

ONE STUPID THING

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. UPSCALE NEIGHBORHOOD, BOSTON - EVENING

An enclave of smartly renovated homes. Robins flit through maples, nest building. The May breeze ruffles the daffodils. Kids' bikes and soccer balls dot the lawns.

At the smartest house on the block, no bikes, no balls.

An immaculate van equipped with ladders and construction gear expertly backs into this driveway.

Lettering on the van reads: "CARTER CUSTOM RENOVATIONS."

BEN CARTER, steps out. Work boots, hard hat, and the finest aviation sunglasses.

About thirty, fit and sun-weathered, Ben's every move says "strong."

He starts up the walk to the house. Notices a candy wrapper on his pristine lawn. Picks it up.

From the house next door a NEIGHBOR calls across his fence.

NEIGHBOR

Ben! Beer's cold. Barbecue's hot.  
How long you going to be?

BEN

Give me twenty minutes.

He continues toward the house.

NEIGHBOR

Hey, can I borrow your long ladder  
on the weekend? Got a roof leak --  
somewhere.

Ben stops, takes a considered look at his neighbor's roof. The careful, analytical examination of a pro.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM WITH ENSUITE BATH - EVENING

Ben does the shower-shampoo-shave drill. He re-hangs towels, wipes the sink clean. Replaces razor, deodorant, comb all back in their proper stations after use.

In the bedroom, he's a study in efficient multi-tasking -- he gets dressed, checks stats on his laptop computer, all while talking on his hands-free cell phone.

BEN

It's a chimney flashing problem.

(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)

Use the copper sheet left over from the Baxter reno. Not that galvanized shit.

He zips up his chinos. Lifts a shirt off a hanger.

BEN

There's two bundles of shingles in my shed that'll match. So come here first.

Buttoning his shirt, he slips his feet into deck shoes.

BEN

Bring Andy and Raul. Should take you guys three hours max.

He clips on his watch as he passes the window.

Glancing out, he sees a muddy Landrover pull up across the street. Means nothing to Ben. Ready, he gets his sunglasses.

INT. LANDROVER - EVENING

A book-sized package, battered and stained, lies on the driver's lap.

It's thickly wrapped with gray gaffer's tape. Black magic marker letters on it read: "TO: BEN CARTER."

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Ben comes downstairs still talking on the phone.

BEN

You guys get an extra three hours pay. I get a summer of the best barbecues from the best neighbor in Boston. Best deal I've made all week.

He flips his phone off, reaches the door, flings it open.

And comes face to face with a man in a baggy khaki photographer's jacket. HAROLD jumps back, startled.

Unshaven, unkempt, Harold looks like he's just stepped off a battlefield, and he has. He holds the battered package.

BEN

Don't worry, I haven't killed anyone yet.

HAROLD

Ben Carter?

BEN

Yes.

HAROLD

I have something for you from Jack O'Brien.

The name drains the good humor from Ben's face.

BEN

I have no interest in anything from Jack O'Brien.

Ben moves to leave. Harold blocks his way.

HAROLD

I need to talk to you, Mister Carter. Jack's dead.

INT. HALL - LATER

Ben and Harold haven't moved far from the door. Ben is clearly shaken.

HAROLD

Roadside bomb. He was crushed under his Humvee. I've seen this before -- the victim can stay lucid until the vehicle's lifted off. Then the internal bleeding --

Ben cuts him off with a sharp gesture that says, "I get the picture."

HAROLD

Jack knew his life was over, Mister Carter, and he asked me to videotape his last words. And deliver the tape to you.

He hands Ben the package. Ben regards it with a look of revulsion. Almost dread.

HAROLD

There's just one condition.

Ben looks up.

HAROLD

You have to watch it with your wife.

Ben shoves the package back with sudden violence, jabbing it into Harold's stomach.

BEN

Let me be clear: leave my house.

Harold raises his hands, refusing to take back the package.

HAROLD

Look, he did something you haven't forgiven, I understand. That doesn't mean you can't show some decency and honor the dying request of a man who was once your best friend. Jack was a great guy. A good friend of mine. I know this: if you'd asked him to listen to your last words, he'd do it.

Ben's eyes narrow in anger. But he's also in turmoil. He still holds out the package. Harold still won't take it.

HAROLD

Mister Carter, Jack's last thoughts were about you. His last words were for you. And Camilla.

BEN

I don't care. And I don't know where she is.

HAROLD

I do.

There's a flash of keen interest in Ben's eyes. But just for a moment.

He reaches to open the door. Harold holds it closed.

BEN

The answer's "No." Get your fucking hand off my door.

Harold sighs. He tugs a slip of grimy paper from his pocket.

HAROLD

Jack said if you refused I was to supposed say...

He reads from the paper, giving each word ominous emphasis.

HAROLD

You owe me. Remember the night on Trident in the storm at --

BEN

-- Hang Dog Reef.

Ben slumps, the fight knocked out of him. Harold shoves the package back at him.

HAROLD

I'm the guy who shot this. Believe me, you need to see it. With your wife.

INT. BASEMENT - EVENING

Under the harsh light of bare bulbs Ben walks past tools, a well-equipped workbench, stacked boxes. Tucked into the darkest corner is what he's come for: a banker's box.

He wipes thick dust off the box lid. Lifts it. Inside are hastily crammed papers, the detritus of his former life.

He takes out a large manilla envelope. It's addressed to "Ben Carter" and the sender's name is "Jack O'Brien." It's still sealed, never been opened.

Ben takes a knife from the workbench, slits open the envelope. Inside is a multi-paged letter. He starts to read.

JACK (V.O.)

Ben, I'm not asking you to forgive me, but I want you to know exactly what happened between me and Camilla.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

The kitchen is ultra modern, well ordered, immaculate, but not a place where much cooking takes place.

Ben sits with the dregs of a glass of scotch, looking like he needed it.

On the table before him is the letter, its pages messily spread out.

Next to the letter is the package Harold delivered. It's still securely taped, unopened.

Beside Ben is a suitcase, his jacket thrown over it.

Outside, a car honks.

INT. TAXI - NIGHT

In the back seat, Ben stares out the window as city lights streak past in flashes -- like flashes of the past.

JACK (V.O.)

It started the night of your anniversary party...

INT. BEN'S HOUSE, MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

A man's hands grip a woman's naked buttocks.

The man is Ben, and he's holding CAMILLA up off the floor, her back against the door.

Her legs tighten around his waist, and her arms around his neck. They both grunt and moan.

Apart from her panties lying at his feet, and his pants around his ankles, they're both fully dressed in semi-formal attire.

Ben kisses her -- a kiss so hot and urgent it's like he'll die.

He rams into her. She gasps.

SUPER: "FOUR YEARS EARLIER."

Panting, they relax. He lowers her. Her feet touch the floor.

They grin at each other, kiss, nuzzle, catching their breath.

Camilla's in her mid-twenties, and her loveliness has a timeless quality -- not so much beauty as grace.

They both speak in whispers.

CAMILLA  
Ovulation waits for no man.

Ben laughs into her neck.

BEN  
It's a dirty job, but someone's got  
to do it.

They stifle their laughter.

Ben's final kiss is tender.

Hastily, they make themselves decent, straighten their clothes. Camilla opens the door and hurries out.

Ben notices a ribbon on the floor. He picks it up. Unwilling to call after Camilla, he stuffs it in his pocket.

He catches up to her and they walk hand in hand down the

HALL

where they reach the top of the stairs.

Below, the living room is crowded with friends chattering, drinking, making merry. There are bouquets and balloons, one of which reads: "HAPPY FIRST ANNIVERSARY."

This party's in full swing, and no one seems to have missed the hosts.

Ben and Camilla exchange a look, like kids who've pulled off a prank. With sedate smiles, they start down the stairs.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ben holds high a glass of champagne. From the light in his eyes it would seem that he's already enjoyed a few. He's not drunk, not on alcohol -- though on love, he's close.

The crowd stands in a circle around him, enjoying his speech. Camilla stands across the circle, like the king's consort.

No champagne for her, just in case. The glow on her face is the glow of a woman in love.

BEN

She changed my life. Hell, I knock down walls, bang nails. But now -- okay, I still bang nails, but it's like now I know why. To build something -- build our life together, me and Camilla. To make something more of myself than I ever could be alone. Make a life that's more than either of us could have, alone. This is the woman of my dreams, and I still can't believe that every night she dreams right beside me. Jeez, I hope not about being somewhere else...

The crowd laughs. Camilla smiles.

CAMILLA

No. Only that I'll wake up magically beside a man who's no longer tone deaf.

More laughter. Ben's is the loudest. He raises his glass to Camilla in a toast.

BEN

To the woman who is all my dreams.

He drinks. The crowd applauds. A camera flashes, held by a less than sober WOMAN.

WOMAN

Camilla -- speech!

CAMILLA

Way ahead of you.

Camilla moves to the baby grand piano. The crowd "Ooo-s" and "Ah-h-s."

A well-muscled MAN pulls out the piano bench for her.

MAN

Camilla for us. Chopsticks for Ben.

More laughter. Everyone gathers around the piano. Camilla sits at the keyboard.

Serious about her work, she twists her long hair into a tight bun, takes a pencil from atop the piano, and jams it into the bun to secure it. Not stylish, but it does the job.

Ben winces at the rough effect.

BEN

Needs a little renovation.

He tugs out the pencil, letting Camilla's hair tumble free. Then pulls the ribbon from his pocket.

BEN

Lose this?

Recalling how, Camilla blushes with a small smile.

Ben gathers her hair gently at the nape of her neck and loosely ties it with the ribbon. Much prettier.

He lifts her face to gaze at her.

BEN

God, you're prefect.

He kisses her, a kiss both fervent and tender. She responds with equal warmth.

People "Ah-h-h" and applaud.

BEN

You're on.

He steps back, giving her the floor.

Camilla sings, accompanying herself. It's a song about a wonderful year of marriage. Lyrical and heartfelt, it's also slightly jazzed with a twist of fun.

As a performer, Camilla's raw talent and passion and wit more than make up for her unpolished technique.

As a songwriter, her musical style -- a fusion of R&B and alt-rock -- is unique and fresh, but still tentative. In short, it's alive with potential.

The crowd listens, captivated. Camilla's performance brings a smile to every face. Everyone senses that this is more than just a party piece.

Except Ben. He adores his wife, but when it comes to music he simply doesn't get it.

The doorbell chimes. Ben maneuvers through the crowd to answer it.

Reaching the door, he glances at the security monitor. The face on the screen is JACK O'BRIEN'S.

In his mid-twenties and a scuffed leather jacket, Jack has the confident swagger of the veteran actor.

A man this good looking really should be smiling, but Jack looks grim, unaware he's on camera. He hunches against the October chill.

Ben throws open the door and grins.

BEN

About time.

Jack grins back. Ben grabs him in a bear hug. Jack returns the embrace. Their genuine affection is mutual.

BEN

How many invitations do you need to come see us?

JACK

They weren't engraved.

BEN

Come on in. Camilla's doing her thing.

Jack's smile fades as Ben pulls him into the throng.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

At the fridge Ben fills an ice bucket. Jack lounges against the counter, drinking beer from the bottle.

BEN

What's with you never coming around? Every time we ask you over, you've got an excuse.

JACK

Ben, you're married. Camilla's your life. I'll always love you, man -- you're like a brother to me, you know that. Shit, we lost our virginity to the same girl --

BEN

Same night --

JACK

And then you pulled her mad-dog  
brother off me.

They share a smile.

JACK

I'll always be there for you -- I'd  
take a bullet for you. But life  
changes. Lives change.

BEN

If I knew I'd lose you as a friend  
by marrying Camilla...

JACK

Fuck that. I'm still your friend,  
your best friend, always will be.  
But, Ben -- buddies, beer, babes --  
it's over. It's time for you two to  
make babies.

BEN

We're working on it.

JACK

Good. Make me an uncle, engrave  
your invites, and I'll give the toast  
on the day you celebrate.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Camilla finishes her song to the crowd's burst of warm  
applause. Ben and Jack stride over to the piano.

BEN

Wonderful, doll. Now, I've got a  
treat for you.

(to the crowd)

Everybody, this is Jack O'Brien, my  
best buddy and the greatest actor  
I've ever met.

JACK

The only actor he's ever met.

BEN

Graduate of the American Academy of  
Dramatic Arts. Known to all the  
world as the voice of Choco-Block  
Chocolates' Marshmallow Bunny.

He pulls Jack forward to perform.

BEN

(to Camilla)

Remember that Shakespeare thing he did at the wedding -- that you liked so much? He's here to do an encore.

CAMILLA

Oh, Jack. This is wonderful.

Ben sits on the piano bench beside Camilla. Everyone looks expectantly at Jack.

Jack, the consummate performer, turns to face his audience. He pauses until the room is hushed. Then, in a voice that melds the drawl of Lou Rawls with Bugs Bunny...

JACK

M-m-melty, m-m-mouth-watery Ch-ch-choco-b-b-block ...

Guffaws of laughter from the crowd. Jack smiles. Now that he's got his audience, he turns to Ben and Camilla.

His performance of the Shakespeare sonnet is natural, his delivery clear, his interpretation pregnant with meaning.

For many in the room, it may be the first time they've ever fully understood Shakespeare's words.

Camilla's eyes, and perhaps even Ben's, mist up.

JACK

Let me not to the marriage of true  
minds  
Admit impediments. Love is not love  
Which alters when it alteration finds,  
Or bends with the remover to remove:  
O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark,  
That looks on tempests and is never  
shaken;  
It is the star to every wandering  
bark,  
Whose worth's unknown, although his  
height be taken.  
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy  
lips and cheeks  
Within his bending sickle's compass  
come;  
Love alters not with his brief hours  
and weeks,  
But bears it out even to the edge of  
doom.  
If this be error and upon me proved,  
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

Camilla rests her head on Ben's shoulder. Happy tears well up in her eyes.

For a long moment there's not a sound in the room. No one wants to break the magical mood.

The front door slams.

EVE CARTER, 15, dressed like a Sunset Boulevard hooker in serious solicitation mode, strolls in with GREG PRENTICE, 19, a multi-pierced Goth, in tow.

Eve hits the center of the room, stops, takes in the tears and silence.

EVE  
Somebody die?

She grabs one of Greg's many chains and hauls him to the kitchen.

Ben watches them go, a murderous look in his eyes. To recapture the mood, he gives Jack a standing ovation.

Camilla jumps up too, exuberant in her applause. The crowd joins in, clapping.

Camilla gives Jack a heartfelt kiss on the cheek.

Jack almost shivers at Camilla's kiss, though he does his best to hide it.

Ben joins them and throws one arm around Camilla, the other around Jack -- the two people he loves most in all the world.

The less than sober woman with the camera staggers forward to capture the Kodak moment.

WOMAN  
Say "penis envy."

The whole room choruses...

CROWD  
Penis envy!

And the woman flashes her picture.

Jack moves off.

Ben looks in the direction Eve and Greg went. He speaks quietly to Camilla.

BEN  
Jesus, what's she dragged in now?

But Camilla is watching Jack go, preoccupied with her own concern.

CAMILLA

I always get the feeling Jack doesn't approve of me.

BEN

That's crazy. Who wouldn't love you?

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

Ben laughs with a group of friends that includes Jack.

Camilla reaches Ben's side, gently takes him aside and whispers in his ear.

Ben storms up the stairs to

EVE'S BEDROOM

and bursts in. Camilla is behind him.

On the bed, Eve and Greg hotly make out. Eve's T-shirt is hiked up. Greg nuzzles her breasts.

In an explosion of fury Ben grabs Greg off Eve, hauls him to his feet, shoves him against the wall and slugs him.

Greg slumps to the floor. Eve screams, scrambles off the bed.

Ben grips Greg by his shirt, yanks him up to his feet.

BEN

She's fifteen!

He hauls back, about to punch Greg again.

CAMILLA

Ben, no!

Camilla forces her way between the men, restraining Ben. Greg stumbles free.

Camilla can't hold Ben back. He lunges for Eve, who ducks and pushes Greg out to the hall.

EVE

Greg, run!

Greg staggers out and makes it to the

LANDING AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS

but Ben snatches him from behind, hauls him around so they're face to face, and lands another punch. Greg flops backwards against the railing.

The crowd below looks up in surprise and alarm.

Ben lunges for Greg. In sheer defense Greg tries to fight back, but Ben is far stronger and angrier. They wrestle.

Camilla and Eve frantically grope at Ben and shout at him. Nothing stops him.

Jack races up the stairs. He wrenches Ben away from Greg.

Greg stumbles down the stairs, half running, half falling, and bolts out of the house.

EVE

(to Ben)

Bastard!

Eve's about to run down after Greg, but Ben snatches her by the arm. He pulls her back, away from public view, into

EVE'S BEDROOM

where he kicks the door shut.

BEN

What are you aiming for, slut of the year?

EVE

Fuck you! You're not my father!

BEN

No, Dad would've decked you by now.

EVE

Oh great, beat me up too -- nice parenting, Ben.

BEN

My house, my rules. That horny little shit never comes here again. And you will act like a lady.

Camilla slips in, closing the door behind her. She's truly anxious about Eve.

EVE

(sneering)

Like her?

BEN

Let's stay in the realm of possibility.

CAMILLA

Eve, can't we please just --

EVE

Fuck you, too!

BEN

Jesus, Eve, if you act this way, dress this way, every guy who sees you thinks he's welcome to fuck you.

EVE

They all want to fuck her too. Women like that, you moron. What, you forgot about Mom?

BEN

Shut up.

EVE

There's only one reason she hasn't cheated on you. Every guy who wants to is scared to hit on her, 'cause they know you'd beat the shit out of them -- like you just did to Greg, you bastard.

The insult is so outrageous, Camilla can't help it -- she laughs.

CAMILLA

(gently)

Eve, you're such a child.

Camilla leaves.

Ben glares at Eve, hardly able to contain his fury.

And something more. His sister's words have cast a pall of anxiety, almost fear, over Ben's face.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ben stands behind Camilla, unfastening her necklace. He's in boxers, she's in bra and panties.

BEN

Sorry.

CAMILLA

For scaring away half our guests? Hey, it was getting too crowded anyway.

She turns and puts her arms around his neck.

CAMILLA

Until then, it was fun. Let's do it again. Does every year about the same time work for you?

BEN

Sure.

She sees his worried look.

CAMILLA

She'll grow up.

BEN

And move out? Tomorrow would be good.

CAMILLA

You don't mean that.

BEN

No, I... just want to keep her safe.

CAMILLA

I know. But, see, you can't do that if you're in prison for murder.

He almost smiles.

BEN

Point.

CAMILLA

Love her, trust her, let her be herself, and when she screws up -- and she will -- make sure she knows she can always come home. She will grow up, Ben. We all do.

Ben gets into bed, lies back, watching Camilla.

She unlocks a cabinet drawer and places her necklace inside. There are a few other jewelry items in the drawer, plus Ben's revolver.

BEN

What crap she talks, huh? That the only reason you haven't had an affair is guys are afraid of what I'd do if they hit on you.

Camilla slowly walks to the bed, her eyes on him. She slips off her bra, lets it dangle from her fingertips, drops it.

She steps out of her panties, lets them slide from her fingers to the floor.

At the bedside she takes Ben's hand, slides it up between her legs, holds it there.

She mounts him cowgirl-style... leans over and kisses him full on the lips, her open mouth... then slowly works her mouth down his body.

CAMILLA

The only reason you haven't had an affair, and never will...

She gently takes his nipple between her lips, then teeth...

Ben is lost to the sensations.

CAMILLA

...is that no woman has the balls to hit on you...

She draws her tongue in small circles over his belly...

CAMILLA

...'cause they all know what I'd do to them...

She's now below his waist. What she's doing is evident on his face.

CAMILLA

...and to you. Happy anniversary.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - LATER

Camilla is asleep.

Ben lies awake, looking at her. It's not love on his face anymore, but worry.

The fear that invaded him at Eve's words is now deeply embedded.

EXT. A HOUSE UNDERGOING RENOVATION - DAY

Ben's at work with his crew, the construction site a clutter of lumber and debris. Men walk by with two-by-fours. Nail guns thunk.

Ben wipes soldering paste off a plumbing joint. He turns to JIM, his lead plumber.

BEN

Test it at 150 percent.

JIM

Good to go.

WORKMAN (O.S.)

Hi, Mrs. Carter

Ben turns to see Camilla making her way through his crew. The men smile and nod, politely deferential to the boss's wife.

She smiles back, offering affectionate comments and the occasional touch -- not exactly flirting, but close.

It's the men's politeness and deference that troubles Ben.

CAMILLA

(to Ben)

Got a second?

She shows him a framed blow-up of the picture taken at the party: Ben with his arms around her and Jack.

CAMILLA

(to the plumber)

How's the burn, Jim?

She takes Jim's hand and runs her finger over his palm, a caring touch.

CAMILLA

Did you try the aloe vera like I said?

JIM

Yeah, it helped. So did the week off with pay from the boss.

They share a smile.

It's not lost on Ben. He stares at Camilla's hand holding Jim's.

With a glance at Ben, Jim backs away from Camilla, touching his forehead like a peasant to a duchess.

JIM

Thanks, Mrs. C.

Ben looks sharply at the other men. They're all studiously back at work.

INT. UPSCALE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Ben hands the wine list across the table to Camilla. Their words are overwhelmed by the restaurant's music and clatter.

A buff young waiter, no doubt an actor, brings a breadbasket and tongs a roll onto Camilla's plate. It rolls off and lands by her foot.

Red-faced, the waiter bends to pick it up. Camilla does too. Their fingers touch.

Tongue-tied, the waiter shoots Ben a nervous look and mumbles an apology. Camilla reassures the waiter with a "not to worry" smile and a gentle stroke to his sleeve.

Ben watches, clearly disturbed.

INT. "THE SPRIG AND THISTLE" BAR - NIGHT

A casual neighborhood watering hole. Beer, darts, day-at-the-office banter.

Camilla and Ben stand at the bar chatting with the well-muscled man from the anniversary party.

CAMILLA  
You really liked it? Sorry, I'm pathetic.

MUSCLED MAN  
Loved it. Your best song yet.

Delighted, grateful, Camilla throws her arms around his neck.

As his eyes meet Ben's, the guy's arms remain resolutely at his sides.

Grimly, Ben knocks back the last of his beer.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Camilla undresses, moving around the room, chattering.

Ben, fully dressed, sits on the edge of the bed, watching her with a tortured look as he slowly unbuttons his shirt.

CAMILLA  
...doing a run-through with the new percussion track and Eve came in. Believe it or not, she sat down at the keyboard with me and listened... she even said "Kinda rocks"...

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - LATER

Ben lies in bed, his back to Camilla, his eyes wide and worried.

She snuggles close, caresses his ear, ready for love.

Ben shies away from her touch, trying to hide his turmoil. He throws off the covers, escapes the bed.

BEN  
Can't get tomorrow's quote out of my head. It's not right. I better get it done.

CAMILLA  
Ben, is everything alright?

BEN  
Sure, never better.

Watching him go, Camilla's face clouds with worry.

INT. BEN'S HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

Ben's neatly organized desk lies in gloom. His laptop computer isn't even open.

Bleary-eyed, he sits across the room, looking lost.

With a groan, almost a sob, he hides his face in his hands.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - MORNING

The one-room furnishings betray Jack's status: rich in talent, poor in bank account.

But the bachelor squalor is brightened by a fine titanium ten-speed bike, a few high-end copper kitchen pans, and framed movie posters including "Casablanca."

At the kitchen table, Ben, waiting, looking like he hasn't slept in days, which he hasn't, stands desperate before Jack.

Jack, in rumpled boxers and T-shirt, a steaming coffee mug in hand, is barely awake despite the coffee, making it all the harder for him to comprehend what Ben has asked of him.

JACK  
I'm not saying a thing until you  
promise me this is not some sick  
joke -- and you tell me, honestly,  
you're serious.

BEN  
Deadly.

JACK  
On blood?

BEN  
On blood.

Jack shakes his head in disbelief.

JACK  
The answer's "No." Sit down --

BEN  
Jack, please --

JACK

And let me tell you why. Sit down!

Ben slumps down at the kitchen table, a broken man.

Jack tops up his own mug with coffee. Raises the pot, signals to Ben "Want some?"

Ben morosely shakes his head.

BEN

I can't sleep... can't think about work... can't think about anything else... in bed with Camilla I can't --

JACK

I listened to you. It's my turn. So shut up and hear me out.

Jack sits down across from Ben.

JACK

First, no good could can come from what you're asking me to do, only bad. And I won't do something that can only hurt you. Or Camilla.

He slurps a mouthful of coffee, revving up.

JACK

Second, Eve. I love her, but the little she-rebel was totally pissed off at you for punching out her boyfriend -- which she had every right to be -- so, naturally, what did she do to cause you maximum pain? She pushed your "Mother" button. And you fell for it.

BEN

It's not about --

JACK

Of course it is. Ben, just because your Mom fooled around doesn't mean Camilla wants to.

Ben groans, looks away, the connection too painful.

JACK

Don't do that -- your mom was a great lady. Okay, so she entertained a few "uncles" when we were kids. But she also taught you and me to read by the time we were four, remember?

(MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)

And she loved us, even when we burned down her apple tree and killed the cat.

Ben closes his eyes, unmoved, in misery.

JACK

And third, what kind of person do you think I am that I'd do something as fucked up as what you're asking? And what would Camilla think of me, four, for trying to get her in the sack? She'd think I was a total fucking asshole, and she'd be right.

BEN

We'll tell her, after. That you were just helping me. She'll understand. She'll blame me, not you.

JACK

Oh, great, you'll tell her you secretly tested her to see if you could trust her? You can only lose, man, and you can only hurt Camilla.

BEN

But what if Eve's right? What if the only reason Camilla doesn't fool around is guys won't take a shot at her because they're afraid of me?

JACK

So what? Let's say you leave well enough alone. You'll grow old with her and bounce grandkids on your knee. Let's say you test her and she passes, which she will, you'll grow old with her and bounce grandkids on your knee.

BEN

And if she fails?

JACK

Exactly! Your test can only break things. Don't try to fix what ain't broke.

BEN

Jack, everything you say is true. But this thing in my brain is tearing out my heart. I feel like I'm going insane.

He plows a hand through his already disheveled hair.

BEN

Maybe I'm wrong -- fuck, I know I'm wrong -- but the only way I'm going to chop this out of me is to test Camilla. Somebody's got to try to seduce her, and she's got to reject them, so I can know if she's truly mine. So I can get our life back.

Ben is almost in tears.

BEN

It has to be you, Jack. I can trust you not to go all the way. You wouldn't take advantage of the situation... or Camilla. Please, I'm begging you. Do this for me.

JACK

Ben, I'll do anything else to help you, but I will not do this.

Ben slowly hauls himself up from the table. Drags on his jacket. Shuffles to the door, opens it. He turns back.

BEN

Thanks for listening, anyway. At least I know now what I have to do.

JACK

What're you going to do?

BEN

Get someone else. There's a guy on my crew -- Jim. We go back a ways. Camilla likes him.

Jack bolts to the door. Slams it shut. Stares at Ben with the look of a man who's been ambushed.

JACK

Fuck you. FUCK YOU. SHIT!

INT. BEN'S KITCHEN - MORNING

Ben, dressed for work, pours himself a cup of coffee. Camilla ladles pancake batter into a skillet, flips bacon in another.

The doorbell chimes. Ben jumps, he's so nervous.

BEN

That's him.

He hurries to the

## LIVING ROOM

and at the front door he sees, on the security monitor, Jack's face filling the screen. Ben flings open the door.

Jack stands with fists in pockets, backpack slung on his shoulder, glowering at Ben.

Camilla calls from the kitchen...

CAMILLA (O.S.)

Just in time, Jack. Bacon and pancakes are hot. Ben made the coffee, so you take your chances there.

Jack winces at Camilla's warm welcome. Ben nervously winks at him, then shepherds him through to the

## KITCHEN

where they saunter in, forcing innocent faces. Jack's is convincing, Ben looks plain weird.

JACK

(to Camilla)

I really appreciate this. It's just, they're fixing my street and the racket makes it tough --

CAMILLA

-- to write anything. Ben told me. I'm honored, a real artist working under my roof. Okay, cup of mud, stack of Vermont, bacon in the alley, coming right up.

JACK

Yum yum in the Joe, please. Hold the moo juice.

Camilla and Jack share a surprised smile, both tickled to find that the other knows the lingo.

Ben has no idea what he's just heard. Camilla grins at his perplexed look.

CAMILLA

Got me through school, Ben -- working diners and bars.

(to Jack)

You?

JACK

Fountain man in a short-lived soap.

BEN  
 (to Camilla)  
 You worked in a bar?

CAMILLA  
 Darling, we all have secrets.

BEN  
 Well, I'm out of here. Leave you  
 two to... moo and mud.

Camilla is taken aback -- she's cooked all this food.

CAMILLA  
 What about breakfast?

BEN  
 I'll grab an Egg McMuffin. Running  
 late as it is. Jack, meet for a  
 brewski later?

JACK  
 Sure, I'll... sure.

Ben is out the door.

Camilla and Jack exchange an awkward glance.

Eve tramps in, a Pop Tart in her mouth like a dog's bone as  
 she hoists her book bag on her shoulder.

JACK  
 Eve, take a load off. Healthy  
 breakfast, sharp mind.

Eve opens the fridge, gets a Coke.

EVE  
 Puke.

She leaves by the back door, slamming it.

INT. DEN - DAY

Camilla shows Jack in. It's a snug family room with  
 bookshelves, a DVD system, easy chairs, a futon.

CAMILLA  
 Will this be alright?

JACK  
 Great.

CAMILLA  
 Enough room?

JACK  
There's just the one of me.

CAMILLA  
So, a one-man show -- that's exciting.  
What's the title?

JACK  
"Othello, Hello!" A lighter look at  
jealously.

CAMILLA  
Desdemona, I own ya?

JACK  
Hey, that's good. Consider it stolen.

CAMILLA  
I'm afraid I have to get to work.  
Well, not afraid, just --

JACK  
I know.

CAMILLA  
If you need anything, I'm just down  
the hall. Kitchen's yours.

JACK  
Perfect.

She leaves, allowing Jack to let out a pent-up breath. He sits on the futon. Mimes shooting himself in the head.

INT. CAMILLA'S STUDIO - DAY

Camilla plays warm-up exercises on her electric keyboard.

Her studio is cozy with cushions and eclectic with instruments: a well-used guitar, a banjo, maracas, didgeridoo, a full computer system, mics. This is her private world.

INTERCUT - STUDIO/DEN

Jack prowls the den like he's pacing his jail cell.

Camilla works on a composition. She plays a few tentative bars on the keyboard, scribbles music notation, tries the same riff on the guitar.

Jack opens his backpack, pulls out a door-stopper "Don Quixote," flops down on the futon, puts his feet up, cracks open the book to page one, and reads.

Camilla sings and accompanies herself on the keyboard, happily getting in the groove.

Jack's eyes are closed, the book open face-down on his chest. Camilla's music can be heard faintly.

But although he lies still, Jack's finger beats time to the music.

INT. THE "SPRIG AND THISTLE" BAR - NIGHT

Ben and Jack stand at the bar with beers and chasers.

JACK  
Basically, it went well.

BEN  
How well?

JACK  
A very good start. First day, so I didn't try to go too far. Just told her how great she looked, what a terrific cook she is, how much everybody likes her, that kind of stuff. We had lunch... talked mostly about you.

Ben smiles, very pleased. He raises his beer in a toast.

BEN  
Here's to day two -- and three, four, whatever it takes.

Jack looks like he'd rather nail his tongue to the bar. He quickly gulps half his beer.

MONTAGE - JACK AND CAMILLA SPEND SEVERAL DAYS IN THE HOUSE

The den - Jack soldiers on through "Don Quixote," reading on the futon, on the chair, on his stomach on the floor.

The studio - Camilla frowns as she works through a knotty problem in composition.

The kitchen - Jack pours himself a glass of O.J., hears recorded music suddenly get louder as the studio door opens, scurries out before Camilla comes in.

The kitchen - Camilla slaps together a sprouts-healthy sandwich, carries it back to the studio.

The studio - Camilla plays and sings, hard at work.

The kitchen - Eve melts a Mars Bar in the microwave and dribbles the gooey result over a dish of licorice ice cream.

The den - Jack sleeps.

INT. THE "SPRIG AND THISTLE" BAR - NIGHT

Ben and Jack stand at the bar. Ben nurses a beer. Jack wolfs a burger.

BEN

What do you mean, she passed?

JACK

She just isn't responding. She's passed your stupid test. I know when I'm striking out -- it's not something I'm used to, and believe me, I am striking out.

BEN

Maybe you're not trying hard enough.

JACK

What do you want me to do, jump on the woman?

BEN

Of course not, but --

JACK

But nothing. I've tried every line in the book. I've spun so much sweet talk I'm practically candy floss. And made enough gross suggestions she couldn't possibly miss my drift. In fact, the clearer I made it, the more she talked about you.

Jack balls his napkin, drops it as if in defeat.

JACK

It's going absolutely nowhere, Ben. Face it, man, you have the perfect wife. She passed, cum laude.

Ben ponders the foam in his beer.

BEN

It's been all words, right? Easy to resist words. What about a gift? An expensive necklace... a sexy nightgown... like that. What do you think?

JACK

You know what I think. Go home to your wife. She loves you. Only you.

BEN  
 Jack, just this one last thing? If she refuses a gift, I'm home free. Cured.

JACK  
 You mean it? This'll be over? You won't get someone else to test her? Ever? No matter how nuts you get?

BEN  
 Over and done.

JACK  
 On blood?

BEN  
 On blood.

JACK  
 Again.

BEN  
 On blood.

INT. BEN'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ben sets down a box on Camilla's baby grand piano. The box is labelled "WIRELESS SECURITY CAMERA." He lifts out a device that looks like a black golf ball sliced in half.

Standing on a chair, Ben attaches the camera to the ceiling above the book shelf. Camouflaged by some small sculptures, it's barely noticeable.

INT. BEN'S HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

Ben opens his laptop on the desk. Tapping the keyboard, he pulls up a program called "WATCH."

A wide-angle view of the living room with piano fills the screen.

He opens a closet, picks up another couple of "WIRELESS SECURITY CAMERA" boxes.

EXT. BEN'S HOUSE - DAY

In the driveway Ben opens the door of his van and sets his laptop on the passenger seat.

Jack wheels in on his 10-speed. Dismounts, unslings his backpack.

Ben slips a jewelry box out of his pocket. He shoots a glance at the house, then furtively shows Jack the box, lifting the lid.

Inside is a necklace -- simple, elegant, expensive.

Jack regards it like it's radioactive. But he takes the box, shoves it into his backpack.

Ben slaps Jack on the back. He gets in the van and starts down the driveway.

Walking his bike, Jack plods into the garage.

INT. THE "SPRIG AND THISTLE" BAR - NIGHT

At the bar, Ben's beer sits untouched in front of him. He looks grim.

Jack's beer is almost gone. He toys with the jewelry box.

Ben's laptop sits on the bar between their beers.

JACK

... and nothing I tried worked. I thought we might be getting friendlier, you know after the last few days -- but nothing. In fact, she's getting almost hostile. I did everything I could think of -- patter, jokes. She wasn't buying. I offered to take her out for lunch to Le Paris, share a bottle of wine, relax, just talk. She wasn't interested.

BEN

And the necklace? You tried to give it to her?

JACK

Timing's everything, Ben, and she was in such a mood. Definitely not the right time.

As Jack rambles on with his story, Ben opens his laptop and punches in the "Watch" program.

JACK

It's like she's offended whenever I try to get closer to her. She doesn't want anything to do with me. She loves you, man, there's no --

BEN

What kind of mood?

JACK

Foul. Every time I talked to her she made some excuse and left the room. Or asked me to leave. Ben, the test's over. Camilla --

BEN  
Every time? Really?

Ben pivots the laptop to face Jack. Video of various rooms in the house slide-show on the screen.

Den: Jack lies on the futon reading.

Studio: Camilla works on her music.

Kitchen: Jack gets a banana, then leaves.

Living room: Nobody there.

Kitchen: Camilla makes a sandwich alone, takes it with her.

Hall: Eve, with school book bag, enters her bedroom, slams the door.

Studio: Camilla sings and plays.

Living room: Nobody there.

Den: a DVD of "The Bridges of Madison County" plays as Jack sleeps.

BACK TO SCENE

BEN  
Want to see more?

Jack, caught in his lie, stares at Ben, stunned -- and appalled that Ben bugged the house.

BEN  
First time you ever lied to me.

JACK  
First time you didn't trust me.

They glower at each other.

BEN  
Looks like I had good reason. Bad enough I can't make myself trust Camilla -- now I know I can't trust you.

Ben swipes the jewelry box from Jack, jams it in his pocket. Then shakes his head, looking lost.

BEN  
What do I do? What the fuck do I do?

Ben grabs his beer and stalks over to the pool table.

Jack follows. Ben snatches a cue and violently stabs at balls of every color, the cue ball be damned.

BEN

I thought you understood... how this fucking idea is eating away at my brain... killing me...

He's shooting and missing every pocket.

BEN

I begged you... begged you to help me. And all the time you're lying... deceiving me behind my back... fucking with my head until I...

He can't go on. He's fighting tears, and losing.

Jack is speechless. This is a pitiful, vulnerable side of Ben he's never seen.

Embarrassed, angry, Ben pitches the cue like a baseball bat across the room.

A couple of guys at the bar turn and scowl. Ben wheels around on them.

BEN

Fuck you looking at?

Jack hustles Ben to a booth in a private corner.

JACK

I'm sorry, man. I'm ashamed -- I really am. I'll make it up to you.

BEN

Then help me -- for real. For God's sake, Jack, do this -- do it right. I have to know the truth.

JACK

Okay. Okay.

BEN

What does that mean?

JACK

It means yes. Let's just get this over and done.

BEN

You'll really, truly test her?

JACK

On blood.

Ben lowers his head to his chest in relief. He extends his hand to Jack. They shake -- a solemn pact.

JACK  
But no fucking cameras. Turn them off. If I'm really going to do this, you do not watch.

BEN  
Done. For the camera-shy actor.

They sit in silence for a moment, Ben's sprits rising, Jack's sinking.

BEN  
So, how will you... go about it?

Jack draws a large heart in the film of moisture on the table.

JACK  
The quickest way to a woman's heart... is through her heart. I'll tell her I love her.

He looks Ben in the eye. Almost like a challenge.

It's not what Ben expected, and it shows on his face.

A Hooter-class server, damp towel ready, saunters up.

SERVER  
You gonna put an arrow through that heart?

JACK  
Nope.

She wipes the table clean, obliterating the heart.

SERVER  
Last call.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Camilla, brushing her hair before bed, stops, looks toward the bathroom.

CAMILLA  
Nantucket? How long will you be gone?

BEN (O.S.)  
It's a major reno. Three, maybe five days. I have to survey the site -- there's sand dune issues. Then meet with the client, prepare the quote...

CAMILLA

I'll miss you.

BEN

Me too.

He comes out of the bathroom with a towel wrapped around his waist, drying his hair with another.

BEN

Anyway, Jack's got this problem with his place, so I told him -- if it's alright with you -- he could stay here for a few days. He can use the futon in the den.

CAMILLA

With you gone?

BEN

Is that a problem?

CAMILLA

I'm having trouble finishing the last two songs for upload. Evenings are the only time I can wind down. With Jack around --

BEN

This is about your web site?

CAMILLA

I have to stick to my production schedule or I won't sell anything.

BEN

I can't see the harm in spending a little time with Jack.

CAMILLA

Ben, the web is the only way I have to get my music out there.

BEN

Doll, please don't get your hopes too high. What have you sold? Maybe a hundred songs, tops? What's that, a hundred dollars? Hell of a hard business to break into.

She looks down, tugs a hair off the brush in her hand. Ben sees that he has hurt her feelings.

CAMILLA

It's my work, Ben. It's what I do.

BEN

And I'm behind you all the way, you know that. It's just... I'd hate to see you break your heart.

He's about to say more, but realizes he can't dig his way out.

Frustrated, he starts opening drawers.

BEN

Have you seen my track pants?

She opens a drawer, hands him the pants. He pulls them on.

CAMILLA

About Jack. It's not just the schedule. He's so... distant. I'd really rather not have him here while you're away.

BEN

Jack? He's the friendliest guy I know.

CAMILLA

To you.

Ben looks at her, hope in his eyes, but also a desperate need to be sure.

BEN

It's almost over -- I mean, he won't stay long.

She heaves a troubled sigh.

BEN

Camilla, this is a guy who saved my life.

She's surprised.

CAMILLA

That I didn't know.

BEN

Yeah, we were nineteen. Sailing, got caught in a squall, swept onto rocks. Place called Hang Dog Reef. Jack figured out how to get us off, and safe.

He takes Camilla's hand in both of his.

BEN

In all the world, in all my life,  
you and Jack are the two people I  
love most. It would make me really  
happy if you two became friends.  
Can't you try? For me?

Her love for Ben shines in her eyes, overpowering her  
reluctance.

CAMILLA

Do my best.

She lifts his hand to her cheek, gently presses it.

CAMILLA

You gonna take off those pants, or  
am I?

Ben's a mess, his body craving her, his mind trapped in  
anguish.

BEN

Uh... I've got a ton of files and  
stuff to pack.

He hustles out of the bedroom. Camilla looks after him,  
surprised and hurt.

She flings her hairbrush onto the bed.

EXT. BEN'S HOUSE - DAY

Coming out the front door, Ben turns to give Camilla a  
perfunctory kiss.

He climbs in his van, waves goodbye out the window, pulls  
out of the driveway.

Camilla stands at the open door, waving goodbye.

From inside the house, Jack comes up behind her and joins in  
the waving.

Ben's van takes off down the street.

Camilla turns to go in, offers Jack a tentative smile, moves  
past him into the house.

Jack closes the door.

INT. DEN - DAY

Jack slowly paces, deep in thought. He's clearly trying to  
make up his mind about something. Abruptly, he leaves the  
room and enters the

HALL

where he makes his way to Camilla's studio door. It's closed, but music drifts out. He hesitates -- then gathers his courage and knocks.

No answer. He knocks louder. The music stops.

Camilla opens the door.

CAMILLA

Hi.

JACK

I was wondering... I can hear you rehearsing... well, almost. And I --

CAMILLA

Oh, Jack, I'm sorry. I can lower the keyboard amplifier a bit if that'd help --

JACK

No, that's not it. I wanted to ask -- that is, if you wouldn't mind -- if you'd leave your door open. Listening to your songs helps me think. They're... well they touch something.

Camilla is taken aback at the praise. She's moved, lost for the right words.

CAMILLA

Uh... sure... no problem.

JACK

Thanks. Don't mean to be a bother.

CAMILLA

No bother. In fact... that's quite a compliment. Ben and Eve usually complain about the 'noise.'

JACK

Well, thanks. I'll get back to work.

Camilla watches Jack meander down the hall. She turns into her studio -- but first she deliberately opens the door wide.

INT. STUDIO - DAY

Camilla sits down at the keyboard and launches into a song.

Knowing now that she has an audience, she pumps up the energy, taking it beyond a rehearsal feel, closer to a performance.

INT. DEN - DAY

Jack lies on the futon, eyes closed. His fingers gently tap in time to Camilla's music.

He begins to hum along -- quietly, like someone indulging in a deep secret. He knows the song by heart.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Camilla fills the coffee pot with water.

She's spooning coffee into the filter when Jack comes up behind her. Startled, she spills some coffee.

JACK

Sorry. Didn't mean to scare you.

She grabs a paper towel, wipes up the scattered grounds.

CAMILLA

No, I was thinking about a chorus I need to fix -- lost to the real world.

JACK

Chorus to "Is He A Trick?"

He sings it.

JACK

"Is he a trick,  
A sleight of hand,  
A love I should not  
Understand?"

This surprises Camilla -- that he knows any of her work.

JACK

I was going to make myself an omelet,  
if that's okay.

CAMILLA

Yes... I mean, the song and the  
omelet. Wow... you know the chorus.

JACK

I've got all your songs.

She stares at him, amazed.

He opens the fridge with a flourish, like a performing magician. Inspects the interior for treasure.

He whips out eggs, onion, green pepper, mushrooms, cheese.

JACK

Frying pan?

Camilla gets a pan, sets it on the counter.

JACK

I can add a couple more cackleberries  
if you'd like something more  
satisfying than coffee.

Holding up two eggs, he awaits her answer, relying on the actor's most powerful effect: silence at center stage.

It throws her more off-balance -- first his intimacy with her music, now his eager helpfulness. This is a new Jack.

CAMILLA

No... but thanks.

Jack juggles the eggs and onion. He's a nimble juggler.

JACK

Sure? No cold garret or starving  
gut ever inspired any artist.

CAMILLA

Artist, wow... another compliment.  
Okay, omelet for two.

Jack cracks eggs into a bowl. Slices and dices ingredients.

He flips the frying pan end for end with the panache of a cooking show star. Sets it on the range, turns on the gas, adds butter and chopped onion.

CAMILLA

When I'm working, I lose interest in  
food. At least, until I faint with  
hunger.

JACK

Food? A Jack O'Brien omelet is not  
mere food. It is... inspiration.  
It is music.

CAMILLA

Omelets are music?

JACK

You didn't know? How tragic for  
you, Philistine.

He flourishes a tea towel over his arm like a French waiter, gallantly pulls out a chair for her.

JACK

"The omelet hath charms to soothe  
the savage breast, to soften rocks,  
or bend a knotted oak." You wouldn't  
by any chance have...

Narrowing his eyes with a pirate's leer.

JACK  
...a savage breast?

Camilla looks down to check her breasts.

CAMILLA  
I wish.

Enjoying herself, and Jack's omelet performance, she sits in the offered chair.

JACK  
A great omelet is like a great song -- and "Is He A Trick" can be a great song. It's all about anticipation, performance, and surprise. The theme of an omelet is eggs. The theme of "Is He a Trick" is... confused love?

CAMILLA  
Uh... okay... confused love.

JACK  
First, lightly sautéed onions, because the wonderful aroma, in fact, intentionally misleads. Not unlike your opening few bars.

He adds the other ingredients.

JACK  
Next the back beat, green peppers. Give them a heated moment to change the mood. And mushrooms, the omelet's bass line. Are we starting to see the music of the omelet?

CAMILLA  
I can smell it.

JACK  
And now...

He pours the eggs into the onion medley.

JACK  
Theme.

He scatters paper-thin slices of cheese over the eggs.

JACK  
Anticipation?

He leans into the pan's aroma like it's an intoxicating perfume. Grinds pepper, sprinkles salt.

Expertly folds the omelet over on itself.

CAMILLA  
The surprise! Gimme the surprise!

JACK  
Wait for it... wait for it...

He halves the perfect Jack O'Brien omelet, slides the portions onto a couple of plates.

JACK  
Close eyes.

Camilla closes her eyes and Jack forks off a bite of omelet.

JACK  
Open mouth.

She opens her mouth and he slips the fork-full between her lips. Her eyes light up.

JACK  
And the first thing that comes to  
mind is...?

CAMILLA  
Country summer.

JACK  
Not eggs?

CAMILLA  
No.

JACK  
Surprise! And that's how you compose  
a great song.

Camilla stiffens, struck by inspiration.

CAMILLA  
Yes!

Jack sees her elation, almost sees ideas spark from her. He grins. She grins back.

She jumps up.

CAMILLA  
I can't wait --

JACK  
Know the feeling --

CAMILLA  
Want to get to work --

JACK  
Do me a favor? Play for me?

CAMILLA  
Audience of one? I've never... done that.

JACK  
I could be more than that, if you'll let me. Could help you create.

CAMILLA  
Create... together?

JACK  
You ready for that? I don't want to force you.

INT. STUDIO - DAY

Camilla sits at the keyboard, playing and singing. Jack's on guitar, accompanying her.

They're rocking through "Is He A Trick?" By now they've worked this song into something dynamic and powerful.

They're both flushed, on a creative high.

JACK  
Woman, you blow me away.

He sizzles into a solo riff on the guitar. Camilla bops in place, loving it.

They hit the chorus, singing and playing together with gusto. Jack bop-dances closer, until he's right beside her.

CAMILLA AND JACK  
(singing)  
Is he a trick,  
A sleight of hand,  
A love I should not  
Understand?

They hit the final chord, and it reverberates through the room, making the air electric.

Camilla swivels on the piano bench, and suddenly she's astride it, facing Jack.

Her face is aglow, her breathing shallow from the excitement. Jack, too, is pumped.

They look at each other for a long, lively moment. They were good, and they both know it.

Like a child too stimulated to keep still, Camilla squirms up onto her knees on the bench.

Standing on her knees, she takes Jack's face between her hands.

CAMILLA  
Thank you... thank you.

He places his hand over hers. Turns his head, kisses her palm...

... a kiss that strays far beyond the borders of friendship. An eyes-closed, lost-in-the-wonder kiss.

For Jack this is no act.

JACK  
I love you, Camilla.

Camilla jerks her hand free as if scalded. Leans away from Jack as from a dangerous thing.

CAMILLA  
No... don't... please...

JACK  
Camilla...

CAMILLA  
No! Go away!

The violence of her reaction slaps Jack back to reality.

At the look on her face -- confusion, revulsion -- he winces as though in pain, then hurries out.

INT. DEN - DAY

Jack jams clothes, books into his backpack. Every movement requires a struggle to control his shame and anger and hurt.

His cell phone rings. Ever the actor, Jack reins in his feelings, pastes on a cheerful face and voice.

JACK  
Jack O'Brien.

INT. BEN'S VAN - SAME

Parked on a side street, the van idling, Ben lounges back in his seat as he talks on his hands-free phone.

His smile is that of the proverbial cat that ate the cream, contented as a smile can be.

BEN  
Camilla just called.

## INTERCUT TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

Jack's professional cheeriness evaporates. He slumps.

BEN  
Jack, you there?

JACK  
Yeah.

BEN  
She was really upset. She wanted me to throw you out. Wouldn't say what you'd done -- just said she didn't want to hurt our friendship but she wanted you gone. Isn't that great?

Jack, in misery, sinks to the floor, his back against the futon.

BEN  
I told her if she wanted you out she'd have to tell you herself. I pushed it to see what she'd do.

Jack slowly curls forward, almost into a fetal position.

BEN (O.S.)  
I told her, don't expect me to protect you from every guy around. And I'm sure not going to toss out my best friend just because my wife takes something the wrong way.

Easy and relaxed, Ben shifts into gear, checks for traffic, pulls out into the street.

BEN  
I was tough on her, Jack, maybe too tough, but I'll make it up to her. I'm home tomorrow. Man, I can hardly wait to see her. Isn't she perfect? I just love her. I love her so much.

Jack struggles to sit up. It's as if every muscle is in mourning.

JACK  
I'm out of here, Ben. Camilla won't have to tell me to leave.

BEN  
Hey, buddy, I appreciate this -- what you've done for me. I owe you.

JACK  
Just tell me this is over.

BEN  
Yeah, it's over. I've never felt  
better. Go home.

Silence.

BEN  
Jack, you okay?

Jack snaps shut his cell phone, drops it in his lap. His head lolls back in relief.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Camilla lies on the bed, crying. There's a knock at the door.

She sits up, hastily wipes away her tears, trying to compose herself.

CAMILLA  
Yes?

JACK (O.S.)  
I just want to say... goodbye. And  
to apologize. I'm really sorry. I  
just... got too much into your music.

EXT. HALL OUTSIDE BEDROOM - DAY

Jack gently touches his forehead to the bedroom door.

JACK  
I... take care, Camilla.

He turns to leave. Camilla opens the door.

CAMILLA  
Jack. Thanks for the omelet... and  
for "Is He A Trick?"

JACK  
We were good.

She turns away, but can't hold back the tears. They burst from her.

She leans against the door, her face in her hands, sobbing.

CAMILLA  
I'm sorry... it's Ben...sometimes he  
says stuff that hurts...

It's too much for Jack. His move to her is pure instinct to comfort her. He takes her in his arms tenderly, as a father would enfold a child.

Camilla sobs against his chest.

CAMILLA

I'm sorry... it's just... it's like  
he doesn't care anymore... I don't  
know what I did...

JACK

You have nothing to be sorry for...  
nothing. This was all my fault.

He gently strokes her hair.

JACK

Ben loves you...

His eyes mist up. He rests his cheek against the top of her head, breathing in the scent of her hair. Lost.

JACK

(barely whispering)  
Adores you...

She raises her face to his, her cheeks wet with tears.

And she sees what Jack cannot hide: love shining in his eyes. It leaves her breathless.

Suddenly, she kisses him. It lasts for a long moment, as if, for both of them, it's the most natural thing in the world.

For Jack, it is.

Just as suddenly, Camilla pulls back, shocked at what she's done.

Too late. Her kiss makes Jack shiver. He grips her arms, and hungrily returns her kiss.

She fights free. He releases her immediately.

She catches her breath -- stares at him -- then kisses him with all the passion he could have hoped for.

She tugs off his T-shirt, unsnaps his jeans...

He yanks up her blouse, caresses her breasts. She arches in pleasure...

He rips aside her bra, covers her nipple with his mouth...

In a hot rush they pull off clothes, their own and each other's. They tumble naked onto the bed...

Their hands are all over each other, caressing, stroking. Their mouths too, kissing, tasting...

He rolls her onto her back. They're breathing hard. He mounts her. Kisses her.

She pulls him into her -- and gasps.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Eve comes in, earphones implanted, singing along to the rage on her iPod. Dumps down her backpack. Kicks the door shut.

EVE

I'm home! As fucking ordered by the warden.

She opens the fridge, grabs a Coke, slams the door, rattling its contents. Swigging Coke, she stalks through the

LIVING ROOM

and stomps up the stairs, dropping her jacket on the landing, and marches down the

HALL

where she pauses for a moment at the closed door of the master bedroom.

She continues on, reaches her own room, goes in, slams the door.

From her room the recorded screech of electric guitars and a jack-hammer bass assault the hall.

EXT. BEN'S HOUSE - DAY

Ben's van glides down the street. He expertly backs into the driveway.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ben lets himself in, suitcase in hand.

BEN

Camilla?

Nothing. He sets down the suitcase.

BEN

Camilla? Eve?

Camilla appears at the top of the stairs. Seeing her, Ben beams a broad, generous, love-filled smile.

He hurries up the stairs toward her, taking the steps two at a time. Camilla starts down.

BEN  
Hi.

CAMILLA  
Hi.

BEN  
Something wrong?

CAMILLA  
Jack left.

She passes him on the stairs.

CAMILLA  
I didn't have to tell him to go.

She continues through the room. Ben follows her into the

KITCHEN

where Camilla swings open the fridge door. Note pad and pen in hand, she scribbles a list.

CAMILLA  
I'm going shopping. Anything you want?

BEN  
Camilla, I'm sorry about yesterday, on the phone... about Jack. What I did... what I said... was wrong.

Camilla's pen stills. She takes a long look at Ben.

CAMILLA  
Before I called you, yesterday, I finished my best song. Jack helped me finish it.

BEN  
That's great, doll. I don't want there ever to be anything between you and Jack. You guys should be friends.

CAMILLA  
We're not friends, Ben.

BEN

But you should be. Camilla, there's something I've got to explain. I just don't know how... or where to start. But you have to trust me... no matter what I said yesterday... I love you. Love you more than I've ever --

CAMILLA

There's no eggs left, Ben.

Ripping her list page off the pad, she marches out.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - DAY

Camilla, naked under a rucked-up blanket, reclines on Jack's pullout couch, relaxing in the languor of afterglow.

Jack stands before her and hands her a glass of water. He's in a white bathrobe that sports a basketball-sized bunny tail.

CAMILLA

Nice robe.

JACK

One of the perks of being a M-m-m-marshmallow B-b-b-bunny.

He shucks the robe and climbs under the blanket with her.

CAMILLA

Funny, I don't feel guilty. At least, not yet.

She sits up, the better to think straight. Sips water.

CAMILLA

Don't see why I should. He wouldn't, if I'd acted as shitty to him as he has to me. Anyway, it's a first. I've never fucked a bunny before.

Jack lies back, gazing at her.

JACK

First for me too. Can't help loving my best friend's wife.

Camilla looks at him, moved.

Jack's wrestling with his own demons.

JACK

He saved my life.

CAMILLA

Really?

JACK

We were sailing. A squall drove us onto Hang Dog Reef. Ben was the only one with the strength to handle the jury-rigged rudder and get us off.

Camilla's expression turns to wonder.

CAMILLA

In his version you're the hero.

Jack stares at her, clearly surprised.

He reaches up to caress her face.

Camilla kisses his palm, but her look is preoccupied.

She gets out of bed. Starts getting dressed.

INT. BEN'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Camilla fits plates into the dishwasher. Ben passes behind her, gives her a soft, sensual kiss on the back of her neck.

BEN

Come to bed.

CAMILLA

I'll just finish this.

BEN

Don't be long.

He leaves.

In the silence, Camilla scrubs a pot.

INT. STUDIO - NIGHT

Camilla sits at the keyboard, scribbling whims for lyrics. She plays a few tentative chords.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ben lies in bed alone, reading. He glances at the clock. It reads: "12:55." He can hear music from Camilla's studio.

He puts down the book, disappointed. Snaps off the light.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The room lies in shadows, the house silent. Camilla has one hand on the banister, about to go upstairs.

She stops, hearing something. Voices, whispering. Then stifled laughter.

EXT. BACK DOOR - NIGHT

Under a pale moon Eve twists a black belt in her hands. Greg zips up his fly.

Eve lassos his neck with the belt and yanks him to her. Their mouths lock. He grabs her ass and they grind pelvises.

The back door light snaps on. The door opens.

Eve and Greg, discovered, look like suspects at an interrogation.

CAMILLA

(to Greg)

You, go.

(to Eve)

You, to your room.

Greg slinks off. Eve stomps past Camilla into the house.

INT. EVE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Camilla stands before Eve, arms folded like a lecturing principal.

Eve stands her ground, defiant, her eyes narrowed in contempt.

CAMILLA

Are you being careful? Using condoms?

EVE

Mind your own fucking business.

CAMILLA

What goes on in my house is my fucking business.

EVE

Oh, so unsafe sex somewhere else is okay?

CAMILLA

Don't be ridiculous. You know exactly what I mean.

EVE

Anyway, it's not your house. You married into it. Sis.

CAMILLA

Eve, I only want to protect you. So does Ben.

(MORE)

CAMILLA (CONT'D)

That's why this has got to stop.  
You break it off with Greg. Tomorrow.  
You hear me?

Eve smiles dangerously.

EVE

Or what?

CAMILLA

You know what.

EVE

You'll tell Ben?

CAMILLA

Eve, you know how he gets. Let's  
you and me deal with this, for  
everyone's sake. Just end it...  
please.

Camilla turns to go. Reaches the door.

EVE

You tell Ben about me and Greg, I  
tell him about you and Jack.

Camilla freezes. Slowly turns.

EVE

And you know how he gets.

Eve flops down on her bed, triumphant.

EVE

Close the door on your way out.

INT. THE "SPRIG AND THISTLE" BAR - NIGHT

Ben and Jack lounge in a booth, nosing brandy snifters.

On the table is the remains of a fine steak dinner: picked  
clean T-bones, balled napkins, an empty wine bottle.

Jack's loose limbs indicate that, for him at least, it wasn't  
the only bottle. He toys with the salt shaker. He has a  
lot on his inebriated mind.

JACK

Normally, I'm a huge fan of truth.  
But telling Camilla? Don't. One,  
you didn't trust her to be faithful,  
not an endearing attitude from hubby.  
Two, you tested her, not the smartest  
thing you've ever done.

He knocks over the salt shaker. Ben winces slightly.

JACK  
Even worse, four --

BEN  
Three.

JACK  
Three, I played the leading role.

Ben rights the salt shaker. Sweeps the salt off the table into his palm. Deposits it neatly onto his plate.

BEN  
Don't worry, she thinks you're --

JACK  
The technical term is prick. Only word for someone who'd try to seduce his best friend's wife.

BEN  
When in fact you cured my --

JACK  
The technical term is insanity.

BEN  
Jack --

JACK  
Ben! Let's just leave it alone. This will all pass. Besides, I'm not around much.

Jack knocks back his brandy in one huge swallow.

JACK  
Thanks for dinner. Now, take me to my hovel -- via your castle so I can pick up my bike.

EXT. BEN'S NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

Ben's van glides down the street under the streetlights.

EXT. BEN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ben backs the van into the driveway in front of the garage.

It's a dark night, and the single light above the garage door does little to relieve the surrounding heavy shadows.

BEN  
Sit tight. I'll get it.

Jack nods, in no condition to get energetic.

Ben climbs out, opens the van's rear door. He activates the garage door, which rattles and groans on its tracks. As it rises, he ducks under it and heads into the garage.

Meanwhile, in the

VAN

Jack idly looks into the passenger door mirror. Something catches his eye and he blinks, trying to focus.

In the mirror he sees a figure hurry out the side door of Ben's house. It's so dark, all that's clear is that it's a man.

A woman follows him out. Despite the dark, Jack can see that it's Camilla.

The man takes her hand, pulls her toward him, gives her a quick kiss.

Camilla gently pushes him away, makes "shooing" gestures, clearly urging him to hurry away via the rear of the house.

The man disappears into the shadows. Camilla hurries back into the house.

Jack's head bangs back against the headrest. He's horrified by what he's seen. That kiss!

EXT. BEN'S HOUSE - SAME

Ben walks Jack's bike out of the garage and hefts it into the back of the van. He closes the garage door, climbs back into the

VAN

and glances at Jack.

BEN

Next stop --

Ben doesn't finish, seeing Jack's rigid body, pale face, eyes staring dead ahead.

BEN

Don't even think about heaving in this van.

Ben shifts into gear, rolls out of the driveway, and drives down the road.

Jack turns to him with a dazzle in his eyes that's on the manic side, not quite in control. Because he's not.

JACK

Ben, there's something you need to know. About Camilla and me.

EXT. BEN'S NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

Ben's van lurches to a stop in the middle of the road.

Slowly, it pulls over to the curb and stops. The lights stay on.

EXT. BEN'S NEIGHBORHOOD - MORNING

A paperboy girl bikes past a house down the block from Ben's, tosses a newspaper onto the driveway. She wheels past Jack.

Jack sits astride his bike, watching Ben's van pull out of his driveway and move down the street.

Jack waits until Ben's van turns a corner and disappears from sight, then he pedals furiously toward Ben's house.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Jack and Camilla stand face to face.

CAMILLA

Did Ben see him? Did you tell Ben about him?

JACK

No. You kissed the guy and he took off down the back lane. Who was he?

CAMILLA

Kissed...? What's your point, Jack?

JACK

Who the hell --

CAMILLA

You think I'm having another affair.

JACK

Are you?

CAMILLA

My God.

JACK

Camilla, what's going on? I'm crazy about you and I --

CAMILLA

Oh, I get it -- I'm screwing you behind Ben's back, so why not someone else behind yours. Is that it?

Jack is too confused, too ashamed, too angry to answer.

CAMILLA

The guy you saw kiss me, Jack, was Eve's boyfriend. Greg. I was getting him out of the house before Ben saw him. He kissed me because he was grateful, for heaven's sake.

Jack winces, seeing his dumb mistake.

JACK

Sorry. I just didn't know what to think...

CAMILLA

So you thought the worst. Thanks, Othello. Well, think about this. Eve knows about you and me. We made a deal -- if I keep quiet about her boyfriend, she won't tell Ben about us.

This is too much information for Jack, and he rubs his forehead as though in pain.

His brain is overloading with all the conflicting facts -- the bad, the ugly, and the catastrophic.

JACK

Ben... oh, my God... Ben!

His reaction seems a little extreme to Camilla.

CAMILLA

Take it easy. I don't think Eve's going to --

JACK

You don't understand! Last night, I told Ben that... I was so fucked up, seeing that guy kiss you, I just wanted to get back at you, so I told Ben that... that...

Now Camilla is as horrified as he is.

CAMILLA

Not about us?

JACK

No, of course not. I told him you ... I said that you...

CAMILLA

Jack, what did you tell him?

JACK

That you probably would sleep with me. I said, "Ben, I lied to you to spare your feelings. But she's been coming on to me, and if I test her again she'll fail."

He looks at her, aghast at what he's done.

She looks at him as though he's lost his mind and is babbling incoherently.

Jack motor-mouths on, overwhelmed by what he's set in motion.

JACK

He didn't believe me. He thinks you passed, because I told him you did -- but I only said that so he wouldn't know about us.

Head down, he paces and rattles on, trying to mentally process the calamity.

JACK

Then I saw you with that guy and I went nuts, and I said, "Ben, I can prove it. Set up your cameras. See for yourself."

Camilla is trying to follow but it's like he's spouting gibberish.

CAMILLA

Jack, are you on some kind of medication?

JACK

So we made a plan. Another test. Ben would tell you he had to go out and I'd come see you again. Tonight. And he'll watch -- Ben -- on his laptop. And then he'll know --

Camilla clamps her hands on his shoulders.

CAMILLA

Stop. Take a breath. Whatever you're trying to say, start at the beginning.

Jack sucks in a deep breath, as though it might save him.

JACK

It all began with Eve.

CAMILLA

Doesn't everything. But could we not go back quite so far?

JACK

Eve told Ben there was only one reason  
you were faithful...

MONTAGE - JACK TELLS CAMILLA THE WHOLE SORDID STORY

-- He paces quickly, talking MOS, gesticulating. She listens,  
frowning.

-- He sits on the couch, elbows on knees, talking MOS. She  
listens, eyes wide and appalled.

-- He sinks to sit on the floor, his back to the couch,  
talking MOS. She listens, eyes shut, shaking her head.

BACK TO SCENE

His tale told, Jack helplessly looks up at Camilla.

JACK

I'm so sorry. I totally fucked up.  
I have no idea what to do.

If looks could kill does not begin to describe Camilla's  
reaction.

If looks could dismember, disembowel, rip out a tongue, tear  
out eyes, cut off ears and feed the still-living body to a  
screaming mob -- this hints at her expression.

Jack cringes, pathetic as a dog waiting to be kicked.

Then, before his eyes, Camilla undergoes a transformation.  
She seems to relax, become calm.

Her expression is as clear-eyed as a benevolent goddess.

Or an assassin lining up her shot.

JACK

Camilla?

CAMILLA

It would be best, Jack, if you didn't  
speak to me right now.

Eyes downcast, he awaits his fate. Camilla slowly paces,  
strategizing.

CAMILLA

You're going to do exactly as I say.  
Come here this evening and do  
everything you and Ben planned.

JACK

What are you going to do?

CAMILLA

The less you know, the better. Just follow my lead and play along. Improvise. You're a very good actor, Jack. I'm the proof.

JACK

Camilla, I love you. That was no act.

She gives him a look, both searching and disappointed.

CAMILLA

How would I know?

INT. EVE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Eve is multi-tasking -- watching TV, eating chips, and head-bopping to the rant on her iPod.

Camilla barges in.

CAMILLA

I want you out of the house tonight.

Eve is mildly taken aback.

EVE

Homelessness -- a new adventure.

CAMILLA

For the evening. I need the place, alone. Go to the mall or something.

EVE

Forget it. That sucks.

CAMILLA

Just do it, Eve. You don't want me to tell Ben about Greg. Are we clear?

Eve scowls, but in the face of Camilla's new forcefulness she wisely keeps her mouth shut.

CAMILLA

Good.

And she's gone, leaving the door open and Eve pissed off at the apparent new balance of power.

EVE

Bitch.

EXT. A STREET NEAR BEN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ben's van idles at the side of the street, parking lights on.

Jack wheels up on his bike, stops beside the driver's window where Ben sits at the wheel.

Ben looks deeply disturbed.

BEN

Jesus, I hope you're wrong.

Jack has no answers. He's almost as nerve-wracked as Ben.

JACK

Me too.

Jack pedals off.

Ben stays put inside the

VAN

where he sips coffee like a cop on a stake-out. His laptop is open on the passenger seat.

Leaning back against the door, he watches Camilla on-screen walk into their bedroom. She unlocks her jewelry drawer.

Ben stops the coffee half-way to his lips, arrested by what he sees.

INSERT - LAPTOP SCREEN

From the drawer Camilla takes out Ben's .38 revolver. She checks to see if it's loaded. It's not.

She rummages deeper in the drawer for a box of cartridges. Awkwardly loads the gun.

She slips the gun into her jeans' back pocket and pulls her sweater over it to conceal it.

JACK (O.S.)

Camilla?

She stiffens. Rushes out of the bedroom.

BACK TO SCENE

Ben frantically taps keys on the laptop keyboard.

INSERT - LAPTOP SCREEN

A wide shot of the living room pops up. Jack stands beside the baby grand.

Camilla appears at the landing at the top of the stairs. Jack sees her and starts for the stairs.

CAMILLA

Stop there.

Jack freezes on the bottom stair.

CAMILLA

Not another step, Jack. Not until you tell me exactly how you feel about me.

Jack stares at her, flustered. Aware that Ben is watching, that this is the "script" -- and that Camilla knows all this -- he can only follow her lead.

JACK

I love you. I love everything about you -- your music -- your warmth and kindness. I want to be with you -- touch you --- hold you -- make love to you. Camilla, it would kill me to live without you.

CAMILLA

And what about Ben?

JACK

I know it's wrong, but I can't help myself. If loving you -- having you -- means betraying Ben, then --

CAMILLA

You disgust me. For weeks you've been putting the moves on me, trying to get me in bed. No matter how many times I say no, you never stop. I can't tell Ben. It would destroy him. I will not hurt Ben. I will not let him find out what a vile creep you really are.

INT. BEN'S VAN - SAME

Ben grins with the joy of pure relief. A grin that beams "I was right, she's perfect."

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME

Camilla moves down the stairs. Instinctively, Jack backs up.

CAMILLA

Ben's out tonight, Jack. How did you know? Ben tell you? Best friend to best friend -- sure. So with him gone, you come back here to have another shot at me.

(MORE)

CAMILLA (CONT'D)

And, aren't you lucky, Eve's out too. So it's just you and me. Well, I'm going to take care of you, Jack. Right here and now. I'm going to shoot you in cold blood. And tell the police I thought you were a burglar.

INT. BEN'S VAN - SAME

Watching the screen, Ben is aghast. This is going horribly wrong.

Frantically, he rams the gear-shift into "drive," still watching Camilla and Jack on screen.

INSERT - LAPTOP SCREEN

CAMILLA

I'll tell Ben it was a horrible mistake. He'll be devastated by your death, but that will be better than him finding out what a back-stabbing bastard you really are.

JACK

Camilla, you can't do this. This is wrong. I'll go away -- you'll never see me again.

Camilla whips the .38 from her back pocket. Aims it at Jack's head almost point blank.

Jack is stunned to see the gun, has no idea how to respond.

STREET NEAR BEN'S HOUSE

Ben's van careens down the street. Swerves around a slow-poke car, passing it.

LIVING ROOM

Camilla holds the gun steady in two hands, pulls back the hammer.

BEN'S VAN

Driving like a maniac, Ben takes his horrified eyes off the screen as the van screeches around a corner. The laptop slides off the seat and crashes to the floor.

LIVING ROOM

Jack stares in horror at the gun. Camilla fires.

## BEN'S VAN

Ben hears a gunshot. He lurches up his driveway, slams on the breaks. Jumps out, sprints up his walkway to the door.

## LIVING ROOM

Jack frantically tries to wrestle the gun from Camilla. Camilla fights him like a demon.

Ben bursts in.

BEN

Camilla, no!

There's no stopping her. She seems hell-bent on killing Jack, desperately trying to aim and cock the .38.

Jack grips her gun-arm, holding on for dear life. He's not entirely sure she isn't trying to kill him.

BEN

Camilla, stop!

Ben wrenches Camilla and Jack apart. Then engulfs Camilla in his arms to restrain her.

She continues to struggle blindly, but suddenly seems to realize that Ben is there.

CAMILLA

Ben?

Slowly, she gives up the struggle. But still seems disoriented.

CAMILLA

Ben?

BEN

Camilla, it's okay -- it's me. It's okay. Give me the gun, Camilla.

He releases her just enough to try to take the gun. But Camilla is too quick. She jumps back, breaking his grip.

Gun in hand, she stops and surveys the scene.

Ben and Jack stand together, frozen, awaiting what the furious woman with the gun will do.

Camilla raises the gun, and this time manages to cock it. The maniacal gleam in her eye makes her look convincingly unstable.

CAMILLA

I'm going to kill him, Ben. I don't care if you know. He betrayed you. He's not your friend. He's been trying to sleep with me.

(to Jack)

TO FUCK ME! I'm going to kill you, you son of a bitch!

Ben lunges in front of Camilla, shielding Jack.

BEN

Camilla, I asked him to do it!

She seems unable to comprehend his words.

BEN

Jack hit on you for my sake. I asked him to -- no, I made him. This is all my fault.

CAMILLA

What are you telling me?

Camilla lowers the still-cocked gun.

BEN

I had a crazy idea in my head. That nobody comes on to you because they're afraid of what I'd do. And that's the only reason you're faithful.

CAMILLA

That's ridiculous.

BEN

I know, but I couldn't think straight -- it's like I went insane. So I asked Jack to help me. To test you. To try and seduce you and see what you'd do.

CAMILLA

You tested me?

(to Jack)

And you went along with this?

(to Ben)

What am I, some medieval bride?

She raises the gun and points it at both Ben and Jack.

CAMILLA

How could you treat me like that?

(turning on Jack)

And you. You make me sick.

(turning on Ben)

Both of you.

JACK  
I'm sorry...

BEN  
(simultaneous)  
Forgive me...

Camilla aims the gun at Jack's head.

CAMILLA  
Get out, Jack. Now. And never,  
ever come near me or near this house  
again.

JACK  
Camilla --

CAMILLA  
There are no words. Get out.

Jack backs up, casts a pleading glance at Ben.

JACK  
Ben --

CAMILLA  
Don't speak! Out!

Jack turns and slinks out.

Camilla points the gun at Ben. He raises his hands in  
surrender, pure instinct, having no idea what she intends.

Camilla flips open the revolver's cylinder. Points the gun  
to the ceiling. Lets the bullets drop to the floor.

CAMILLA  
And you -- I can't bear the thought  
of sleeping in any bed you've touched.  
I'm moving into the den.

She tosses down the empty gun and stalks out.

Ben picks up the gun. Shaken, he stares after Camilla.

The front door slams. Ben spins around with the gun.

It's Eve. Her hands fly up in genuine fear.

EVE  
Don't shoot! I was with a girl  
friend!

INT. BEN'S BACKYARD DECK - NIGHT

The moon is full. Clouds scud across it like fleeing ghosts.  
The back garden is a tangle of shadows.

Wind sways the budding maple boughs.

Camilla stands in her nightgown, barefoot, staring up at the moon. She hugs herself, chilly, but deep in thought.

Worry clouds her face.

A hand touches her shoulder, startling her. She turns her head. It's Ben.

Standing behind her he wraps a soft blanket around her shoulders, enfolding her.

She doesn't move. Their eyes meet.

She clasps the blanket to her breast, accepting it. He squeezes her arms. Then he turns and goes inside.

The faintest smile warms Camilla's lips.

INT. MOVIE HOUSE - NIGHT

An old-time revue cinema. Tacky upholstery, but glamour aplenty on screen.

Movie music swells for the final scene of "Casablanca." Jack and Camilla watch, like enjoying an old friend.

On screen, Claude Rains as "Louis" joins Humphrey Bogart as "Rick" outside the hangar. They watch the plane carrying Ilsa and Viktor take off and disappear into the night clouds.

Rick and Louis slowly walk toward the runway.

LOUIS

It might be a good idea for you to disappear from Casablanca for a while. There's a Free French garrison over at Brazzaville. I could be induced to arrange passage.

RICK

My letter of transit? I could use a trip. But it doesn't make any difference about our bet. You still owe me ten thousand francs.

LOUIS

And that ten thousand francs should pay our expenses.

RICK

Our expenses?

LOUIS

Uh huh.

RICK

Louis, I think this is the beginning  
of a beautiful friendship.

Rick and Louis walk off together into the night.

FADE OUT:

EXT. MOVIE HOUSE - NIGHT

The movie marquee reads "CASABLANCA."

Beneath it, Camilla and Jack exit the doors and head off  
into the warren of old Boston. Cobbled streets, small shops.

They stroll down a

COBBLED STREET

where Jack turns to Camilla.

JACK

Ilsa handled a gun almost as well as  
you.

She gives him a sly smile. But it quickly fades. It's clear  
she has something on her mind.

JACK

Why do I have this nagging suspicion  
that tonight Casablanca isn't just  
about popcorn?

Camilla is about to speak, but hesitates. Jack sees it.

JACK

(mimics Ingrid Bergman  
as Ilsa)

Oh, I don't know what's right any  
longer, Camilla. You'll have to  
think for both of us, for all of us.

Relieved that Jack has given her this opening, Camilla slips  
her arm through his as they stroll on.

CAMILLA

(mimics Humphrey Bogart)

Where I'm going you can't follow.  
What I've got to do you can't be any  
part of. I'm no good at being noble,  
but it doesn't take much to see that  
the problems of three little people  
don't amount to a hill of beans in  
this crazy world...

Jack stops. He's smiling at Camilla's Bogart impression,  
but he's also beginning to get her drift. She stops too.

CAMILLA  
 (still as Bogart)  
 Someday you'll understand that.  
 Now, now...

She takes Jack's face in her hands, having saved the best Bogart for last.

CAMILLA  
 Here's looking at you, kid.

Jack looks at her for a long moment. He gets it.

JACK  
 So, you're going back to Victor?

CAMILLA  
 Ben, actually. The perfectionist  
 jerk.  
 (soberly)  
 The man I vowed to love and honor.

There's a sudden catch in her throat.

CAMILLA  
 Because the fact is, Jack -- I do.

They separate and continue to stroll, Jack manfully struggling to accept the inevitable.

JACK  
 Beautiful friendship then?

CAMILLA  
 Till death do us part.

JACK  
 Here's looking at you, kid.

They've reached the main street, the real world. Noisy traffic. Noisy tourists.

JACK  
 Take you home?

CAMILLA  
 I'd like to walk -- alone. Take  
 time to think. About me and Ben.

They stop at an intersection.

CAMILLA  
 Is that your bus?

JACK  
 Should never miss the bus.

The bus stops and Jack gets on. On the steps, he turns to say something to Camilla, but she is already walking away.

INT. BUS - SAME

Jack pays his fare. The bus pulls away.

Jack walks down the aisle, looking out the windows at Camilla as she disappears up a narrow street.

Jack flops down in a seat at the rear. His struggle's not quite over.

JACK  
(as Humphrey Bogart)  
If she can stand it, I can.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ben lies on his back in the dark, alone, staring at the ceiling. His look is puzzled: how did this happen?

Camilla comes in quietly, closes the door. She's in her nightgown. Hope springs into Ben's eyes.

BEN  
Forgive me?

CAMILLA  
Accept you. Got room in that bed?

Ben quickly turns down the covers. Camilla slides in.

BEN  
Wait.

He jumps up. Grabs his pants and gropes in the pockets. Pulls out the jewelry box, the one he gave Jack to give her.

BEN  
I got you this.

She opens it. A lovely necklace. She's pleased, but can't help laughing at his timing.

He laughs too, in happy relief at having her back. He climbs in beside her.

As though seeking comfort from the other for their sins, they embrace. And the embrace leads to a kiss.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - LATER

Ben and Camilla sleep soundly.

A loud thud from elsewhere in the house wakes Ben.

BEN  
You hear that?

Camilla struggles to wake up.

CAMILLA  
Hear what?

Ben throws off the covers. He unlocks the jewelry drawer. Takes out the .38 and loads it.

Opens the door and starts down the

HALL

just as, at the far end, Greg comes out of Eve's bedroom. Seeing him, Ben stops cold.

Greg closes Eve's door quietly, starts in Ben's direction -- then sees him.

And sees the rage in Ben's eyes. Greg stops, fear on his face.

Greg makes a dash for the stairs. Ben sprints forward and catches him by his shirt. Greg stumbles, falls to the floor.

Ben wrenches Greg onto his back, then straddles him, Greg at his mercy.

Ben whacks Greg's face with the butt of the .38. Blood spurts from his nose.

Eve and Camilla come running.

EVE  
Stop it! Get off him!

Ben hammers Greg's face again, then again, his mouth and nose a mess of blood. Teeth may be breaking.

Helpless, Greg struggles to shield his face with his forearms.

CAMILLA  
Ben, stop!

Eve claws at Ben to get him off Greg. Ben ignores her. He gets to his feet. Greg rolls onto his side, in pain.

Ben kicks him in the gut. Greg curls up in agony.

Ben stands, breathing hard. Greg struggles to his hands and knees and starts to crawl away.

Ben slowly walks alongside him, in total control of everything but his fury. He kicks Greg in the ribs. Greg sprawls.

CAMILLA

Ben, for God's sake, you'll kill  
him!

EVE

(simultaneous)  
Bastard! You bastard!

Ben grabs a fistful of Greg's shirt and hauls him, like a sack of trash, down the hall.

At the top of the stairs he plants his foot on Greg and gives him a push.

Greg tumbles down the stairs and lands in a heap at the bottom, moaning.

Eve starts to run down after Greg, but Ben grabs her and holds her at the stop of the stairs.

Camilla races down to Greg.

BEN

Get that piece of garbage out of my  
house.

Camilla helps Greg to his feet. He's bloodied and suffering, but with her help he stumbles to the front door and out.

Eve struggles to break free of Ben, but he restrains her.

EVE

I hate you!

Camilla comes back. There is blood on her hands.

BEN

(to Eve)  
Hate away. I know what's best for  
you.

EVE

You don't know shit. I'm pregnant!

Ben is so shocked, his grip on her slips. Eve wrenches free. The look on her face is victorious.

Ben stands very still.

BEN

I'll kill him.

He bolts down the stairs. Eve is horrified.

EVE

Wait! There's more you don't know.

Ben stops, turns. Looks at her, waiting. Eve comes down the steps. Her whole concentration is on keeping Ben here.

EVE  
Believe me, you want to hear this.

BEN  
Well?

EVE  
Not now -- you're too crazy. In the morning.

Torn with indecision, Ben looks in the direction Greg went. Camilla stands in his way.

CAMILLA  
Ben, he's gone. Wait till morning.

Eve is determined to keep Ben from hunting down Greg.

EVE  
I'll tell you everything tomorrow.  
Just leave Greg alone tonight.

Eve's jittery eyes meet Camilla's.

Camilla has never looked more frightened.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

The room lies in shadow. Ben sleeps fitfully.

Camilla, in her nightgown, quietly unlocks the jewelry drawer. She shoots a furtive glance at Ben. He's still asleep.

She removes the few items of jewelry that have value.

INT. DEN - NIGHT

Camilla quickly slips into jeans, sweatshirt, sneakers.

INT. ALL-NIGHT DINER - NIGHT

Jack sits across from Camilla in a tucked-away booth. Coffee mugs stand between them, untouched. Camilla looks haggard.

CAMILLA  
There was blood everywhere. Greg could barely walk. He half-crawled to the street. I can't imagine what he'd do to us.

JACK  
Camilla, are you sure about this?  
He loves you. I know he does.

CAMILLA

He loves his perfect wife. That's not me.

She clutches her coffee mug, as though needing its warmth.

CAMILLA

He loves his perfect friend, too, but we're not what he thinks, are we?

Jack swallows, has to look away.

CAMILLA

I failed, big time. What I did was wrong. And not just to him. To you too. I owe you an apology, Jack. He hurt me, so I... I did it to get back at him. I'm sorry.

JACK

Takes two. And it was a beautiful duet.

Camilla's look is bleak.

CAMILLA

We deceived him. And tomorrow morning Eve's going to tell him that.

JACK

Okay, just to be safe, let's assume the worst. We'll give him a few days -- stay away until it blows over. And it will.

CAMILLA

No. He won't forgive us. Not me -- not you. I saw him. He scares me.

She hugs herself, shivering.

CAMILLA

This is the only way I can protect... everyone. I'm not going back. I can't.

JACK

Where will you go?

CAMILLA

Chicago.

JACK

What's in Chicago?

CAMILLA

Chicago.

They share a desolate smile.

CAMILLA

You?

JACK

I owe my reserve unit some time.  
Looks like the time has come.

They reach across the table and touch hands. This is goodbye.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Ben wakes up, stretches. Sun streams through the windows.  
It's a beautiful morning.

He looks at Camilla's side of the bed. No Camilla.

INT. HALL - DAY

Ben knocks on Eve's door. No answer. He pokes his head in.  
No Eve.

He walks into

EVE'S BEDROOM

where he sees that her bed has not been slept in. Her closet  
door is open, and all the hangers are bare.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - DAY

Crowded near the open apartment door are moving boxes and  
duffel bags.

Ben stands with a young man who holds a TV in his arms,  
carrying it in. He has the easy manner of an actor.

BEN

Where's he gone?

YOUNG ACTOR

Didn't say. Just that he was going  
on the road.

INT. BEN'S HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

A lone pool of light from the desk lamp faintly illuminates  
the room. Ben holds the phone, listening.

FEAMLE VOICEMAIL VOICE (V.O.)

You have no new messages in your  
mailbox ...

Ben hangs up. He lifts a plate with a partially eaten sandwich. Looks at it -- no appetite.

On the desk his laptop chimes, signaling a new e-mail message. He opens the message.

INSERT COMPUTER SCREEN, on which an e-mail message reads:

"Ben, it's over. Don't try to find me.  
I'm sorry I failed your test. Good luck.  
Camilla."

The sandwich slips off the plate in Ben's hand, and falls to the floor.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ben sits fully dressed on the edge of the bed. His breathing is shallow. His eyes are bloodshot.

All around him, tidiness and order. In his mind, chaos.

EXT. CHICAGO, O'HARE AIRPORT - NIGHT

A commercial jet roars out of cloud cover, on final approach.

SUPER: "FOUR YEARS LATER"

The jet swoops down on a runway slick with rain.

INT. O'HARE TERMINAL - NIGHT

Ben wheels his carry-on suitcase through the baggage area where a sign reads: "CHICAGO O'HARE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT."

INT. O'HARE TERMINAL - SAME

A clerk at a rental car counter hands Ben keys and papers.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET, CHICAGO - NIGHT

Windshield wipers drum back and forth on the rental Ford idling on the side of the street.

At the wheel Ben looks down at the stained package on his lap.

It's the one Harold delivered -- Jack's videotape. Still unopened, securely bound with gaffer's tape.

Ben peers out through the curtain of rain, looking nervously at his destination.

It's an old house, modest in size, with a funky look: wind chimes on the porch, helter-skelter vines, tangerine shutters.

Mustering courage, Ben gets out, strides through the rain and up the steps under the porch roof.

He stops, takes a breath. Rings the doorbell.

Nothing. He pulls a slip of paper from his pocket, checks the address against the number on the door. It's right.

He rings the bell again. Still nothing.

A faint metallic sound clinks. Ben looks down. The letter slot, hip-high on the door, has flipped up.

Ben bends down, peers in -- sees two eyes looking at him.

BEN

Hello?

CHILD'S VOICE (O.S.)

Goodbye.

BEN

Wait...

CHILD'S VOICE (O.S.)

Wait and see.

Ben pauses. It's an odd conversation.

BEN

Does Camilla Carter live here?

CHILD'S VOICE (O.S.)

I live here.

BEN

Sorry. Must be the the wrong address.

Ben straightens, bewildered. He turns, starts down the steps. The door opens.

EVE (O.S.)

Ben?

He whips around. In the open doorway stands Eve.

Ben is so surprised he almost teeters off the step. Eve is equally surprised, and not happily so.

BEN

Eve ... my God. What are you doing here?

EVE

I live here. What are you doing here?

Ben looks down. The child, GRACE, about four, shyly clings to Eve's leg. Her chin is smeared with peanut butter.

Ben looks back at Eve, putting two and two together, amazed.

BEN  
What's her name?

EVE  
Grace.

BEN  
Hi, Grace. I'm your Uncle Ben.

GRACE  
That's rice.

Ben laughs awkwardly. Eve doesn't crack a smile.

Ben's bewilderment floods back.

BEN  
I thought... I was told Camilla lived here.

EVE  
She does.

This leaves Ben even more at sea. He and Eve stare at each other, the years an ocean between them.

BEN  
I don't get it... you hated her.

EVE  
So I was wrong. Look, it was rough -- the baby and all. She's been good to me and Greg.

BEN  
Jesus, you're still with that guy?

Eve's face hardens.

EVE  
What do you want, Ben?

BEN  
I have to see Camilla. It's important.

Eve folds her arms, a forbidding stone wall.

EVE  
You already scared her bad enough.

BEN  
I'm not here to hurt her --

EVE  
You hurt everybody near you.

GRACE  
Want to see my ladybugs?

As little girls will, Grace exuberantly lifts her skirt, displaying underpants decorated with ladybugs.

Ben, wanting only to break the ice with Eve, offers her a wise-guy smile.

BEN  
Kid takes after her mom.

Eve slams the door in his face. Ben winces. He's blown it.

BEN  
Eve --

EVE  
Go away. She's at work.

BEN  
Where's that?

Inside, the security chain clatters into place.

BEN  
Eve, please ...

He waits. Absolute silence. He slumps. Turns to go.

The letter slot flips open. Ben turns back, bends down, sees Grace's big eyes through the slot.

GRACE  
She's at the side door.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET, CHICAGO - NIGHT

Ben dodges traffic, splashes through puddles to get across the street. There, a small neon sign reads: "THE SIDE DOOR."

INT. THE SIDE DOOR CLUB - SAME

Ben makes his way through the packed and noisy room.

The hip young crowd is an eclectic mix: stockbroker and lawyer suits relax alongside bike couriers with body piercing. As many women as men. Every table is full.

Ben reaches the busy bar. Above the din of voices the bartender raises his eyebrows in a gesture: "What'll it be?"

BEN  
Beer. Sam Adams.

BARTENDER  
Sorry, no Beantown brews. Try a  
local?

Ben nods. The bartender pulls a draft lever, fills a mug.

The lights dim. Ben turns to look at the stage. He has to peer over heads in the standing-room-only crowd.

The MC strides onstage to a mic on a stand. He's clean-cut, in casual business attire. Amazingly, it's Greg.

Realization slaps Ben. The gangly teen Goth he pummeled with a .38 is now a self-assured man.

GREG  
Ladies and gentlemen, it is my great  
pleasure to introduce to you the  
incomparable, the unmistakable, the  
one and only... Camilla...

He turns stage left.

GREG  
Cassidy.

Wild applause from the crowd. The lights go out. The applause quiets to an excited, expectant hush.

A spotlight snaps on. Follows Camilla as she enters from the wings. More uproarious applause. She sits at the piano.

Camilla looks very, very different. She's changed the color of her hair and its cut, changed her style, her whole air. Her look is flamboyant, edgy, unique.

As beautiful as ever, but seemingly a new woman, she literally takes Ben's breath away.

Lights come up on her band behind her. Camilla launches into an upbeat number and her sidemen join in. It's a jive swing tune, but with Camilla's signature R&B twist.

The audience swings along with bursts of applause and happy hoots.

Camilla grins as she plays and sings. She's clearly having the time of her life.

Ben cannot move, knocked out by the power of Camilla's performance.

It's as though he's seeing her for the first time -- and falling head over heels all over again.

Suddenly, two men flank him, crowding him.

GREG (O.S.)  
Looking for someone?

Ben's head jerks left, comes face to face with Greg -- and Greg's is grim.

Ben's head snaps right, and meets the wooden stare of a tree trunk of a man, the BOUNCER.

GREG  
Or for trouble.

Ben holds up his hands in surrender.

BEN  
No trouble. I'm just here to see Camilla.

GREG  
You've seen her.

BEN  
I have to talk to her. I have some news to give her.

GREG  
From you there's only bad news.

BEN  
You're not the first person to point that out. Look, I just need a few minutes with her.

GREG  
See my friend here?

Ben glances at the bouncer still crowding him.

GREG  
He removes people I don't like. When I really don't like them, he rearranges their face. Like you did with mine.

Ben glares at Greg.

BEN  
She was fifteen. She's my sister. I'd do it again.

Greg glares back. A stand-off.

Greg nods to the bouncer. Ben stiffens, preparing for pain.

Surprisingly, the bouncer walks away.

GREG

If some punk was banging my kid sister, I'd do exactly like you. Eve and I got married soon as she turned sixteen. I wasn't just some punk -- and I love her. You and me, we square now?

BEN

I saw her. She looks happy.

He offers his hand.

BEN

We're square.

Greg takes Ben's hand. They shake.

GREG

Camilla spotted you. Come on, she's in her office.

BEN

Office?

GREG

She owns this club.

INT. THE SIDE DOOR CLUB, CAMILLA'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The room is part office, part dressing room. A makeup table with mirror, a wardrobe rack, a big desk messy with the paperwork of a busy enterprise.

Camilla stands behind the desk, her cheeks wet with tears.

Ben stands before her, waiting.

On the desk between them is the unopened package with Jack's videotape.

CAMILLA

Did he suffer?

BEN

I don't know. I don't think so.

They stare at the package as though it were alive, or held Jack inside.

Ben takes a step closer to Camilla. A lump in his throat.

BEN

There's so much that I didn't know. All these years, I thought you and Jack were together.

Camilla is amazed.

CAMILLA

Why?

BEN

Your e-mail -- when you both took off. Right after, Jack sent me a letter, but I was too mad to read it... never opened it. Until yesterday. It explained everything. My God, all this time. Camilla, if only I'd known.

CAMILLA

What difference would it have made?

BEN

I'd have looked for you. Maybe I could have fixed what I broke.

She's surprised at the warmth in his voice.

CAMILLA

Or broke what you couldn't fix. You scared me, really scared me, Ben. And you scared Jack, and Eve. That's why we all left.

BEN

I'll never scare you again, Camilla. I swear.

For a moment, it seems there's an open channel between them, almost like old times.

BEN

So what do you say, let's watch this thing like Jack asked, get it over with. Then we can talk... there's so much that I want to... maybe back at your place?

A shadow crosses Camilla's face.

Abruptly, she goes to her makeup table, grabs a tissue, wipes her cheeks thoroughly dry.

Composed, she nods at the package.

CAMILLA

Take it. I don't want to see it.

BEN

What? But... we have to. Together.

CAMILLA

No. We don't.

She sits in front of the mirror and repairs her tear-damaged mascara. Ben has to talk to her reflection.

BEN

Camilla, Jack's last thoughts were about us. His last words were for us. This was his dying wish.

CAMILLA

Jack's gone. And my wish is to get on with my life --

BEN

But we can't just walk away from --

CAMILLA

A life, Ben, that neither of you has been part of for a very long time.

BEN

So, there's someone else?

She can't believe it. She laughs at the absurdity.

CAMILLA

Ben, you never change. No, there's no one -- not that it's any of your business. My life is very full with my work and this business and --

She doesn't finish. Moves on to powdering her nose.

BEN

God, you were great out there tonight. I like your songs... your singing. I still just bang nails, but you... it's like I never really heard you until now. Camilla, I'm so sorry. It was all my fault. I can't blame you for... what happened.

She turns in her chair to face him.

CAMILLA

Not all your fault. I did it because... well, mostly I wanted to get back at you. Jack was just a very nice way to do that.

Ben tentatively reaches out. Tucks a lock of her hair behind her ear.

BEN

Seems like a long time ago.

CAMILLA

Yes. Let's let it go.

Encouraged, he's about to move closer, but she suddenly sits back.

CAMILLA

Ben, now that you've found me, I  
want to close this part of my life.  
For good. I want a divorce.

INT. THE SIDE DOOR CLUB - LATER

The lighting turns low, blue, moody. Ben, looking dazed, stands at the back of the packed room, watching Camilla.

She sits at the piano, solo this time, and leans into the mic to introduce her next song.

CAMILLA

Ever been through a dark night of  
the soul?

There are murmurs of assent from the crowd.

CAMILLA

Me too.

She looks out, straight at Ben.

CAMILLA

I wrote this song during the hardest  
time in my life.

She sings.

The song is a caustic lament about broken promises, broken hearts, and cruelty. It is bitter and unforgiving.

Ben takes it like a man under siege. On his face is devastation.

Before the song is finished, he can't take any more. He pushes through the crowd toward the door.

He passes Greg talking to a customer. Grabs Greg's arm.

BEN

Tell Camilla for me, would you? If  
she changes her mind about the tape --  
she'll know what I mean -- I'm at  
the Peninsula. I leave tomorrow.

INT. O'HARE AIRPORT - DAY

Ben shuffles forward in the lineup to get his boarding pass.

Strangers, stressed and disinterested, eddy past him.

EVE (O.S.)

Ben.

He turns and sees Eve hustling through the crowd. Grace trails beside her, holding Eve's hand.

Hope lights up Ben's face. He abandons the line, reaches Eve.

BEN

Camilla sent you?

Grace squats to inspect a piece of candy wrapper litter.

EVE

Don't, Sweet Pea, that's dirty.

(to Ben)

No, Greg said you were leaving.

Bored, Grace takes Eve's hand, then Ben's, and swings between them, lifting herself off the ground.

EVE

I didn't want you to go without saying goodbye. Four years of bad blood is enough. After all, you did raise me -- even if you were totally clueless.

BEN

I'd say I did okay.

(smiling at Grace)

Here's the proof.

They regard each other over Grace as she swings.

BEN

I was wrong about a lot of things, Eve. Including Greg. He's a good guy.

Eve can't hide her pleasure at this, much as she tries to.

BEN

And I sure underrated you. You're doing a great job, being a mother.

Eve looks away, uncomfortable.

BEN

Well, I better go.

He sets Grace down. Gives Eve an awkward peck on the cheek.

BEN

Now that I know where you are, I'll  
keep in touch -- if that's okay?

Eve pulls him into her arms. It's a stiff embrace, both of  
them so new to it.

Then, suddenly, it's a mutually heartfelt hug.

Ben kisses Eve's cheek. Looks at Grace.

BEN

Grace, you take care of your Mom,  
okay?

GRACE

Okay.

He turns to go.

EVE

Wait...

He turns back.

EVE

Oh, God, I'm taking an awful chance  
here. She'll never forgive me...

BEN

Forgive you?

EVE

Sweet Pea, see that chair? Go sit  
down, count the people wearing red.

Grace scampers off. Eve turns to Ben.

EVE

When I took off from home with Greg  
I was pregnant. Two months later I  
miscarried. Ben, I lost the baby.

Ben blinks at her. His eyes snap to Grace.

INT. THE SIDE DOOR CLUB, BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Ben sidesteps the bass player as Camilla's band strides  
offstage. Applause crescendos for Camilla taking her bow.

Ben plants himself squarely in her way as she follows her  
sidemen off. She almost bumps into him. He confronts her  
with one word.

BEN

Grace.

Face to face, neither of them moves. Camilla shuts her eyes in anger.

CAMILLA

Eve.

BEN

Don't blame her. I'm glad -- I'm thrilled. It's what we always wanted.

CAMILLA

We?

BEN

You took off, not me. I never would've left you to bring up a child alone. That was wrong of you, Camilla. And not just for Grace. I had a right to know.

CAMILLA

See, that's exactly why, Ben. You just won't accept people for what they are. We're all supposed to fit your rules. Why is that?

BEN

Oh, come off it, my rules? What kind of life is this for our daughter?

CAMILLA

A damn good life. Grace has me and Eve and Greg -- all the loving people she could ever want.

BEN

Except a father.

CAMILLA

Go away, Ben. You don't belong here.

She pushes past him. He grips her arm and stops her.

BEN

You can't shut me out of Grace's life. A father has rights.

CAMILLA

If you are her father.

Ben freezes.

Camilla sees a stagehand watching them. She pulls Ben down the hall and into her

OFFICE

where she shuts the door. She stands with her back against it as if to hold at bay a world of troubles.

Shaken, Ben thuds down on a chair.

CAMILLA

The night I left you, I knew I was pregnant. What I didn't know was who --

BEN

Jack.

CAMILLA

Maybe. I just don't know, Ben. And I truly don't care.

BEN

How can you say that?

CAMILLA

Because it doesn't matter. All that matters is Grace. She's what I had to think about that night. I was scared, Ben. Of you. I watched you almost kill Greg. What would you have done to Jack?

BEN

Did Jack... know?

Camilla's laugh is hollow.

CAMILLA

Same old Ben. That was the one thing I was absolutely sure of. That if you found out the baby might not be yours, you'd make my life hell -- and probably Grace's too. Forever. That's why I left you. I was not going to raise my child with someone like that.

Ben gets to his feet. Gently but firmly, he moves Camilla aside and opens the door.

BEN

Think I'll get a second opinion on that. From a lawyer.

EXT. CITY PARK WITH KIDS' PLAYGROUND - DAY

Grace sails down the slide, laughing. She dashes to the monkey bars.

Ben hounds after her like a private detective, watching her every move.

Eve follows Ben, shaking her head at him partly in pity and partly in disgust.

BEN

See that? How she throws her head back? That's like me. I always do that.

EVE

Sure, you always act like a four-year-old girl. It's what we love about you.

Grace watches kids clamber over the monkey bars. Impatient as she waits her turn, she plants her fists on her hips.

EVE

Oh God, Ben, look -- that's just like Jack.

Eve laughs, enjoying the chance to tease her big brother.

Ben is not amused.

EVE

Watch her, will you? I'll get the sandwiches. We have to be back before noon, or Camilla could find out.

BEN

I know. I owe you, Eve.

EVE

True.

Eve heads off toward the parking lot. Ben sticks near Grace.

He casts a furtive look Eve's way, then pulls a square of gum out of his pocket, unwraps it. Pink bubble gum.

BEN

Grace, come here.

Grace hops off the monkey bars, runs to him. Ben pops the gum in her mouth. Grace looks startled.

GRACE

Are you a stranger?

BEN

No.

GRACE

Okay.

Satisfied, she happily chews.

Eve comes back on the double, looking horrified.

EVE

Is that gum? You can't give a four-year-old gum -- she'll swallow it.

BEN

Jesus, I never thought of that.

Ben pulls a clean plastic sandwich baggie from his pocket and holds it open under Grace's chin.

BEN

Spit it out, Grace.

Grace dutifully spits the gum into the baggie. Ben smiles at Eve as if to say, "Okay." Eve rolls her eyes.

EVE

I said you could spend a little time with her, not choke her to death.

INT. LABORATORY OFFICE - DAY

A technician's latex-gloved hand swabs the inside of Ben's wide-open mouth.

The technician, cheerful as a cheerleader, deposits the sample in a vial.

Ben hands her the baggie with its pink wad of chewed bubble gum.

She hands Ben a clipboard with a form, a pen attached.

TECHNICIAN

Don't forget to sign at the bottom, sir.

Ben fills in the form.

INSERT - FORM, whose letterhead reads:

"DNA ANALYSIS CENTER."

Under the list of services, Ben's pen checks off the box for: "PATERNITY TEST."

BACK TO SCENE

Ben hands back the clipboard.

BEN

When do I get the results?

TECHNICIAN

Five working days. And where would  
you like us to send them?

INT. THE SIDE DOOR CLUB - NIGHT

Camilla sings an up-tempo number. It's a weekday night, the crowd more sparse, but these regulars are die-hard fans.

Ben's at a table alone, nursing a beer. His whole attention is on Camilla, like he's trying to decipher a puzzle.

She glances his way several times as she sings. She's too much of a pro to miss a beat, but there's a flicker of bewilderment in her eyes.

INT. THE SIDE DOOR CLUB, BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Camilla comes offstage and stops Greg as he passes her.

CAMILLA

He's here again. Three nights.  
Why?

GREG

Why don't you ask him?

Camilla shakes her head -- a determined refusal -- and walks on.

EXT. CITY PARK WITH KIDS' PLAYGROUND - DAY

Grace kneels in a sandbox emptying a pail of water over the sand in a pink plastic pail. Her concentration is intense.

Next to her, Ben sits on a park bench, leaning forward, picking dandelions. His intensity is that of the perfectionist.

Grace carries the pail to him and smiles. Ben smiles back. She dumps the wet sand sludge on his shoe.

Furious, Ben kicks the sloppy mess off.

BEN

Shit!

Grace freezes, wide-eyed at his outburst.

Ben sees the fear on her face. It unnerves him.

He takes the pail from her.

BEN

I'll show you how to do it right.

He dumps sludge on his other shoe. Both shoes now are a sodden mess.

Grace stares. Then laughs in delight.

GRACE

Shit!

BEN

Uh, Gracie, you might want to forget that word.

He beckons her to come near. She hangs back, unsure.

He reaches behind him and lifts a "daisy chain" necklace of dandelions. Grace, instantly curious, comes to him.

Ben slips the necklace over her head. She beams at him. Smitten, he caresses her cheek with the back of his hand.

Giggling, Grace rips off the necklace, showering dandelions. Ben flinches at the wanton destruction -- then stops himself.

He picks up a dandelion. Affectionately tosses it in Grace's face.

She finds that hilarious, scrambles to grab handfuls of dandelions, pitches them at him helter-skelter.

Ben grabs a handful and pelts her. She laughs. He laughs. A dandelion fight ensues. They're having a ball.

Eve joins them.

EVE

Time, Ben.

With a look of regret, Ben kisses the top of Grace's head. Then slowly walks away.

INT. THE SIDE DOOR CLUB - NIGHT

Camilla, alone on stage, sings a soulful ballad about a woman who throws out her man.

Ben, in his usual spot, listens, enthralled.

The song tells the story of someone kept down so low by her lover she finally decides to move on.

A huge walrus of a man, grungy in slept-in clothes and a two-day growth, hunches over his beer, bleary-eyed. He vents his displeasure in a slurred and vicious rant.

HECKLER

FUCK THAT!

Camilla flinches, but ignores him and sings on.

HECKLER (CONT'D)

No more hurtin' songs... throw the  
bitch off stage... ALL the bitches.

People around him shift uncomfortably in their chairs.

HECKLER

Fuck all of ya. Mary made her sing  
that shit!

Camilla keeps singing, but with a waver of fear in her voice.

The bouncer looms behind the heckler. Leans down to speak  
in his ear.

BOUNCER

Sir, let's take it down a notch,  
okay? I don't want to ask you to  
leave.

HECKLER

Sure, sure...

BOUNCER

How about another brew? On the house.

HECKLER

Deal. Sorry, but my girl...

BOUNCER

Hey, we all got girl problems.

The bouncer turns to go.

The heckler shoots out of his chair, beer mug in hand, and  
smashes it against the back of the bouncer's head.

The thud is sickening. The bouncer drops, out cold.

Camilla gasps, horrified. Silence.

Greg pushes his way through the patrons, signals the  
bartender. The bartender nods, picks up the phone.

Greg reaches the heckler, who towers over him. Greg grabs  
his arm.

GREG

Out. Cops are on their way.

The heckler belts Greg in the stomach. Greg doubles over.

The heckler drops his massive arms on Greg's back, driving  
him to the floor.

The heckler moves with menace towards the stage.

HECKLER  
She told you to sing that, didn't  
she? DIDN'T SHE?

He bears past tables of people. For a drunk, he moves surprisingly fast. He's headed straight for Camilla.

She's gone stiff with fear. He's within a lunge of her.

Ben comes up behind the heckler, throws his arms around the man's huge chest, pinning his arms to his side.

The heckler writhes in shock.

Ben locks his wrists in front of the heckler's chest, hangs on, squeezes. The heckler is bigger, but Ben is stronger.

The heckler tries to twist, arches his back, forward then backward, struggling to get free.

BEN  
Slow down, man. Take it easy.

The heckler falls backwards to try to shake Ben off. But Ben holds tight. They fall together, writhe on the floor.

HECKLER  
Lemme go -- she's singin' shit...

BEN  
I know. It hurts.

The heckler is tiring.

HECKLER  
I don't know what she wants. Every  
time I ... I tried...

BEN  
Relax, man. Slow it down.

The heckler is spent. He's quietly sobbing. Ben does not release his grip.

HECKLER  
I fucked up.

BEN  
I know. We all fuck up.

Two police officers pull Ben and the heckler apart. They cuff the heckler and lead him out.

Camilla watches, her fear softened to compassion. And to amazement -- this is a Ben she's never seen before.

INT. THE SIDE DOOR CLUB - NIGHT

It's closing time, the customers gone. A busboy head-bops to his iPod as he sweeps the floor.

Ben's in his usual spot, eyes narrowed on the door to backstage, as though he'll give it ten more seconds to open, bringing Camilla to him.

The door stays closed. Reluctantly, he gets up, pulls on his jacket.

Greg ambles over.

GREG

I owe you.

BEN

Forget it.

GREG

There's a tape you want her to see, right? Of Jack O'Brien?

BEN

Yeah.

GREG

Bring it tomorrow night. I'll get her to look at it.

BEN

We have to see it together. That's the deal.

GREG

No problem.

INT. THE SIDE DOOR CLUB - NIGHT

Greg makes his way through the crowd toward the stage, glad-handing customers as he goes.

It's Saturday night and the place is packed with people eating, drinking, making merry.

At a side table, Camilla sips a ginger ale and chats with her sidemen, on a break.

Ben, at his table, nurses a beer. Glances at Camilla. Their eyes meet. She pointedly resumes her chat with her band.

Greg hops up on stage, takes the mic.

GREG

Hello, folks.

(MORE)

GREG (CONT'D)  
 Camilla's going to thrill us again  
 in just a few minutes...

Hoots of approval from the crowd, whistles.

GREG  
 But now, for something completely  
 different...

He gestures to a big-screen TV at the bar.

All heads swivel to the screen. Smiles of anticipation.

The lights dim.

ON THE TV

A rural highway in the Middle East. Pavement cratered by an  
 explosion. A chaos of slewed trucks and Humvees.

Injured soldiers lie scattered. Other soldiers dash past  
 with weapons and medical gear. A helicopter whumps overhead.

Sudden new shot -- an overturned Humvee, a man pinned beneath.  
 It's Jack. On his face, an odd, slightly manic smile.

Only his head and chest and one arm are free. His camouflage  
 uniform has been cut away to give the MEDIC access. There  
 is no blood.

The medic administers an IV to Jack's arm. The medication  
 pack reads: "MORPHINE." The medic and Jack grip hands in  
 solidarity.

MEDIC  
 You got a few minutes at best.

Jack grins at the camera with the mock leer of a dope fiend.

JACK  
 No wonder this stuff's illegal.  
 (to the Medic)  
 Please, sir, can I have more?

BACK TO THE CLUB

From the audience, a few nervous titters.

JACK  
 Welcome to beautiful, downtown "I'm  
 not allowed to tell you where so  
 you'll be safe from the evil-doers."

He eyes the Humvee hood crushing his chest, and bounces his  
 eyebrows with a Groucho smirk.

JACK

Ben, Camilla, there's something I need to get off my off my chest.

Jack cuffs the Humvee.

In the club audience, a couple of people laugh. Most look bewildered.

JACK

Just so you know, thanks to the dope this is probably hurting you more than me. Anyway, once they lift this thing off, I die.

(to the medic)

It's a blood pressure thing, right?

The medic gives a solemn nod.

Ben's mouth drops open in horror. Camilla's face goes white.

The camera moves to take in the Humvee, but Jack urgently motions it back to him.

JACK

(to the cameraman)

Hold on, I got something to say.

(to the camera)

Ben, don't blame yourself for me being here. I could've gone home long ago. This is the best gig I ever had, giving these guys a show, something to laugh at. It's true what they say. Dying's easy -- comedy's hard.

The club audience stares, uncomfortable, confused.

On screen, a smile from Jack.

JACK

Okay, not much time. So here goes. Ben, I've loved you like a brother. Nothing can ever change that. I love you, man. On blood.

He takes a breath.

JACK

Camilla, I've made a lot of mistakes in my life, but the stupidest one was not telling you this: I fell in love with you the moment I first saw you. How Romeo. I should have told you that, from day one -- told Ben too -- then let it all play out.

(MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)

Who knows what might've happened?  
But Ben got there first, and we guys  
have this code.

He licks his parched lips. Swallows, with difficulty.

JACK

Point is, when I helped Ben test  
you, I wasn't acting. Love always  
finds a way, sometimes it's just not  
the right way.

A CHAPLIN bends down to Jack.

CHAPLIN

Would you like me to say a prayer,  
son, or administer last rites?

JACK

Last rites! I'm doing my last wrongs.

The chaplin bows his head in a brief silent prayer, then  
takes his leave.

JACK

(to the camera again)

Anyway, being crushed to death is  
not without its perks. The army  
gives me six figures for shuffling  
off this mortal coil. And I've got  
a few sheckels in a 401K. Ch-ch-choco-  
b-b-block residuals.

Jack tugs a paper from his uniform, weakly waves it at the  
camera.

JACK

Last will. I'm leaving it all to  
your little ankle-biter, Camilla.  
Sock it away, so he or she can be a  
college grad.

Ben chokes back tears. Camilla's tears flow freely.

JACK

But there's one condition. For the  
rug rat to get the dough, you guys  
have to spend one whole day together,  
all three of you, just like a real  
family. The zoo, the park, the works.  
One full day, eight a.m. to eight  
p.m. or whenever the kid hits the  
hay. If you don't, it all goes to  
the Old Actors Home in Boston, and  
they're only allowed to spend it on  
bowling shoes.

Jack's eyelids flutter. He rasps a breath. His head lolls, lifeless.

Ben springs to his feet. Camilla's hand flies to her mouth.

Jack's eyes pop open.

JACK  
Just kidding.

The audience gapes, totally confused.

The good humor in Jack's face takes a rest. He's deadly sober.

JACK  
And now the big finale. Ben...  
Camilla... the hardest thing I've  
ever tried to do was forgive myself.  
But I finally did. Now it's your  
turn. All we did was love too much,  
and too stupidly. So forgive each  
other. And forgive yourselves...

He manages a feeble smile.

JACK  
Good night sweet prince -- and  
princess -- and flights of angels  
sing thee to thy rest. Always wanted  
to say that line. On blood, brother.  
On blood...

The TV screen fades to black.

The audience is silent. People look mystified, disconcerted.

Slowly, the room comes back to life. Low murmurs at first, then some clinking of glasses, scraping of chairs, quiet chattering. Life goes on as before.

But not for Ben and Camilla. They stare at each other, the roomful of people between them, both of them utterly still.

INT. CAMILLA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Camilla paces, anxious. Eve stirs her coffee at the table, flips pages of a magazine. Grace sits on the floor, mothering a kitten in a shoe box.

Camilla glances, likely for the twentieth time, at the digital clock on the wall. It reads: "7:58" The doorbell chimes.

Camilla jumps like a startled rabbit. Then bursts into action. Grabs Grace's jacket, then her own, gives her hair a final pat, hustles Grace to the door.

Eve turns another page, a small smile on her face.

EXT. ZOO - DAY

Ben and Camilla, with Grace between them, stroll in awkward silence. They pass the chimpanzees' glass-walled enclosure.

Grace runs to the glass. Enthralled, she mimics a chimp -- yawning, chattering her teeth, rolling her tongue.

Camilla laughs. Ben smiles. They look at each other... then quickly look away.

EXT. ZOO ICE CREAM STAND - DAY

Grace digs her tongue into chocolate ice cream in a cone. Ben pays the vendor. Camilla licks a strawberry cone.

Grace's ice cream dribbles onto her white blouse. She's oblivious. A frown wrinkles Ben's brow. He readies a tissue.

Then catches Camilla's eye. She's watching wryly. Manfully resisting temptation, Ben tosses the tissue in the trash.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - DAY

Wallace and Gromitt gadabout on screen. Ben laughs.

Beside him, Grace bounces with glee.

Beside her, Camilla laughs, her eyes on the screen as she reaches for the popcorn Ben holds.

She knocks popcorn on Ben. Flashes an "I'm sorry" half smile.

Ben takes a piece of popcorn, teasingly pelts it at her. Camilla leans, mouth open, and the popcorn pops in.

They look at each other... and do not look away.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Grace stands at the top of the slide. An "I'm the queen of the castle" moment. She sits and sails down the slide.

She whooshes past Camilla and Ben who stand on either side of the slide.

CAMILLA

I never thanked you... about that heckler. You were great. There was a time you would've wasted that guy. What you did instead was... so cool.

Grace dashes to the slide ladder for another go.

BEN  
 Poor broken-hearted slob. All your  
 fault, you know.

CAMILLA  
 Me?

Grace whooshes down past them again.

BEN  
 Your song. Any man who's not a  
 mess hearing that song would have to  
 be a stone.

CAMILLA  
 Thanks. I think.

BEN  
 No, thank you. For the song. And  
 all the others. I only wish I'd  
 listened... a lot earlier.

Camilla is moved.

Grace runs up to her, tugs her sleeve. But Camilla's eyes  
 stay locked on Ben's.

Grace tugs harder.

GRACE  
 Mommy! I have to pee!

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Ben carries Grace in his arms as he walks. She's asleep.

This total trust from a child is a new sensation for Ben.  
 By the look on his face, he likes it.

Camilla, walking beside Ben, lifts the McDonalds Happy Meal  
 toy from Grace's limp hand, gently so as not to disturb her.

CAMILLA  
 She often has a nap about this time.

BEN  
 How long?

CAMILLA  
 Couple of hours.

They share a look: what to do?

BEN  
 I'm staying two blocks from here.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - DAY

Ben gently settles a blanket over Grace who lies sound asleep, looking very small on the Queen-size bed.

Ben notices a barrette dangling loose in her hair. A trio of ladybugs on a red bar.

He carefully removes the barrette. Smooths back Grace's tangle of hair. Kisses her forehead.

Camilla watches from the door of the suite's adjoining salon. In her eyes, faint surprise. On her lips, a faint smile.

Ben joins her. He has the barrette.

BEN

I didn't know what to do with this.

CAMILLA

She loses them all the time.

Camilla takes the barrette. She fidgets with it, avoiding Ben's eyes, but making no move away from him.

He watches her, as though if he doesn't move, doesn't spook her, she'll stay close.

BEN

Her hair's so pretty. So soft.

He touches Camilla's hair. She raises her face to him.

CAMILLA

You like that peanut butter tangled look, huh?

He kisses her. A tender kiss, full of yearning.

She pulls back. But only to catch her breath.

She kisses him. A passionate kiss.

They both pull back, amazed, the feeling as strong as if the four years apart has been only four days.

Ben sweeps her off her feet, carries her to the couch, kissing her mouth, her neck.

He sets her down, lifts her sweater, kisses her breasts. She arches in pleasure -- then suddenly stiffens.

Ben sees her anxious glance at the open bedroom door.

He jumps up, gently closes the door, comes back to Camilla on the couch. They share a quiet laugh, keeping their voices low.

BEN  
Just like a real family.

The deeper truth of his words touch Camilla, transforming her smile into a look of pure love.

Ben kisses her hungrily. She pulls him down on top of her.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - LATER

Camilla finishes dressing in the salon, toweling her hair after a shower. She happily hums a tune.

Grace sits on the couch, watching cartoons on TV.

Through the door to the bedroom comes the faint sound of the shower, and whistling -- off-key.

There's a knock at the door. Camilla quickly finishes pulling on her sweater. Opens the door.

A uniformed BELLHOP hands her a letter-size envelope.

BELLHOP  
For Mister Carter.

CAMILLA  
Thanks. Wait...

She gets her purse and hands him a tip. Closes the door.

She takes the envelope to the desk, props it there against the mirror so Ben will see it.

Looking in the mirror, humming again, she finger-dries her hair, contentedly primping.

Then suddenly stops cold.

She stares down at the letter.

INSERT - ENVELOPE, on which the sender's name is:

"DNA ANALYSIS CENTER"

BACK TO CAMILLA

She darts a look at Grace. Then at the bedroom door.

Moving quickly, she pulls the Yellow Pages from the desk drawer, flips through the pages, searching.

Glances at the bedroom door again to be sure Ben isn't coming.

She finds the page -- and freezes.

INSERT - YELLOW PAGES AD, which reads, in part:

"DNA ANALYSIS CENTER"

"PATERNITY TESTING"

BACK TO CAMILLA

She looks at herself in the mirror. Her lip trembles. Tears well in her eyes.

BEN (O.S.)

How about a pasta place for dinner --  
think Gracie'd like that?

Camilla jams the Yellow Pages back in the drawer and shuts it. Swipes away her tears.

She grabs the envelope and stuffs it in her purse.

Ben opens the bedroom door. Wearing a bathrobe, he's clipping on his watch.

BEN

Gracie? You like spaghetti?

Grace nods enthusiastically, her eyes glued to the TV.

GRACE

Uh-huh.

CAMILLA

No. We can't do dinner. Come on,  
sweetie. We have to go home.

Camilla grabs the remote, clicks off the TV.

BEN

What? Why? It's still early.

Camilla hustles Grace into her jacket.

CAMILLA

Ben, this won't work -- you and me.  
It was a mistake.

He's so surprised, so hurt, he can only manage a word.

BEN

Camilla...

CAMILLA

No, Ben, you don't change.

She grabs her purse.

CAMILLA

And you never will.

She takes Grace by the hand, guides her to the door.

BEN  
Camilla, don't go. What's wrong?  
What happened?

She faces him, fighting back tears.

CAMILLA  
You break things, Ben. You test  
everything... until it breaks.

He stares at her, uncomprehending. She pulls herself  
together.

CAMILLA  
For Grace, let's be civilized about  
the divorce. I'll have my lawyer  
call you.

She hurries to the door with Grace. Ben stares after them,  
in shock.

As the door closes he starts after them. Realizes he's not  
dressed. Spins around to go get his pants.

He winces as his bare foot grinds on something.

He picks it up. Grace's ladybug barrette.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

Camilla shepherds Grace out of the elevator.

She stops at the front desk, takes the DNA Analysis Center  
envelope from her purse, and hands it to the uniformed clerk.

CAMILLA  
Please give this to Mister Ben Carter  
in Room 712.

Camilla ushers Grace to the front doors, and out.

INT. LAWYER'S OFFICE - DAY

A sterile meeting room. Camilla paces, in consultation with  
her Ivy League lawyer, WELLS, who's seated at the table.

Tense and angry, Camilla looks almost ill. She'd rather be  
anywhere but here.

CAMILLA  
I didn't want him to know I even saw  
it. So I handed it in at the desk.

WELLS

Well, by now he's seen the results.  
If he takes a strong position on  
Grace --

The intercom interrupts him.

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)

Mister Wells, Mister Carter is here.

WELLS

Show him in, Sandra.  
(to Camilla)  
-- then it's safe to say the paternity  
test showed that Mister Carter is  
the father.

CAMILLA

And if he doesn't, it must be Jack.

She sits, trying to compose herself, act businesslike. But she cannot hide her profound discontent.

CAMILLA

Damn him. I never wanted to know.

A knock at the door. The receptionist shows Ben in.

WELLS

Good morning, Mister Carter.

BEN

Morning.  
(to Camilla)  
Camilla.

CAMILLA

Ben.

Ben sits down at the other end of the table.

WELLS

Your attorney didn't accompany you,  
Mister Carter?

BEN

No.

Wells gives Camilla a brief but meaningful glance.

BEN

As I understand it, legally there's  
just three issues. Property. Child  
support. And visitation rights.  
True?

WELLS

More or less.

CAMILLA

I don't want your property.

BEN

And I don't want yours.

His lame joke does nothing to lighten the tension in the room.

BEN

So, the rest is straightforward.  
I'll do whatever Camilla wants.

Camilla regards Ben across the barren table, almost holding her breath.

CAMILLA

You want... nothing?

BEN

I want one thing very much. I want to help. Help you, help Grace. If the only way I can do that is to go away, fine. I make no claim, Camilla. I ask nothing. I don't want to break anything, anymore.

Ben glances at his hand beneath the table.

There, unseen by the others, he holds Grace's barrette. A talisman to help him, to keep his voice from cracking.

BEN

Just, please, let me see her every now and then -- and you. I'd like to be there for her, be part of her life. However you see fit.

Camilla fixes him with an intense, almost haggard look.

CAMILLA

You're sure that's all?

BEN

I'm sure.

CAMILLA

Fine. We'll work out a schedule.

BEN

Thank you.

WELLS

Excellent. Now, support payments --

CAMILLA

Not necessary.

Wells shoots her a look of mild surprise.

WELLS

Do you really --

CAMILLA

If Ben's sure, I'm sure.

Ben meets her gaze, poker-faced.

Wells shrugs.

WELLS

In that case, Mister Carter, we're done. You're right, it's boilerplate. I'll have the papers drawn up and you can take them with you to review. And sign.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

Ben comes in from the street. He's carrying a legal-size envelope from the attorney's office.

He stops at the front desk. The clerk looks up with a smile.

BEN

I'll be checking out in a few minutes. Room 712. Could you have my bill ready?

CLERK

Certainly, sir.  
(pulls up data on her  
screen)  
I hope you enjoyed your stay.

Ben manages a non-committal smile, turns toward the elevator.

CLERK

Oh, Mister Carter...

He turns back. The clerk retrieves a letter-size envelope, hands it to him.

CLERK

This came for you.

Ben looks at the envelope.

INSERT - ENVELOPE, on which the sender's name is:

"DNA ANALYSIS CENTER."

INT. HOTEL SUITE - DAY

Ben's suitcase is packed, ready to go. But Ben isn't.

He stands at the desk, his face grave. On the desk is the letter with the DNA analysis results. He has not opened it.

He opens the larger envelope from the attorney's office. Pulls out papers.

INSERT - document, with the heading:

"Marital Termination Agreement"

BACK TO SCENE

He sets the divorce papers down on the desk beside the unopened DNA results letter.

He looks at them for a long moment -- the two documents, side by side.

He stares at the DNA envelope. Rubs his brow. Torn. Unsure.

He digs into his pants pocket, pulls out the ladybug barrette.

He looks at it long and hard -- this small piece of Grace in the palm of his hand.

He sets the barrette down on the desk between the DNA envelope and the divorce papers.

A slight smile tugs his lips. He picks up the barrette again, and his fingers close around it -- the clear winner of the contest for his soul.

He slips the barrette back into his pocket. His whole body relaxes. The decision fills him with peace.

Calmly, he takes a pen and signs the divorce papers.

He unzips a suitcase pocket that holds business papers, gets a brown manilla envelope, slides the signed papers inside.

Then picks up the unopened DNA results letter and, without a second thought, slips it in too. He seals the brown flap.

INT. EVE'S HOUSE - DAY

Eve stands at the open door. Ben, on the porch, hands her the brown manilla envelope.

BEN

See that she gets this, would you?

They stand for a moment in silence.

EVE

Keep in touch, okay?

Grace skips up to Eve's side.

BEN

Hey, just the kid I want to see.

He takes the barrette from his pocket. Grace's eyes light up.

GRACE

Oh, it's my favorite.

Ben squats to look at her, eye to eye.

BEN

Could I ask a favor? Would you mind  
if I keep this?

Grace ponders the request gravely. Suddenly decides.

GRACE

Okay.

Ben kisses her cheek. Stands up. Kisses Eve's cheek.

And then he's gone.

Eve looks at the brown envelope in her hands. Sadly shakes her head.

INT. AIRPLANE - DAY

Ben looks down at Chicago. Sun sparkles off Lake Michigan.

Vapor mist obscures his view, then the plane is swallowed by cloud.

Ben empties the airline ration of Johnny Walker scotch over the ice cubes in his glass. He spills a dribble onto the tray.

He looks at the small puddle. Almost smiles. And leaves it just as it is.

INT. BEN'S KITCHEN - DAY

The light snaps on. Ben stands in the doorway with his suitcase.

The pages of Jack's letter still lie spread on the kitchen table. He takes a moment. Puts his hand on the letter.

He gathers up the pages, puts them back in the envelope.

INT. BASEMENT - DAY

The banker's box that held Jack's letter is still open on the floor. Ben settles the envelope back into the box, slides the box back into its dark corner.

A weary ghost of a smile from Ben.

BEN

On blood.

He climbs the stairs and, without turning back, snaps off the light.

EXT. BEN'S HOUSE - DAY

Ben's van, expertly parked rear-in as always, pulls out of his driveway.

INT. BEN'S VAN - DAY

Ben turns the wheel, taking a corner, talking on his hands-free phone.

BEN

Don't worry about the cost, Jim, you called it right. It's a bargain, the shape those pipes were in. I'll be there in five.

INT. HOUSE UNDERGOING RENOVATION - DAY

Orange flames lick the air. Constant thumps, like rifle fire, thud from nail guns.

Beyond and below the flames, Ben looks like he's in hell, literally. He crouches at the bottom of a dark, dank pit.

The flames are in a portable incinerator on the level above him. A carpenter dumps in sawdust. The flames lick higher.

Jim, the plumber, crouches beside Ben. Both wear hard hats. They're inspecting rusted pipes, preparing an addition.

Jim looks over his shoulder.

JIM

Hi there, cutie.

Ben's head jerks up. He follows Jim's gaze to the level above.

There, looking down through mesh safety fencing, is Grace.

Ben shoots to his feet, bringing him eye to eye with Grace.

Then he sees, behind her, one of his crew chatting with Camilla.

Ben double-times it up the ladder. He reaches Camilla and Grace.

BEN  
This is a surprise.

CAMILLA  
Sorry.

BEN  
No, a good one. A good surprise.

GRACE  
That's a funny hat.

BEN  
You're just jealous.

He pulls off his hard hat, tugs the inner straps tight to make it as small as possible, and fits it on Grace's head.

She feels it with both hands, surprised. Then, gives him a huge grin.

CAMILLA  
Ben, could I talk to you?

Workmen clomp by carrying bed-sized sheets of plywood, followed by another with a clipboard. Ben stops the clipboard guy.

BEN  
Grace, this is Pete. Pete, this is Grace. Would you please show her around? Don't let her organize a strike.  
(to Grace)  
Go build a house.

Grace takes off hand-in-hand with her new beau.

Ben steers Camilla away from the parade of men and wood. They stop not far from the incinerator.

Ben looks at her, waiting.

Camilla looks away, trying to gather her courage.

Finally, she turns to him. Pulls an envelope from her pocket. It's the DNA analysis letter. Still sealed.

CAMILLA  
You didn't open it.

BEN  
Neither did you.

CAMILLA  
You don't know, do you. Who Grace's  
father is.

Ben looks away. Wipes grime from his face. Looks back at  
Camilla.

BEN  
I do know.  
(tapping his heart)  
In here. Whoever made Grace, I'm  
her father. Period.

Tears spring into Camilla's eyes. Tears of a happiness so  
profound, she has never looked more radiant.

Ben swallows hard. Gently, he takes the envelope from her  
hand. Turns to the incinerator.

He holds the envelope above the flames. Looks at Camilla.

BEN  
Okay?

She smiles.

CAMILLA  
Okay.

Ben drops the envelope.

They watch it curl in the fire, blacken, and shrivel to ash.

Camilla moves hesitantly a little closer to Ben.

She pulls from her other pocket a folded set of documents.  
Opens them. The divorce papers.

She holds the papers above the flames. Looks at Ben. Hope  
in her eyes.

CAMILLA  
Okay?

His surprise is exceeded only by his joy.

BEN  
I do.

Camilla beams. Drops the papers. They spiral down into the  
flames.

She reaches for his hand, holds it tight.

Ben pulls his wife into his arms. Their kiss is like coming home.

EXT. THE "SPRIG AND THISTLE BAR" - NIGHT

Over the door, the sign that reads "THE SPRIG & THISTLE" is almost covered by a temporary one: "BEN & CAMILLA'S."

INT. "BEN & CAMILLA'S" - NIGHT

Couples dance to a rollicking swing number from Camilla and her band. Above them a banner reads: "HAPPY OPENING." The place is packed, every table full, standing room only at the bar.

Greg shepherds customers to their table. Near the stage, Eve works the sound system controls on a mixing board, expertly tweaking volume and tone.

Ben dances with Grace. Ignoring the swing beat, he waltzes with his daughter, cheek to cheek, holding her against his chest, her feet dangling.

A couple boogies past: Ben's neighbor and the Hooter server.

In pride of place on the wall behind the bar, in a gold frame, is a blow-up of the anniversary party photo: Ben with his arms around Camilla and Jack, all of them smiling.

A man stands at the far end of the bar, looking into the dregs of his beer. It's Harold, wearing his baggy khaki photographer's jacket, and a tired but satisfied smile.

He toasts the photo of Jack, knocks back the last of his beer, and heads out the door.

EXT. AIRSTRIP IN THE MIDDLE EAST - DAY

Dust swirls. Runway tarmac cut across a wide stretch of desert.

A huge cargo plane sits with its big rear doors lowered, forming a ramp. Soldiers mill around it unloading crates into vehicles.

Harold trudges down the plane's ramp.

In the distance a man in Army fatigues strides toward him.

As the two men meet they "high-five" each other, an exuberant slap of hands in the air.

The other man is smiling Jack O'Brien.

FADE OUT.

THE END