Buddy.

DR. WINTHROP

Good morning Sarah.

Sarah has obviously undergone the first stages of chemotherapy. Her hair has thinned, but hasn't all fallen out. It's pulled back in tiny tortoiseshell barrettes.

SARAH

(weak)

Hi.

Phil, Gayle and Daniel AD LIB "hello"'s.

SARAH

Hey, Buddy.

Needless to say, Buddy knows everything ... and he's still here.

BUDDY

Hi.

Dr. Winthrop, an effervescent woman in her early 40's, examines Sarah carefully, checking her vitals and marking her chart while keeping up a cheerful line of patter.

DR. WINTHROP

(joking)

Well lucky for you Sarah, we got the license number of the semi that hit you.

SARAH

I thought it was radiation.

DR. WINTHROP

Okay, you tell me. What does it feel like?

SARAH

(laughing)

Like a ten-ton truck.

Everyone wants to laugh, but they keep glancing at Dr. Winthrop and her chart, desperately waiting for confirmation that everything will be okay.

GAYLE

(anxiously)

So ... did it work?

DR. WINTHROP

We'll know by tomorrow.

SARAH

I've been here six weeks and you still can't tell me if I'm getting better?

DR. WINTHROP

Sarah, you just finished an intensive program. The effect is cumulative. Yesterday's treatment was your strongest yet and hopefully ... it's sent you into remission.

Sarah looks at the anxious faces hovering over her.

SARAH (V.O.)

This is just what I wanted to avoid.
A sea of worried, smiling faces.

CUT TO:

INT. DR. VITALE'S OFFICE - DAY

Sarah sits in a comfortable overstuffed chair talking to a pleasant-looking middle-aged psychiatrist, DR. PAUL VITALE.

SARAH (V.O.)

I should have known fixing me physically wouldn't be enough. My parents insisted I talk to the psychiatrist that Dr. Gordon recommended. I don't know why they think talking to a stranger is going to help me when I can't even talk to my family.

CUT TO:

INT. DR. VITALE'S OFFICE - DAY

Dr. Vitale now talks to Phil and Gayle.

DR. VITALE

Sarah has been repressing so many feelings for so long she doesn't know what she should be feeling now. That's why she didn't want to tell you about her illness. She knew you'd respond with an outpouring of emotion and she knew she wouldn't be able to handle it.

His VOICEOVER continues over the following:

CUT TO:

INT. ST. MARY'S HOSPITAL - SARAH'S ROOM

Sarah's room is dark. She's asleep, but tosses restlessly under the thin hospital sheet.

Gayle is slumped in a bedside chair, more asleep than awake.

DR. VITALE (V.O.)

Before the accident, you said she was a bright outgoing young girl. Afterwards, she took refuge in her guilt. She was a loner in high school. Introverted in the extreme.

Lorraine appears in the doorway of the dark room, backlit by the bright hallway fluorescents. She gazes at Sarah's restless form for a few minutes.

DR. VITALE (V.O.)

(cont.)

Sarah has been turned off from her emotions like a child whose brain is disconnected from his nerve endings. (MORE)

DR. VITALE (V.O., CONT.)

Just like that child can't feel a physical touch of any sort, Sarah hasn't been able to feel an emotional touch from anyone around her.

Lorraine steps further into the room and we see that she is carrying her heirloom quilt -- the beautifully-stitched patchwork one. She gently drapes it over Sarah.

DR. VITALE (V.O.)

(cont.)

Her detachment isn't a personal attack on you, she just couldn't feel anyone trying to get through ... until now.

Lorraine places her cool hand on Sarah's forehead.

Gayle wakes with a start as if the hand was pressed against her own brow. She sees Lorraine and the two lock eyes.

Mother to mother.

Seeing that Sarah is okay, Gayle closes her eyes again.

Sarah's restless movements slow and eventually stop, but she doesn't wake. Lorraine watches a moment longer then leaves.

CUT TO:

INT. BUDDY'S TRUCK

Buddy drives as Sarah sits in the passenger seat, wrapped in Lorraine's quilt.

BUDDY

(gently)

You okay?

Sarah doesn't reply.

BUDDY

Come on Sarah. The doctor said full remission. That's great, right?

SARAH

(distant)

I guess. I don't know, Buddy. I'm not a doctor.

(bitter laugh)

And I suppose I never will be.

She sounds like she couldn't care less. Buddy sounds like he couldn't care more. It's a frustrating combination.

Buddy suddenly pulls to the side of the road and shuts off the engine. Sarah simply stares out the front windshield.

BUDDY

Sarah, I've been trying to have the
patience of a saint for six weeks.
I mean--

(frustrated)

You let me propose and you couldn't
even tell me you were sick.

As he speaks, Sarah gets a steely look in her eyes and removes the pewter ring from her finger. She's lost some weight and it slips off too easily and falls onto the seat between them.

BUDDY

(cont.)

You know I'd do anything. Why didn't
you just tell--

SARAH

(angry)

That's why! I know you'd do anything.
I know it! I also know I've never
done anything to deserve that ...
kind of ...

Sarah can't finish the sentence. Buddy retrieves the ring.

BUDDY

Love, Sarah. That's the word you're
looking for. It's a funny thing. It
doesn't matter if you don't feel you
deserve it. People are gonna love
you and want to help you through this.
(beat)

I want to.

Sarah looks up at him. She's got a lot of questions, but doesn't seem to know how to put any of them into words. Finally ...

SARAH

Buddy, why would you ask me to marry
you? Even if I wasn't sick? As far as
you knew, I was going to Harvard.
You're gonna be a goddamn undergrad
in the Fall!

BUDDY

Those are just details.

SARAH

Did I ever treat you well or give you any indication ... You and Daniel used to drive me insane. You said it yourself. I lied to you! About my illness, about my engagement. Why would you--

Once again, she stops herself before she can say "love me".

Buddy won't let Sarah change the subject with the force of her anger. He makes her look him in the eye.

BUDDY

Do you love me Sarah?

Sarah looks away, unable to hold his gaze.

SARAH

It wouldn't matter if I did. It doesn't change anything.

BUDDY

Forget changing things. I could die of an aneurysm tomorrow. You could live for another forty years.

(beat)

Do you love me?

After what seems like forever, Sarah finds the voice to answer.

SARAH

Yes.

CLOSE ON: Buddy slips the ring back on Sarah's finger.

CUT TO:

INT. RUSSELL HOUSE - SARAH'S ROOM

Phil sets Sarah's suitcase down and kisses her on the cheek as he exits. She smiles at him, then sits on her bed.

She pulls the quilt from around her shoulders and rubs it against her cheek.

CUT TO:

INT. RUSSELL HOUSE - THE KITCHEN

Gayle watches anxiously as Sarah leaves the house, clutching the quilt.

The yearning in her eyes is heart-wrenching. Does her daughter care more about the woman across the street than her own mother?

CUT TO:

INT. MORRISEY HOUSE - DAY

The doorbell is RINGING. A hand reaches into frame and opens the door. Sarah stands outside holding the heirloom quilt.

ON SARAH:

She is surprised to see Jon Morrisey. They stare at each other for a moment. He's grown about three feet since she saw him last.

SARAH
Jon? Or is it Rick?

JON
(smiles)
Jon. Hi.

He motions for her to come in.

SARAH
Thanks. Is your mom here?

JON
Yeah, she's in her workshop.

He motions for her to enter. As she walks by him, he stops her with a tentative touch.

JON
Are you ... okay?

SARAH
(smiles)
I'm great. How are you doing?

JON
(answering smile)
Better.

Jon isn't sure if he needs to elaborate, but Sarah's smile says she knows exactly what he means.

INT. LORRAINE'S WORKSHOP

Sarah enters the workshop from the kitchen. Lorraine is levelling an old table with determined strokes. It's pretty noisy.

LORRAINE
(re: table)
Hell of a warp, but I think I can save it.

SARAH

Well ... it's all in the rhythm
you know.

Lorraine looks up and smiles.

LORRAINE

Oh good, you brought the quilt.
(looks at watch)
Let's go.

SARAH

Go where?

CUT TO:

EXT. GRASSY FIELD - NIGHT

A carnival is going full swing in the background, but here there are families sitting on blankets and pulling sodas out of coolers. Kids and dogs run around with equal abandon.

Lorraine and Sarah are sitting on the quilt watching ...

FIREWORKS LIGHT UP THE NIGHT SKY.

The "OOH's" and "AAH's" of the crowd fill the quiet intervals between bursts.

SARAH

(laughing)
I can't believe I forgot it was the
Fourth of July. I guess I just lost
track of time in the hospital.

LORRAINE

How's that going?

SARAH

Well ... they say I'm in remission.

LORRAINE

Why do you say that like it's a
dirty word?

SARAH

I've done my research. You may go
into remission but you don't recover
from leukemia.

LORRAINE

Well what do the people who already
went to medical school say? You know, (MORE)

LORRAINE (CONT.)
oh what are they called ... the
doctors?

Sarah smiles at Lorraine's attempt at levity.

SARAH
I rest up for a few weeks and then
we try a bone marrow transplant.
I just wanted to say "thanks" and
bring this back.
(indicates quilt)
I ... found it on me one morning.

LORRAINE
Keep it. You can be my "honorary"
daughter.

Sarah looks at Lorraine closely. Though her tone is light, the
words are sincere.

CUT TO:

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - NIGHT

Sarah has the folded quilt under her arm. She and Lorraine walk
down their street.

LORRAINE
Did you take my advice?

Sarah is momentarily puzzled.

LORRAINE
(softly)
About letting yourself off the hook?

SARAH
I want to, but ... it's kind of tough
to let go of something that's been
keeping you going for so long.

LORRAINE
Guilt isn't a lifeline, Sarah. I used
it to tie my family in knots and I
came awfully close to losing them
without even noticing.

SARAH
Well except for Daniel, I've never
really been that close to my family
anyway ...

LORRAINE

Are you sure about that?

(beat)

I think you and I are a lot alike.
After Jennifer died, we both shut
down. I just got older, but you--

Lorraine stops herself as the full impact of what Sarah must have
gone through begins to come clear.

LORRAINE

(cont.)

You were still growing up and ...
learning how to live.

SARAH

(bitterly)

Or not learning.

LORRAINE

I just mean you seemed to be enjoying
life before ... it happened. Maybe
you need to remember how.

SARAH

(defensively)

I am.

LORRAINE

I'm glad.

(beat)

He's really cute, you know.

SARAH

On that note -- which I refuse to let
become a full-fledged conversation --
I'm out of here.

Sarah and Lorraine separate, each walking to her own house.

SARAH

Hey!

Lorraine jumps, slightly startled as she turns back.

SARAH

Thanks. You know, for the quilt.

Lorraine's look says "You're welcome". For everything.

CUT TO:

INT. RUSSELL HOUSE - SARAH'S ROOM

Sarah sits on her bed, looking through an old photo album.

CLOSE ON A SERIES OF PHOTOS:

- Sarah at 14, paper-thin, preparing for her first day of high school.

- 16-year-old Sarah at Christmas, off by herself, watching others opening presents.

- 17-year-old Sarah as "Valedictorian" addressing her senior class at graduation.

GAYLE (O.C.)

I remember when you went up to that podium.

Sarah is startled as she looks up and sees her mom standing over her shoulder. Gayle sits down next to Sarah.

GAYLE

(cont.)

You were so nervous. Terrified. We didn't know if you were actually going to be able to get any words out.

SARAH

I remember ...

GAYLE

But, then you pulled it off with such finesse. You could always fool us Sarah.

(beat)

How was I supposed to know you were hurting?

Sarah is uncomfortable. She and her mother do not discuss things like this.

SARAH

(coldly)

Is this line of questioning the result of your meeting with Dr. Vitale?

GAYLE

Don't be angry.

(rethinks)

Or be angry if you want, but just don't hold it in.

SARAH

Mom, there's no reason for me to be angry or for you to feel guilty.

GAYLE

Sarah, your father and I were wrong to ignore what happened.

Sarah stands, anxious to end this conversation.

SARAH

You weren't. You were just taking your cue from me.

GAYLE

And then I probably latched onto the Harvard idea so strongly because it was an easy fix -- something I could get excited about without having to look too closely.

SARAH

Please. Don't try to analyze me or us or ... this whole damn thing.

GAYLE

Honey, don't shut me out--

Sarah interrupts her softly but firmly. She can't take much more.

SARAH

(softly)

Can you just go ... now ...

Gayle stands up, desperate to say the right thing, but she doesn't know what that is. She goes.

CUT TO:

INT. RUSSELL KITCHEN - EVENING

Gayle is standing at the sink, peeling potatoes, staring out the kitchen window into the back yard. Tears glisten in her eyes.

Silently, Sarah enters the kitchen, opens the refrigerator and gets a Coke. She heads back to her room, but pauses in the doorway.

Sarah sets the Coke on the counter and wraps her arms around her mother's waist, resting her head on her back. Gayle stops peeling the potatoes and turns to hug her daughter.

CUT TO:

INT. ST. MARY'S - SARAH'S ROOM

Sarah lies in her familiar hospital bed watching a movie. She is flanked on either side by Buddy and Daniel. Lorraine's quilt covers them and adds life to the drab room.

ON THE TV SCREEN: The Sunday matinee movie is on. It's MARATHON MAN. Laurence Olivier is practicing his torturous dentistry on Dustin Hoffman.

Daniel, Sarah and Buddy all cringe sympathetically.

DANIEL

So they tell me that this bone marrow donation involves some of the most exquisite pain around for both parties.

Buddy starts switching channels.

BUDDY

Maybe we can find a ballgame.

SARAH

(to Daniel)

Are you just nervous or are you trying to back out?

DANIEL

Did you see the size of the needle they're going to stick in my butt?

SARAH

Your hip.

DANIEL

Let's try again ... did you see the size of the needle?

BUDDY

He's just scared shitless.

DANIEL

Joke. I'm kidding. They've just taken so much blood out of me, I'm permanently light-headed.

(to Sarah)

You know I'd give up a testicle--

(rethinks)

Well, I'd give up a finger--

(hesitates)

I'd definitely give up an earlobe for you.

SARAH
I'm touched ... I think.

A NURSE walking by in the corridor outside pauses at their open door and glares at Daniel.

NURSE
How many times do I have to tell you--

Daniel stands up sheepishly when he notices.

DANIEL
(to nurse)
Okay, okay, I'm going back into solitary, but this treatment is inhuman I tell you.

Daniel voice rises to the point of mock hysteria as he is escorted away. Buddy laughs as he takes Sarah's hand ... which we see still has the ring on it.

CUT TO:

INT. OPERATING ROOM

Dr. Winthrop supervises the operation to remove Daniel's bone marrow. Daniel lies on his stomach and cringes as a giant needle injects him with a spinal anaesthetic.

CUT TO:

INT. CHEMOTHERAPY CHAMBER

Sarah is receiving her final gigantic dose of radiation in an effort to destroy all the cells in her bone marrow.

CUT TO:

INT. OPERATING ROOM

Sarah looks worse than we have ever seen her. Unfortunately, she has to come to the verge of death to have a chance for life.

Dr. Winthrop directs the large needles which insert Daniel's healthy bone marrow into Sarah's bones.

CUT TO:

INT. ISOLATION CHAMBER

Sarah is asleep in a hypoallergenic hospital room. She looks extremely small and defenseless in the sea of downy white hospital linens.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE ISOLATION CHAMBER

Phil, Gayle, Buddy and Daniel look in on her. Dr. Winthrop walks up to them. She looks tired, but tries to smile reassuringly.

GAYLE

Can we go see her?

DR. WINTHROP

I'm really sorry, but this is a critical time. It'll be a week or two before we know if Sarah's body will take the new marrow. Until then she has to be isolated.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON: SARAH'S FACE IN THE ISOLATION CHAMBER

It's peaceful for perhaps the first time in a decade.

SARAH (V.O.)

so I finally realize that maybe I do want to spend some time with some people and they put me in an isolation chamber. Another little cosmic irony.

DISSOLVE TO:

SUPERIMPOSE: SIX WEEKS LATER ...

EXT. GREEN FIELD

Soft piano MUSIC plays as the CAMERA slowly moves across a beautiful incredibly-green hillside. The view looks like the vista visible from Gatewood Cemetary.

A quiet SOBBING is heard as we see ... a handkerchief dabbing at tears on the face of a large woman. It's Gladys, the woman Lorraine restored the mother-of-pearl box for.

CLOSE ON: BUDDY

Dressed in a black suit. His face is unusually solemn.

The monotone drone of a PRIEST can be heard faintly. There is a pause, then ...

Buddy turns to Sarah. She's there. She's alive.

And she's dressed in white. He lifts a small veil and kisses her.

They turn to face the small congregation, which includes the RUSSELL's, the MORRISEY's and a beaming Mr. Carroll.

LORRAINE squeezes Howard's hand as she watches Sarah with the pride of a mother.

CLOSE ON: SARAH

She's dressed in a simple white lace dress and her hair is getting thicker, curling around her face becomingly.

The operation was obviously successful. As she turns to look at Buddy, we see that the ever-present bewilderment and uncertainty are gone.

The priest takes Buddy and Sarah's hands and joins them for all to see as he pronounces:

PRIEST

I would like to present Mr. and Mrs.
Henry Carroll.

An upbeat recessional begins as Buddy and Sarah run down the aisle. Martine, Carla, Susan, Jeff and Daniel pelt them with rice.

CUT TO:

INT. WEDDING RECEPTION - DAY

The reception is in full swing. People are drinking, laughing, dancing.

Sarah and Buddy are opening gifts. Lorraine hands an elegant package to Sarah. She rips off the paper like a 5-year-old on Christmas morning.

SARAH (V.O.)

Okay, so maybe my life isn't so random. I'm starting to see the order in the chaos.

It's her finished box. Lorraine has worked her magic. The box looks ancient, but delicately weathered as if with an inner glow. The painting on the top is newly-refreshed with color. New life.

Sarah hugs Lorraine then turns to show Buddy.

SARAH (V.O.)
I don't expect to live forever ...
but I've been wrong before.

FREEZE FRAME on Buddy and Sarah sharing a kiss, hands and lives
joined. In sickness and in health.

THE END