

BLACK ANGEL

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FROM THE BLACK

A FLASHBULB BLINDS US

WALTER WINCHELL's face fills the screen. Early-40s, Fedora, charcoal suit, red tie. Sits behind an enormous desk under a bright movie theater marquee--

EXT. CAPITOL THEATER - NIGHT

--Walter tilts back his hat, wipes his sweaty brow and speaks in a feverish, manic tone.

WALTER

(into microphone)

Walter Winchell here from the star studded premier of MGM's *fabulous* new musical, *The Wizard of Oz!* 1939 never looked so good! This movie is strange, sublime and will surely capture the hearts of everyone everywhere. And, speaking of capturing the hearts of America, walking into the premier right now is none other than the illustrious Bette Davis. What *can't* she do? Followed by her is the ever debonair James Stewart. Talk about a man for the people! And on his arm is the stunning Jean Arthur! Careful, lady. You might actually stop traffic. Oh, and who's this? Why, yes. The man giving F. Scott a run for his literary money...

CAR DOOR

A shiny, buffed pair of black shoes emerges from the car -- followed by a man, 30s, dressed in a crisp tux. Slicked back hair, flawless face -- eyes black as buckshot.

CONRAD WORTHINGTON. Pensive and measured. Careful. Always observing. Refined. Reeks of money.

While discomforted by the spotlight, he knows he's the player in the play. And he plays his part.

His eyes shift back and forth under the glare of the marquee and the flashing bulbs. He's done this a thousand times and would rather be anywhere else.

WALTER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Conrad Worthington. Published his first collection of suspense stories at age 15. Snapped up my maverick agent Addison Lefkowitz. Four novels since. The first three were runaway bestsellers, while his last one barely cracked the top ten. Trouble in writers' paradise? Hard to say. What can he be working on now? Some say a new movie for MGM. Following Conrad is his constant companion...

NEW ANGLE ON THE CAR DOOR

A hand emerges from deep within the car. Conrad takes it. The nails are painted blood red. There's a small diamond bracelet about the wrist -- it catches the light from the marquee.

CORA WORTHINGTON emerges. A hush falls over the crowd. Regal, flawless -- eyes that could cut steel. Somewhere (perhaps) in her 60s. Hard to tell. Maybe younger; maybe older.

Dressed in a stunning red and black Madeleine Vionnet. Backless. Her youthful décolletage is on full display as is her amused smile and one raised eyebrow.

FLASH BULBS! POP! POP! POP!

WALTER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Cora Worthington. Heir to the estate of her tragically departed husband, shipping tycoon Charles H. Worthington, who died in a terrible boating accident. She's made a name for herself as an unrelenting advocate of her son's work. "F. Scott may have Zelda, but my son has me," she told the New York Times. The epitome of grace and refinement.

INT. CAPITOL THEATER, NEW YORK CITY - MOMENTS LATER

Mother and son float through the crowded lobby. Shiny, pretty people SMILE and NOD at them.

Money, money, money.

They're ACCOSTED by an older, well-dressed man talking in a frantic style. ADDISON LEFKOWITZ, late-50s.

Conrad's agent. Face redder than a beet.

Cora kisses Addison on both cheeks. Addison turns to Conrad, but before the agent can greet his client, Conrad darts into the theater.

Cora pats Addison's shoulder -- says something to him we can't hear -- follows her son inside.

We rise away from the busy and kinetic scene. The sounds fade, and soon we are...

BACK IN THE BLACK.

INT. HOTEL MARSEILLES, PENTHOUSE - NIGHT

A long, dark hallway stretches before us.

Lush, opulent. Dark burgundy furniture here and there -- a deep blood red carpet. You can almost smell the aged scotch.

We float... past paintings of Cora and her son... past framed awards: BEST SHORT STORY OF THE YEAR and TEN WEEKS ON THE NY TIMES BESTSELLER -- that sort of thing.

PENTHOUSE FOYER

Darker than dark.

Only a thin strip of light at the base of the front door.

CORA (O.S.)
She really *does* stink though.

CONRAD (O.S.)
(mischievous)
Mother. The neighbors.

Shadows of their feet appear under the door.

Keys turn in locks -- the door swings open.

Cora and Conrad stand in silhouette in the threshold.

CONRAD (CONT'D)
You always get like this when you drink.

CORA
All that money, and she can't take a fucking bath?

Conrad gently shoves his mother inside and shuts the door.

Cora takes off her wrap -- fusses with her dress. Has trouble getting it off.

CORA (CONT'D)

Bette. *Bette*. What kind of name is that? You know what her real name is? RUTH. Can you believe that? Ruth from Lowell Massachusetts. I suppose when you're from Lowell you have to do *something*. This fucking dress is so hard to get OFF.

The dress falls to the ground in a heap. She steps over it, still wearing her jet black heels.

She turns and faces her son. She's naked from the waist up.

Conrad averts his eyes for a second, then looks at her breasts -- he glances up at his mother -- this is nothing new.

His smile turns wry, amused. She's incorrigible, and from the look of his smile, so is he.

CORA (CONT'D)

Do you think she knew?

CONRAD

What?

CORA

The Vionnet. It was from two seasons ago. I saw how she looked at me. Ruth from Lowell.

Conrad kisses his mother gently on the mouth.

CONRAD

You can be very ugly when you're drunk.

CORA

I'm honest. There's a difference.

CONRAD

Perhaps mix it with a bit of kindness.

CORA

Kindness is overrated. Plus we're talking about Hollywood. They're savages there. Drink babies' blood.

She touches his chest with her fingertips.

CORA (CONT'D)

But you're not a savage, are you?
No. You're the sweetest boy in the
world.

(unquenchable)

You love your mama?

CONRAD

No more whiskey for you.

Conrad takes off his jacket and hangs it on a nearby post.

CORA

Tell me you love me, Conrad.

Conrad unties his bowtie, takes off shirt. He wears a white undershirt. It's soaked through. Kicks off his shoes.

CORA (CONT'D)

(baby voice)

Mama wants to hear it.

Conrad sighs -- turns, walks to her -- takes her face gently in his hands.

CONRAD

I love you more than the moon and
the stars. More than life itself.
How is that?

CORA

A good start.

He picks up her dress from the floor; hands it to her. She takes it, holds it to her breasts.

CORA (CONT'D)

Addison was very upset you brushed
past him tonight. I told him we'd
meet him for a nightcap.

CONRAD

(taken back)

A what? Why would you say that?

CORA

Conrad.

CONRAD

I told you. The outline isn't
ready.

CORA

It's because you're trying to do it alone. I told you I'd help.

CONRAD

Call him and tell him something came up. I'm going to bed. I've gotta be up early to write.

He kisses her softly on the lips again -- lingers a bit -- and then walks down the hallway, shoes in hand.

She stares after him. Her soft and loving face sets into an impenetrable stare.

INT. CONRAD'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The space is fucking enormous. Jesus Christ. It's its own borough.

Through giant windows -- to the right: Central Park in the far distance; to the left: rows upon rows of adjacent apartments, all lit from inside.

Conrad enters the bedroom -- places his shoes by the foot of his bed. Takes off his pants -- folds them directly next to the shoes. He's very precise and lines all up in a neat row.

Crosses to a liquor cart. Pours a drink; downs it.

Glances at a black UNDERWOOD TYPEWRITER on a desk in the corner. Beside it are five measly typewritten pages.

He opens a drawer on the side of the desk. Takes out a small photo. It's of Conrad and a man: TIM BOWERS. Late-20s. Blond hair. Effervescent smile.

They're at the beach, both very happy.

Tim wears a cardigan with an embroidered 'TB'.

Cora glides into the room. She holds her dress by her side, again making no effort to cover her bare breasts.

Conrad hears her -- shoves the photo back into the drawer. In his haste he doesn't close it properly; a tip of the photo sticks out.

Cora crosses -- reaches him -- puts her hand on his shoulder.

CORA

Come on, now. Let's write it together. Like we always do.

Conrad gently shrugs her off, walks to the window and closes the blinds.

CONRAD

Mother, you really should cover up. I don't care, but the neighbors might think it's indecent.

CORA

Indecent. Indecent, he says. You know what's really indecent? What the papers will say about us when they find out we're broke.

(beat)

Conrad I'm scared. You saw what I had to do to get the money after your father died. There's nowhere else to go. I did it for you, you know. So you could write. But if you don't publish another bestseller... Sweetheart.

She crosses the large space; stands by the windows. The moonlight casts her face in a white, angelic hue.

CORA (CONT'D)

Let me in.

Conrad shakes his head, as if he were slapped. He exhales -- looks off and swallows down his rage, frustration -- pours another drink, swirls the amber liquid in the glass.

CONRAD

What if I have no talent?

CORA

That's absurd.

CONRAD

But what if it's true? What if all of these stories and books only exist because of you? I need to know if I've got any talent. Me. I wouldn't be here without you. I know that. But I need to do this one alone. Please. One more month.

CORA

If I helped, it would only take a week.

CONRAD

Mother, please. Please.

She searches her son's face, sees the pain -- *what choice does she have?*

CORA
Fine. FINE.

She turns from him, walks to the drink cart -- spies the photo of Tim poking out of the desk drawer.

Cora reaches over and slowly pulls out the photo.

CORA (CONT'D)
I thought we agreed.

CONRAD
We did. I was gonna throw it out.

CORA
What he did to you. The way he left you. The affair was something most mothers would have been horrified by. Was I?

CONRAD
No.

CORA
Because I love you. He never did. He used you.

She walks over to him -- hands him the photo.

CORA (CONT'D)
Get rid of it.

CONRAD
I will.

CORA
Now.

A flicker of something passes deep in Conrad's eyes -- Hate? Anger? Fear?

He looks at the photo and then rips it in two.

CORA (CONT'D)
This isn't about anyone else but us, Conrad. If you won't let me help you, fine. But then it's up to you to save us. You.

She walks to the door of the bedroom.

CORA (CONT'D)

You're not just letting yourself down but me as well, Conrad. You can tell Addison you want another month. I certainly won't. We'll leave in 10 minutes. I'm going to go freshen up. I don't want to appear 'indecent'.

She closes the door behind her.

Conrad looks down at the torn photo. He serrated it right down the middle. Grabs his wallet from the night-table and wedges the torn photo inside.

INT. UPSCALE BAR - NIGHT

A busy, bustling late-night bar.

The city that never sleeps *never* sleeps.

Cora enters in full regalia -- an enormous white scarf about her neck, a blood red dress, and a mink coat. She hands her coat to the maitre'd and walks across the bustling bar, her eyes trained ahead.

She stops at a table.

CORA

You don't look a day over 60.

Her shadow falls over Addison sipping a martini.

ADDISON

That's good, because I'm barely 55.

CORA

What do you know? We're the same age. Stop the presses.

She sits.

A WAITER immediately hovers.

CORA (CONT'D)

Death in the Afternoon, please.
More champagne than Absinthe.

He nods and scuttles off.

ADDISON

Look, Cora--

CORA
Conrad's got it under control.

ADDISON
I'm not giving him an extension.
Friends or not.

CORA
Friend? Is that what I am? I seem
to remember I fucked you so hard
once you cried.

ADDISON
Still not giving him an extension.
And I didn't cry. I'm an agent. I
make people cry.

The waiter puts Cora's Death in the Afternoon drink in front
of her as Conrad appears.

CONRAD
You'll never guess who I saw
outside.

ADDISON
Your outline?

CONRAD
(I'll ignore that)
Ruth. From Lowell.

Cora cackles.

CORA
You're joking.

CONRAD
She was blasted, her coat in her
hand, still wearing that purple
dress from the premiere.

CORA
Oh God. The sleeveless one? Flowers
must be wilting as we speak.

ADDISON
Why does she always smell like a
cow's ass?

CORA
You know Ruth from Lowell?

ADDISON
My nose does.

They all laugh -- Addison abruptly stops.

ADDISON (CONT'D)
No! You're not gonna distract me.
This isn't fun. Conrad--

CONRAD
I need a month.

He sits next to Addison.

CONRAD (CONT'D)
I know the sales from my last book
were shit.

CORA
What about the Orson Welles picture
based on one of Conrad's stories?
Aren't those residuals coming in?

ADDISON
It was from a story he wrote years
ago, and Orson is fucking cheap, so
keep dreaming.
(to Cora)
Why aren't you helping him?

CORA
(sipping her drink)
Good question.

CONRAD
(to her, eyes level)
I told you why.

ADDISON
Is this because you have to 'do it
on your own'? That bullshit?

CONRAD
(abrupt)
It's not bullshit!
(awkward)
I'm not asking for blood, just a
month. One fucking month.

Addison is amused. He lifts the edge of the tablecloth and
looks under.

CORA
What are you doing?

Addison rises.

ADDISON

Just checking to see what it looks like when a man's balls drop for the first time.

CORA

Christ, and I'm the dramatic one.

ADDISON

You have two weeks to show me proof you're on the right track, *and if you are* then I'll give you a month. Are we clear?

Conrad is silent.

ADDISON (CONT'D)

The answer to that question is 'Yes, Addison.'

CORA

Of course, Addison.

ADDISON

(to Conrad)
Say it.

CONRAD

Yes, Addison.

ADDISON

I love working with writers.

Addison silently drinks from his glass.

A beat. They all look to one another.

ADDISON (CONT'D)

Well, I'm certainly not leaving.

Cora gets the hint.

CORA

Come along, son.

She stands; Conrad follows suit. He glares at Addison, who is grinning like a Cheshire cat.

ADDISON

Stay warm. I've heard it's a cold, cruel world out there.

EXT. HOTEL MARSEILLES, ENTRANCE - NIGHT

The cab pulls up in front of the hotel.

Cora steps out, followed by Conrad.

CONRAD

I think I'm gonna go for a walk.

CORA

This late?

CONRAD

I need to clear my head.

He kisses her -- a quick one on the lips.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

I love you.

CORA

Hurry back. I'll make tea.

Conrad nods, shoves his hands into his pockets, crosses Broadway.

EXT. CITY STREET

Central Park looms next to Conrad as he walks past the city park.

TWO WOMEN, TWO MEN walk towards him. As they pass, Conrad draws in his shoulders.

Don't like being touched.

He turns around when *WHAM*. He slams into a MAN.

CONRAD

I'm so sorry!

THE MAN (MANNING)

(British accent)

My fault. I wasn't looking.

He nods the brim of his hat to Conrad.

Conrad notices he holds a hardcover book in his hand.

The Man enters the dark city park.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - NIGHT

The MOON casts a dim glow as Conrad enters.

He stops -- sees the Man he bumped into sitting alone on a bench. The man lights a cigarette -- stares at Conrad.

In the distance, a BRANCH SNAPS!

Conrad looks and sees TWO MEN deep in the forest.

They circle each other -- animals in the dark. One man raises a clenched fist in the air -- the other steps back -- his face taut.

The stare at each other. A beat.

Then: they kiss.

The sound of a man CLEARING HIS THROAT.

Conrad swivels his head towards the sound.

It's the man from the street, still watching Conrad from his bench. In the moonlight, Conrad gets a better look at him--

His hair is dark black; his face is clean-shaven with the exception of a well-trimmed mustache. He's stunning.

He rises from the bench and takes a step towards Conrad. Conrad backs up... and then turns and runs out of the park.

INT. HOTEL MARSEILLES, PENTHOUSE - LATER

Conrad enters the apartment -- closes the door behind him.

He hears a HUMMING. It's his mother somewhere in the apartment.

He walks down the long--

HALLWAY

Sees a light at the base of a partially opened door on the right. The humming becomes more distinct. It's the song "Somewhere Over The Rainbow".

He removes his shoes and walks past the doorway.

As he passes, he glances into the room and sees Cora sitting at her vanity table. She reaches into a small container of lotion. Takes out a dollop.

Lowers the top of her nightgown and rubs the lotion over her shoulders and around her bare breasts.

Conrad quickly moves away from the doorframe.

CORA

Conrad?

CONRAD

(off to the side)

Just going to bed, mother.

CORA

I put some hot tea by your bedside.

CONRAD

Thank you, mother.

CORA

I love you, darling.

CONRAD

I love you too.

Conrad enters his bedroom and closes the door behind him.

BEDROOM

Conrad looks at the tea by his bed. There's a pot with steam coming out of it, a small cup, and a note propped up nearby:

I know you'll write a magnificent book.

*Makes us proud! **Mother***

Conrad rips up the note. Lays on his bed and removes his wallet from his pocket. Takes out the photo of him and Tim (the one his mother made him tear earlier).

He stares at the photo... *It ANIMATES and comes to life.*

In the photo, TIM leans into Conrad and whispers in his ear:

TIM

Together we can do anything.

Conrad wipes the tears from his eyes, turns on his side and closes his eyes.

INT. CONRAD'S BEDROOM - NEXT NIGHT

Conrad punches away at his typewriter. Stops. Types again. Stops. Swallows two fingers of scotch in a tumbler nearby.

Stands. Refills his drink, walks to the windows overlooking the luxury apartments across the way.

AN OLD WOMAN reading a magazine next to an OLD MAN sipping a drink -- A YOUNG MAN playing the piano with a YOUNG WOMAN nearby dancing -- a MIDDLE AGED MAN and WOMAN eating dinner, their DOG at their feet.

Everyone has someone.

Conrad downs his drink; refills it. Downs it again in one swallow. Opens the drawer to his desk -- takes out the photo of him and Tim. He has since taped it. He stares at it...

He shoves the photo back into his desk -- wobbles a bit.

Someone is tipsy.

INT. PENTHOUSE FOYER - MOMENTS LATER

Conrad holds his shoes in his hand. He walks to the front door on tiptoes.

In the far b.g., his mother sips from a drink and talks into a white phone.

CORA

Yes. Yes, that's right. But she wasn't invited. She decided to attend the event all on her own. How sad is that?

Conrad opens the door and steps out, deftly shutting it behind him.

INT. HOTEL MARSEILLES, HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Conrad slips on his shoes. He almost falls over. He steadies himself with this hand on the wall. Giggles and heads to the elevators.

INT. O'LEARY'S BAR - NIGHT

A wonderful place to make terrible choices.

Everyone inside looks hot, tired.

New York City summer: fucking hell.

Dark booths line the walls -- the air is thick with smoke, the lights yellowing -- a few flicker.

MEN and WOMEN fill the bar.

The bar is the main attraction. Stretches almost the entire length of the place -- mahogany wood -- booze for days on the back mirrored wall.

Conrad walks in; his shirt drenched from the relentless summer humidity. He approaches the bartender--

CONRAD
Vodka and tonic, Vin.

VIN (40s, man's man) pours two-fingers. Conrad downs it.

VIN
It's hot.

MANNING (O.S.)
It's disgusting.

Conrad turns -- looks next to him -- sees MANNING OWENSTON. The stunning man from Central Park.

Which side of forty Manning is on is hard to tell. Genetics have been kind to him. Dark suit and white shirt opened at the collar. Tufts of black hair poke out.

A book on the bar next to him: The Fall Of The House Of Usher by Edgar Allan Poe.

A postcard serves as the bookmark. The tip of it sticks out and is clearly visible.

It reads *Coney Island Illusionists*.

MANNING (CONT'D)
I never trust people who say they love the humidity. I'm British and we do adore dismal weather. But this is pure hell.

He has an easy British accent. Relaxed.

Manning extends his hand.

MANNING (CONT'D)
Manning Owenston. At your service.

CONRAD
Conrad Worthington.

Conrad extends a hand. They shake.

MANNING
So it is you.

CONRAD
Excuse me?

MANNING
Don't act so surprised. Your picture is all over your books. Saw that write up about you and your mother in the New York Times. You were wonderful.

CONRAD
It was a typical PR job.

MANNING
I wouldn't say that. That was your mum in the photo with you?

CONRAD nods.

MANNING (CONT'D)
Stunning.

CONRAD
She'd agree.

Manning laughs.

MANNING
Vin, do this man proper.

VIN
Really?

Manning nods.

Vin removes a bottle from a side cabinet -- pours a glass.

VIN (CONT'D)
He never shares Emily with anyone.

CONRAD
Emily?

MANNING

That's what I call her. Very rare
bourbon from Paris. I had to
smuggle it over.

He pushes the drink toward Conrad. Conrad hesitates, then
drinks. He's surprised. It's smooth, rich.

CONRAD

What do you do, Mr. Owenston?

MANNING

"What do you do? What do you do?"
Why is that the only thing we ask
each other? Textiles. Family
business. Lucrative.

CONRAD

Easier than writing I'm assuming.

MANNING

(re: writing)
Can't imagine a harder job,
frankly.

CONRAD

You said a mouthful.

Conrad sips.

MANNING

Must be hard to stay inspired. I
don't know how you do it. Imagine
your lady friend helps.

CONRAD

(imperceptible smile)
You mean my mother?

MANNING

(laughs)
No, that's not I meant.

CONRAD

Oh, you mean -- no. Not now. I did.
Once. Someone. I wrote with them.
Not *with* them. That's what my
mother wants to do. Never stops
talking about it to be honest. No,
they... they read my pages and gave
me notes. This -- person. The one I
knew. But not like the typical
'make this better' bullshit I get
from my agent.

(MORE)

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Notes based on caring about the work. About me in the work. If that makes sense.

MANNING

It does, it does. Well. Whoever she is that helped you, she's a lucky gal. Helping Conrad Worthington write? Getting to read his fresh, wet pages? Sounds rather intoxicating to me.

The men share a glance a beat longer than needed.

CONRAD

Speaking of intoxicating, I should be going.

Conrad stands.

MANNING

I really am a great admirer of your work. You're very good, you know.

CONRAD

Thank you, Mr. Owenston.

Conrad extends his hand. Manning takes it in both of his.

MANNING

Manning, please.

A beat as the men share a moment. Conrad slowly releases his hand, nods to Manning and leaves.

INT. HOTEL MARSEILLES, PENTHOUSE - NIGHT

Conrad closes the front door behind him.

CORA

Connie?

CONRAD

Yes, mother.

Conrad looks at his reflection in a nearby mirror. He's sweaty, his shirt collar drenched.

LIVING ROOM

It's dark. Conrad enters, turns on the light. Cora rests alone in the corner in an ornate chair.

CORA
Where were you? I was worried.

CONRAD
I'm not twelve, mother.

He strides to a liquor cart, pours himself a drink.

CORA
You went to that horrible Irish bar again, didn't you? I can smell it on you. Like your father.

CONRAD
You're drunk. I'm going to bed.

CORA
Are we fighting? It feels like we're fighting.

She stands (well, wobbles).

CORA (CONT'D)
Have I failed you, Connie?

She reaches him -- touches his cheek. Something in Conrad cracks open.

CONRAD
I miss him.

CORA
(whisper)
Tim?

Conrad nods.

A flicker of fear moves within Cora's eyes -- but it fades.

CONRAD
Why did he leave?

CORA
You know why.

Conrad sips on his drink; eyes level, flat.

CORA (CONT'D)
The world's a terrible place, Conrad. It's beautiful too, yes. I know you... loved Tim. He wasn't worthy of you. Leaving you like that. With a note of all things. What was her name again?

CONRAD
 (hard to say)
 Connie.

CORA
 Connie, Connie. Yes.
 (low)
 More like cunt if you ask me.

CONRAD
 Mother.

CORA
 What? I know the word. And she's
 it. Taking him away from you like
 she did. Him telling you in a note
 that she stole his heart and away
 they went. Dreadful. All of it.

Conrad is off in another world. Like he's not even there.
 She's getting fired up.

CORA (CONT'D)
 (throaty)
 I knew all about it Conrad, but I
 accepted you and loved you. I've
 done a lot of things for you,
 Conrad. Things other mothers
 wouldn't dream of doing.

CONRAD
 Meaning?

CORA
 Meaning you really should thank me,
 don't you think?

Conrad's eyes cloud over and become almost opaque --
 something cold and distant envelopes him.

CONRAD
 (the words sound right)
 Thank you, Mother. Thank you so
 much for everything. I honestly
 don't know what I'd do without you.

CORA isn't quite sure what to do with his tone.

What has gotten into him?

She bats it away and continues...

CORA

Let's go away this summer! You can write in peace and quiet. After Addison approves the outline we can take part of the advance and get away. Just you and me. Together.

Conrad finishes his drink and nods to himself. Cora kisses him lightly on the lips.

CORA (CONT'D)

Get some sleep now. You've got work to do.

He heads to bed.

CORA puts down her wine glass and grabs a WHITE SILK SCARF from a nearby chair -- wraps it about her neck.

She walks to the enormous open windows facing Central Park.

A GUST OF WIND rises from the outside -- the scarf flutters.

INT. ADDISON'S OFFICE - DAY

Addison looks up from the stack of typewritten papers in his hand.

Conrad sits across from him, crumpling his Fedora.

CONRAD

So?

ADDISON

Stop talking.

Conrad stands and paces. Crinkles his hat. Looks out the window. A FAN WHIRLS nearby.

Addison puts down the papers.

CONRAD

So?

Addison looks *through* Conrad as he talks.

ADDISON

I mean, there's the thing with the lace curtains. And the sex is fun. Kids will eat it up. Horny housewives too. Needs more blood. Tension. It--

Eyes sharpen. Sees Conrad.

ADDISON (CONT'D)
It hums. But it doesn't sing.

CONRAD
It'll sing.

Addison growls.

ADDISON
'It'll'. That'll buy me a new house
in Sag Harbor.
(beat)
I've known your mother a long time,
pal. We schtupped a few times and
of course now she thinks I owe her.
I DON'T. I owe my mortgage company
is what I owe.
(small beat)
Do you think you aren't up to this
or something?

CONRAD
(no)
I am.

ADDISON
You need her.

CONRAD
I don't need her! I'm a man. I'm an
adult man and I don't need her.

ADDISON
Wow. An adult man. Look at you.

Conrad walks in a circle -- stops and then says with great
intensity:

CONRAD
The first time you called me?

ADDISON
Yeah.

CONRAD
After you read my short story? You
said: Conrad you're a great writer.

ADDISON
Okay.

CONRAD

It was the only time I felt I mattered. Before that, I was Cora Worthington's son. The Worthington kid. So what?! I wasn't anything. I was a thing. A commodity.

ADDISON

Don't get metaphysical on me.

CONRAD

You told me what I am. YOU. This is your fault. You told me I could write. And I have. But I need some time to get over this hump. I'll figure it out. Six weeks.

ADDISON

A month.

CONRAD

Five weeks.

ADDISON

Suck my dick.

Beat.

CONRAD

I'll show the pages to my mother.

ADDISON

Take her edits?

CONRAD

If they're good.

ADDISON

Of course. I mean, you're the artist.

Addison can't help but smirk.

ADDISON (CONT'D)

This is the part where you leave.

Conrad puts on his hat and goes. Addison stares after.

INT. CONRAD'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

Conrad types at his desk. He's surrounded by wads of crumpled paper. He looks miserable. It's getting dark.

A huge bouquet of white roses adorns the desk with a note attached, reading: "For My Lovely Boy."

There's a knock on the door. He doesn't respond. He keeps typing. Knock! Knock! Knock!

Conrad grabs a nearby letter opener, twists the sharp tip back and forth atop his desk, digging into it.

CORA (O.S.)
Darling?

CONRAD
I'm working, mother.

CORA (O.S.)
I just thought dinner, later, might be nice.

CONRAD
I'm gonna go out for a walk.

CORA
Again? So late?

CONRAD
I won't be long.

A beat. Then:

CORA
Alright. I'll wait up for you.

Conrad exhales and rises from his chair, grabs his cigarettes and heads out.

INT. O'LEARY'S BAR - NIGHT

Conrad enters the bar. He's dripping wet; wipes the sweat from his brow -- fans his face with his hat.

He scans the bar; sees Manning. Sits a few seats away from him.

Vin pulls out Manning's special, pours and slides it across the bar to CONRAD. Conrad catches it.

Manning raises his glass to Conrad -- they drink. Vin hands Manning the special bottle. Manning grabs it -- stands. Gestures to Conrad.

MANNING

Let's drown our sorrows in my
office.

CONRAD nods, rises, follows Manning. His eyes land on the shape of Mannings neck as he walks. The beads of sweat on his nape.

He looks down at Manning's thick hands. They sway to and fro as he walks. The veins stand out. He watches as Manning brushes his hair back. His fingers slide between his black strands...

Conrad can almost hear how it sounds -- like a faint sigh.

The men plunk down in a booth.

MANNING (CONT'D)

I think you know why you can't
write.

Manning suppresses a smile.

MANNING (CONT'D)

But it's not my place to say.

CONRAD

Stop being so British.

Manning hesitates.

MANNING

You were in love with this...person
you mentioned. You wrote then. A
lot, right? You were in love, yes?

CONRAD steals a glance at Manning.

Manning clears his throat:

MANNING (CONT'D)

I've read all your books. There's
always this love story in the
center that never really works out.
Like, almost. But some sort of
'fate' intervenes and the lovers
never end up together. It made me
wonder: 'writers write what they
know'. You know love. How to write
when in love. If I'm too forward
just say.

CONRAD

Yes. Once. I was in love. He left me.

Conrad steals a glance at Manning. Takes his temperature. Sees Manning staring at Conrad, eyes full of kindness and empathy.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Told me in a note. Said he'd met a girl. That he couldn't live as a...

Beat.

MANNING

Homosexual.
(mock ominous tone)
Oooh. Scary.

Conrad has *no* idea what to do with that. He keeps going.

CONRAD

Told me he couldn't live like that. As...a homosexual. Told me the girl he'd fallen in love with was like me.

MANNING

Fuck you and your compliment, pal.

Manning slaps the top of the table with his open palm.

MANNING (CONT'D)

We gotta go for a walk. Because this conversation is getting very dull. Come on.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - NIGHT

Manning and Conrad walk at a fast clip across 5th Avenue and into the park.

DEEPER IN THE PARK

Around 67th street on the west side, Manning leads Conrad under a bridge.

Conrad leans in and puts his hand on Manning's crotch.

MANNING

No.

Manning gently removes Conrad's hand, leans in and kisses him with a tenderness that's breathtaking.

He stares into Conrad's eyes -- then kisses him on the forehead, then the eyes.

Conrad bows his head and lays it on Manning's chest.

The men hold each other in silence.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - ACROSS FROM HOTEL MARSEILLES - LATER

Conrad and Manning emerge from the park, a few blocks from the Hotel.

CONRAD
I should go.

MANNING
Lemme come up.

CONRAD
Come up? What? You can't.

MANNING
You said she likes to drink at night, right? She's probably passed out. Won't hear a thing. Come on. What are you afraid of, Conrad?

CONRAD
Who are you?

MANNING
Not the asshole who broke your heart.

INT. HOTEL MARSEILLES, ELEVATOR - NIGHT

Manning and Conrad ride up in silence. Until...

CONRAD
You really should go.

Manning wraps his pinky finger around Conrad's pinky finger.

INT. CONRAD'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Conrad reaches for the light. Manning covers Conrad's hand with his -- kisses him.

The light from the opposite building cuts across the men -- they dart in and out of shadow as they move back and forth, kissing, hands roaming.

Conrad steps back. Unbuckles his belt. He glances at the window next to him -- sees his neighbors across the way -- grabs the cord to close the lace curtains.

Manning comes up behind him, whispers in his ear--

MANNING

Let 'em watch.

Conrad spins around -- Manning pulls Conrad's belt off -- it makes a loud, snapping sound -- Manning wraps the belt around the back of Conrad's neck -- pulls him in for a kiss.

Conrad grabs a handful of Manning's shirt and pulls him onto the bed.

The light from outside bathes their bodies in a soft glow.

INT. HOTEL MARSEILLES, PENTHOUSE - NIGHT

Manning walks down the hallway of the apartment -- his shoes in hand. Conrad, barefoot, is right behind him.

They come to the front door -- Conrad unlocks, opens it -- Manning slips out -- kisses Conrad... then is gone.

Conrad closes the door. Locks it.

Walks down the hallway to his bedroom -- stops outside of his mother's door -- looks down. Nothing but darkness on the other side.

He heads to his bedroom, enters, and closes the door.

A beat... and then a light appears under Cora's door.

INT. HOTEL MARSEILLES, PENTHOUSE - DAY

Conrad sits in a chair and leafs through pages.

The front door opens.

CORA (O.S.)

Connie? You home?

CONRAD

Yes, mother. In here.

Cora enters, numerous shopping bags in hand.

CONRAD (CONT'D)
What's that?

CORA
I needed some summer dresses.

CONRAD
(snide)
Summer dresses?

He stands up, shredding the papers in his hands.

CONRAD (CONT'D)
There's no way Addison's going to
buy this. It's shit.

He pours himself a drink and slams it down. She gently places her bags down, grabs the torn papers, looks at them.

She kisses him on the cheek.

CORA
Go grab a few notebooks and pens.
Let's work.

He hesitates. She glares at him.

CORA (CONT'D)
I'm not helping you, I'm guiding
you. Remember that.
(so much love)
Come along now, little one.

A beat.

CONRAD
Thank you, mother.

Cora nods and then sits in an ornate, plush chair in the center of the living room -- Conrad runs out of the room.

CORA
By the way -- I heard strange
noises coming from your bedroom
last night.

CONRAD (O.S.)
I couldn't sleep. I was listening
to the radio.

CORA
I see.

She nods, smooths her hands over her dress in a strange manner. An unmistakable darkness settles over her face.

Then, like clouds on a summer day, the darkness passes and the sun comes out.

She rises and says in a rush of gaiety--

CORA (CONT'D)
Now. Let's work!

INT. BOWLING ALLEY - DAY

A bowling ball SMASHES into a set of pins.

Manning walks from the lane -- perfect strike. He sits next to Conrad, puts his arm around him.

Conrad pulls away from him. *Is anyone watching?*

INT. CONRAD'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A single candle rests on a table beside his bed. It casts an amber glow about the room and over the figures of Manning and Conrad.

Manning runs his hands under the sheets.

Conrad GASPS. Manning pulls away.

MANNING
You okay?

CONRAD
What?

MANNING
I thought I was hurting you.

CONRAD
Hurting? No.

Manning takes Conrad's face in his hands.

MANNING
I can see why he loved you. Tim,
right?

Conrad nods.

MANNING (CONT'D)

You have the saddest eyes. I wanna take that sadness away from you. I wanna take you away from here. I know Tim promised you all sorts of things. I know he broke your heart. I won't break your heart. You're so fucking beautiful.

He kisses him.

MANNING (CONT'D)

So fucking beautiful.

Manning kisses Conrad with great passion. Conrad is taken aback. The kiss is strong, unrelenting. But soon he's swept up. He moans and gives into Manning.

INT. HOTEL MARSEILLES, LOBBY - SAME

Cora rushes into the lobby. She carries a massive bouquet of WHITE ROSES.

TOMMY the doorman nods to her.

TOMMY

Where did you get the lovely flowers?

CORA

(mischievous)

I stole them from the lobby of the theatre. Orson Welles's new play is dreadful. Felt I deserved some compensation for my time. Conrad home?

TOMMY

He's upstairs.

CORA

Thank you, Tommy.

Cora enters the elevator. As the door closes, Tommy yells:

TOMMY

He's with his friend, too.

Cora frowns and stares at Tommy as the door slams shut.

INT. CONRAD'S BEDROOM - SAME

Manning slides the sheet off Conrad's body...lowers himself down his body.

INT. HOTEL MARSEILLES, PENTOUSE - SAME

Cora opens the door to the apartment, flowers in hand.

She looks around; no sign of life. She walks to the hallway leading to Conrad's bedroom -- there's a light flickering under his bedroom door.

She flits to his bedroom door -- softly opens it.

She looks into the bedroom and her face changes -- from excitement to a darker, slithering emotion. It's something she puts neatly aside -- the emotion is too large, too big.

Conrad traces his lips down Manning's chest. Manning moans.

She shuts the door and heads back down the hallway, the white flowers still in her hand.

When she reaches the living room she stops dead center.

She falters as if possessed by something.

She nearly falls over -- has to catch herself on the edge of the ornate liquor cart.

She throws the flowers on the floor -- pours booze and downs it -- wipes her mouth with the back of her hand and then very, very slowly falls to her knees and lowers her head in silence.

BEDROOM

A door OPENING then CLOSING is heard.

CORA (O.S.)

Conrad?

Conrad bolts up in bed.

CONRAD

(whisper)

Shit.

Silence.

The men stare at one another. Manning pushes Conrad off of the bed.

Conrad throws on a bathrobe, rushes out of his bedroom and into the--

LIVING ROOM

Cora stands by the front door. She extends the slightly tussled, white roses to Conrad. He takes them.

CORA

Think of these as a gift from Orson Welles. Least he can do.

(off his bemused look)

Why are you looking at me like that?

He bursts into a huge smile -- she throws her arms around him.

CORA (CONT'D)

You did it! See? I TOLD you. You got the job done.

CONRAD

Still needs some work, but we're almost there.

CORA

I know you'll bring it home. You're my son. We can do anything.

She rushes over to the liquor cart; pours drinks -- extends one to him.

CORA (CONT'D)

Why are you looking at me like that?

They clink glasses.

CONRAD

To us.

She puts down her drink -- rubs her temples.

CORA

I did something wrong, didn't I?

CONRAD

It's okay. Everything's okay.

She grabs her purse -- removes a bottle of pills.

CORA
Fucking headaches never stop. It's
like my head is in a vise.

Cora darts down the hallway to the bathroom.

CONRAD
Mother.

CORA
I need some water.

CONRAD
MOTHER.

She YANKS OPEN the bathroom door.

CORA GASPS.

IN THE BATHROOM: Manning wraps a towel around his waist.

MANNING
Oh. Hello.

CORA
Hello to you.

MANNING
Do you want something to wash it
down with?

CORA
Excuse me?

MANNING
The pills. In your hand.

CORA
Oh. Yes. Thank you.

Manning fills a glass with water and hands it to her.

Cora takes Manning in as she slowly swallows the pills. Hands
the glass back to him. He takes it, sets it down.

Conrad rushes up behind Cora.

CONRAD
Mother, this is Manning. Manning,
this is--

CORA
Cora. Cora Worthington.

She extends her hand. He reaches out -- takes her hand in both of his.

CORA (CONT'D)
How do you know my son?

MANNING
We met at O'Learys.

Cora raises an eyebrow at Conrad.

MANNING (CONT'D)
I know. Disgusting place, isn't it?
I only go there after work before I take the train home. I met your son and we got to talking. I asked him if I could use your shower. It's a long train ride to Brooklyn. Have you noticed how the smell of that bar lingers on your clothes?

CORA
I have. My husband used to frequent that place. Never been myself.

MANNING
Husband?

CORA
He's no longer with us.

MANNING
I see. I'm sorry.

CORA
I'm not.

Manning nods, moves to go back to the bathroom -- to Cora:

MANNING
Again, I'm sorry if it was forward of me to use your facilities.

CORA
I'm rather partial to strange men in my shower.

They laugh.

MANNING
I'll get dressed now.

He closes the bathroom door. Conrad and Cora head into the living room. When they are out of earshot--

CORA

Addison is tonight. Did you courier over the outline?

CONRAD

Yes. It's not done, though. I told you.

CORA

You'll figure it out in the meeting.

Manning appears, dressed and ready to go.

CORA (CONT'D)

Fresh as a daisy. Enjoy your evening.

MANNING

I'll show myself out.

He holds Conrad's eyes for a beat, nods -- then leaves.

CORA

Let's pick out an outfit for Addison.

INT. RUSSIAN TEA ROOM - NIGHT

Conrad enters the famous tea room. He looks smashing. Spies Addison in the corner. Walks over.

CONRAD

Addison! So good to see you.

ADDISON

No it's not.

CONRAD

Oh dear.

ADDISON

The outline stinks.

CONRAD

You're kidding me.

ADDISON

Telling people I love the Yankees?
That New England is pretty in the
winter? That I'm hung like a
donkey? That's kidding. About
writing?...

He slides a bit closer to Conrad.

ADDISON (CONT'D)

You're a good writer. Still can't
shake the bit about the lace
curtains. But the rest stinks.

CONRAD

She refuses to let me write it
alone.

ADDISON

Kill her.

(off Conrad)

I'm joking. I think. Fuck me...
Okay. FINE. You were right. I was
wrong. Write it alone. But please,
God, wherever you have to do to
find inspiration, find it. And find
it fast.

He stands from the table.

ADDISON (CONT'D)

I need you to deliver on this. If
you're gonna do it alone, prove you
can do it alone. Bleed on the page.
A lot. This is your last chance. I
can't keep reading this dribble. I
know you're better than this. You
know you're better than this. Prove
to me I didn't make a mistake
taking a chance on you years ago.
Tell the waiter I want a double
martini dry as fuck or I'll have
him fired.

He strides away, leaving Conrad alone at the massive table in
the busy, swirling restaurant.

Conrad glances around him -- couples embrace -- families
laugh -- women mingle with men.

Conrad lifts his Manhattan and takes a sip -- then carefully
places it back onto the napkin so it's perfectly centered.

He places his hands in his lap and sits very still as the music of the people around him rises and falls.

EXT. BATTERY PARK - DAY

Manning and Conrad sit side by side, their feet dangling over the shimmering Hudson below.

They're in a deserted area -- no one is around.

MANNING

Are you sure?

CONRAD

You've read my books.

MANNING

I love 'em.

CONRAD

I don't want you to feel any pressure.

MANNING

Why are you asking me?

CONRAD

You know why.

Manning nods.

MANNING

I'd love to read your work. I'm no writer but...I believe in you. I hope that's enough.

CONRAD

It's perfect.

They kiss.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Addison told her I have to write it alone. She wasn't happy about it, but she agreed. She doesn't need to know your helping me.

MANNING

I hope I can help you.

CONRAD

You already have.

They kiss. Sweet. Tender.

MANNING

My family has a place in Maine. We could get out of the city. You can write without any distractions. Just you, me, and your amazing manuscript.

A smile spreads across Conrad's face.

CONRAD

Just you and me?

Manning bumps his shoulder against Conrad's.

MANNING

(devilish)

Think of all the things we can do.

CONRAD

She won't like it.

MANNING

Well, Addison said you had to write it alone. He didn't say I couldn't come.

CONRAD

I'll talk with her tonight.

MANNING

Good.

Manning stands.

MANNING (CONT'D)

Oh. I left some work papers at the apartment yesterday. Mind if I run up real fast to get them? I promise I'll leave right after.

CONRAD

Sure. She should be out.

INT. HOTEL MARSEILLES, PENTHOUSE - DAY

Conrad and Manning run into the apartment -- they stop; listen.

Manning gently kisses Conrad then trots down the hallway to the bedroom. Conrad sighs and looks about. He hears a CLINK.

CORA (O.S.)
 Connie. When did you get home?

CONRAD
 Mother.

She appears from the kitchen down the hall, ice in a glass.

CORA
 Join me for a drink?

CONRAD
 I really can't. I have to write.

Manning runs into the space.

MANNING
 I found-- CORA!

CORA
 Oh. Mr. Owenston.

CONRAD
 He left some work papers here. He's leaving.

The phone RINGS.

She gestures to the phone. Conrad picks it up.

CONRAD (CONT'D)
 Worthington residence. Oh, hi,
 Tommy. Sure. Be right there.

He hangs up the phone.

CONRAD (CONT'D)
 Tommy said there's food downstairs.
 Want me to grab it?

CORA
 Thank you sweetheart. From
 Epstein's. I couldn't stand the
 thought of cooking tonight.

CONRAD
 Be right back. Come with me
 Manning?

MANNING
 I'm exhausted. Do you mind if I
 wait up here?

Conrad seems surprised -- but smiles and says:

CONRAD
Of course. Be right back.

He darts out of the apartment; shuts the door behind him.

CORA
Drink, Mr. Owenston?

Cora strolls to the liquor cart.

MANNING
I told you.

He walks over to her.

MANNING (CONT'D)
Call me Manning.

He lifts her hair from her neck, *kisses her neck*. She pulls away from him.

CORA
You smell dirty.

She sits; sips her drink.

Manning's English accent is gone, **and in its place is his true accent:**

Tough Brooklyn.

CORA (CONT'D)
You have the manners of a rat, you know.

MANNING
Just how you like it, Lady.
'Cept...

Manning pours two fingers of scotch.

MANNING (CONT'D)
...you ain't no Lady.

CORA
Aren't. Watch your contractions. My son is a writer. He'll figure out what an uneducated lowlife you are, and then we'll have real problems.

MANNING
(English accent)
Quite.
(approaches her)
(MORE)

MANNING (CONT'D)

Still can see it bright as
day...that Packard... You were so
good. Told me exactly what I wanted
to hear. Gotta say you hooked me
with the car.

CORA

What hooked you was the money.

MANNING

(back to Brooklyn accent)
I got feelings, ya know.

CORA

Feelings for a paycheck.

Manning turns away from her -- pours a drink at the
cart...swirls it about the glass.

MANNING

Ya ever think what this would do to
Conrad if he found out? About us?

CORA

Find out? How would he find out?

MANNING

He loves you very much, you know.

CORA

I love him too. Why else do you
think I'm doing this?

MANNING

Because it's in his best interest.
I know, I know.

CORA

Shut up and get over here.

Manning crosses the room -- towers over her -- his shadow
splits her face in two.

Cora looks up at him.

She takes his hand and guides it to her neck -- slowly moves
it down, down -- past her breasts -- she pauses a moment --
arches her back -- looks up at him, her eyes wet, open.

Lower... She guides his hand to her midsection -- lower until
he's at her knee -- she lifts her dress ever so slightly --
guides his hand under, deep inside.

CORA (CONT'D)

Fuck me.

He moves his hand back and forth -- Cora sighs and lays her head back -- her lips parted, her tongue back and forth.

The FRONT DOOR OPENS.

Cora stands, smooths over her dress.

Manning smirks and stands to the side. Licks his fingers.

CORA (CONT'D)

Maine? Really?

MANNING

(clears his throat;
British again)

Yes. My family has a place up there. Should be lovely this time of year.

Conrad enters; places the box from Epstein's on the ground.

CONRAD

I was going to tell you, Mother.

CORA

You live in New York City. All the inspiration you need is here. New England? They dress in plaid and drink beer up there. Dental is dubious. Plus, all that nature? It's disgusting.

Conrad laughs -- looks at Manning.

CONRAD

You'll have to forgive her.

CORA

What? For being logical?

CONRAD

Please mother. Just for a little bit. A change of scenery might help.

CORA

Personally, I think the American Museum of Natural History is all the nature you need but if you think it'll help.

CONRAD

I do.

CORA

Fine. FINE. You do your best to raise them in the city and off they wander to some horrible natural setting, infested with terrifying woodland creatures.

MANNING

I should be going. Your dinner's waiting. I'll ring tomorrow with the specifics.

Manning puts down his empty glass.

MANNING (CONT'D)

Thank you for the drink, Cora.

CORA

My pleasure, Mr. Owenston.

Conrad walks Manning to the front door.

He ruffles Conrad's hair. Silently kisses him on the cheek. Manning frowns.

CONRAD

What is it?

MANNING

Nothing.

He silently kisses Conrad again, leaves. Conrad shuts the door, walks back to his mother. She's looking at the box.

CORA

Let's eat. I'm famished!

CONRAD

You sure you're okay with me going to Maine with Manning?

CORA

Addison told me how your meeting went. I honestly don't think we have much of a choice.

Conrad nods.

CONRAD

I'm not very hungry. Save my dinner for later?

CORA

Of course.

Conrad walks towards his bedroom.

He stops, turns.

CONRAD

Thank you, mother. You're always
looking out for me.

CORA

I always will.

Conrad walks to his room, shuts the door.

Cora moves about the room, tidying up as she goes.

She catches her reflection in a mirror -- there it is again,
that deep inner blackness -- it seems to alter her features
from the inside out.

As soon as it grows, she shoves it right back down.

She's again poised, clear and in control.

EXT. SOUTH STREET SEAPORT - MORNING

Conrad, Cora, and Manning stand at the boarding ramp beneath
an ornate boat.

CORA

I still can't believe Addison paid
for you to travel first class.

CONRAD

Oh, please. If I don't deliver on
the outline, he'll bill me.

The ship whistle BLOWS.

Conrad kisses Cora on the cheek.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

I'll see you in two weeks. We'll
cross the finish line. I know it.

MANNING

(to Cora)

I'll take good care of him.

CORA

I know you will.

They board the boat.

EXT. BOAT - DAY

It sails down the Hudson and off into the morning sun.

EXT. BOAT - LATER

Conrad and Manning sit at the front of the boat. People mill all about -- open collar shirts -- dresses that catch the breeze -- hair flowing, free.

The New England sky is flawless.

EXT. MAINE DOCK - NIGHT

The boat slides into a dock with the sign: "WELCOME TO MAINE".

The men walk off of the boat. The sun is sliding down in the distance, coating them in a beatific, golden light.

INT. CLIFF ISLAND GROCERY - NIGHT

They buy food and provisions; pay for them at the front.

They pass an old man -- NATHAN PORTER. He opens a glass case containing milk. He looks tired, haunted -- stubble on his chin, simple tan hat on his head.

He closes the glass door, and, as he does, he sees Manning and Conrad in the reflection.

The Old Man freezes. Frowns. Walks over to a basket containing gardening shears in a far corner.

He pretends to look at shears and gardening gloves; steals a glance at Conrad and Manning as they walk out.

He watches them carry their bag of groceries to their car, climb in, and drive away.

EXT. CAR - NIGHT

The men drive down a winding rural road.

So this is what they mean by God's Country.

INT. HOUSE ON CLIFF ISLAND - NIGHT

Conrad walks through the front doors and stares ahead. He drops his travel bags, including one marked UNDERWOOD.

Manning takes the groceries to the kitchen.

Conrad walks across the well-appointed living room and out onto the--

EXT. HOUSE ON CLIFF ISLAND, DECK - CONTINUOUS

It's huge. Extends over the beach and seems to float in the air. It affords an extraordinary view of the still (and frigid) Atlantic waters, extending as far as the eye can see.

The house is a classic New England home -- white shutters about each of the four paned windows facing the water; each window is decorated with white lace curtains.

There are some dark smudges and dirt on the windows; it needs a bit of love after being pummeled by the unforgiving New England weather.

Manning joins Conrad on the deck.

CONRAD
This is amazing.

MANNING
No one ever comes.

CONRAD
It's been waiting for us.

MANNING
Waiting for you.

Conrad puts his head on Manning's shoulder -- they gaze off into the cloudy and bright New England sky together.

EXT. SMALL BEACH - DAY

The men stroll along a small, private beach near the house. They talk in an animated manner; stop, laugh -- talk again -- resume walking arm-in-arm.

INT. HOUSE ON CLIFF ISLAND - NIGHT

A fire roars in the background as Conrad types and Manning sits on the couch, reading pages.

EXT. SMALL BEACH - DAY

Conrad stands on the beach in his swim trunks. Manning appears on the deck overhead, tea in hand.

MANNING
Good morning, sunshine.

Conrad ignores him as he stretches.

MANNING (CONT'D)
Are you still mad about what I said
about the ending last night?

Conrad is giving him nothin'.

MANNING (CONT'D)
Connie.

Conrad glares at him.

CONRAD
You know what they say, we only
kill the things we love.

MANNING
You're incorrigible sometimes, you
know that?

Conrad jumps into the water. He YELPS.

CONRAD
It's freezing.

Manning laughs as he sips his tea.

WATER

Conrad swims, his strokes even and clean. Manning and the house disappear behind him.

As he rises for air, he sees someone on the shoreline following him.

EXT. SHORELINE - CONTINUOUS

Conrad emerges from the water. On the edge of the tree-line, he sees the Nathan, the old man from the store.

Nathan semi-hides behind the trees as he watches Conrad. He's not hiding very well. It's rather absurd.

Conrad wraps his arms about himself trying to stay warm.

CONRAD

Hello?

Nathan hides further behind a tree.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

I can see you.

Nathan steps out into the open.

NATHAN

Of course you can. I'm being ridiculous, but we New Englanders don't trust out-of-towners much.

CONRAD

Conrad.

NATHAN

Nathan. You visiting?

CONRAD

From New York, yes.

NATHAN

Me too. Originally.

CONRAD

Ah. What part?

NATHAN

Brooklyn. Sheepshead Bay.

CONRAD

Nice and quiet.

NATHAN

It is. Quiet here too.

CONRAD

Why'd you leave?

NATHAN

My daughter moved here. Wanted to be closer to her.

CONRAD

That's nice.

NATHAN

Yes. Used to be.

CONRAD
How do you mean?

MANNING (O.S.)
Conrad! Where are you? Lunch is
getting cold.

Nathan darts up to Conrad -- hands him a folded piece of
paper. Conrad takes it -- looks confused.

CONRAD
What's this?

MANNING (O.S.)
Conrad!

In a barely audible whisper --

NATHAN
Don't tell him I gave it to you.

-- and Nathan darts back to the tree line. Disappears.

Manning runs up to Conrad.

MANNING
I was an ass. Forgive me?

CONRAD
I might if lunch is any good.

Manning grabs his hand -- they run back down the beach.

Conrad glances behind him, looks in vain for Nathan -- no one
in sight.

INT. HOUSE ON CLIFF ISLAND - DAY

The men run into the house. Manning heads into the kitchen.

Conrad runs into the--

BEDROOM

Takes the note Nathan gave him out of his pocket and puts it
into a drawer by the bed.

MANNING
What are you doing?

Conrad startles -- Manning stands in the doorway.

CONRAD
I was gonna take a shower.

MANNING
Hurry back.

CONRAD
Maybe I will, maybe I won't.

MANNING
What does that mean?

CONRAD
It means I might or might not take
a shower and you might or might not
get dessert.

Conrad wiggles his eyebrows -- bops Manning on the nose and
LAUGHS -- runs down the hall.

MANNING
You're a strange man, Conrad
Worthington.

CONRAD (O.S.)
Thank you!

Manning looks about the bedroom -- nothing seems amiss. He
hesitates... and then walks towards the kitchen.

EXT. CLIFF ISLAND GROCERY - DAY

An old, beaten up pick-up clamors up to the gas pumps outside
of the small-town island store.

Nathan emerges from the car -- he's shaken, ashen-faced.

INT. CLIFF ISLAND GROCERY - SAME

PASQUALE, a teenage male clerk, rises from under the counter.

He gasps in surprise.

PASQUALE
Sorry, ma'am. I didn't think anyone
was here.

Cora stands in front of him -- she wears a stunning, yellow
and white floral dress. She's tired from traveling -- her
face is drawn and unamused.

CORA

It's alright. I know everyone here
is on country time.

The doorbell over the front door rings...

CORA (CONT'D)

I was wondering if you could help
me. I'm here to surprise my son.
He's here visiting with a good
friend of his. One is tall, dark
hair--

NATHAN (O.S.)

The other shorter, kinda pale?

Cora turns around -- comes face to face with Nathan.

She's suddenly all sugar and spice and somethin' extra nice.

CORA

Why, yes. That's him. My son. I'm
Cora. Cora Worthington. And you
are...

She extends her hand; he extends his -- they shake.

NATHAN

Nathan Porter. Pleased to make your
acquaintance.

INT. NATHAN'S PICK-UP - DAY

Cora slides in as Nathan closes the door after her. She
glances around the dirty car as he rounds the rear to the
driver's side.

Filthy floor: check. Crucifix hanging from the rear-view
mirror: check.

Nathan jumps into the driver's seat, shuts the door.

CORA

So you met my son?

NATHAN

Sure did.

He starts up the car.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Boy needs some sun, I'll tell you
that much. Like lookin' at a ghost.

Nathan manages a smile -- looks like it hurts.
He peels out.

INT. HOUSE ON CLIFF ISLAND - DAY

Conrad walks out of the bedroom nude.
Manning joins him.

CONRAD
Eggs?

INT. NATHAN'S PICK-UP - DAY

Nathan drives down the road -- hits bump after bump.
Cora hangs on for dear life.

NATHAN
So you said you and your son are
visiting?

CORA
Yes, from New York.

Nathan glances at her -- sizes her up and down.

NATHAN
I'm gonna guess Upper West Side.
The uh...the other guy your son,
too?

CORA
(with a slight snort)
Hardly.

NATHAN
So just a friend.

They hit a bump -- then another bump -- then another one.
Cora hangs onto the door handle.

CORA
Like being in a hurricane.

NATHAN
Country can be merciless.

EXT. HOUSE ON CLIFF ISLAND - DAY

The pick-up pulls up to the front of the house.

Cora steps out -- carries her travel bag and a small sack of groceries.

NATHAN

What's the friend's name again?
Sorry, but I didn't catch it. I
always like to know my neighbors.

CORA

Maybe he'll tell you when we have
you over for lunch.

Cora shuts the door and walks to the house.

CORA (CONT'D)

Thank you for the ride.

Nathan watches her, his eyes tiny and squinted.

INT. HOUSE ON CLIFF ISLAND - SAME

Conrad types (still nude).

CONRAD

Need a new ribbon.

He jumps up from his chair and runs to his bedroom, leaving
naked Manning alone, cooking.

CORA (O.S.)

Surprise!

Manning whirls around -- sees Cora staring at him.

MANNING

Cora!

Cora looks at his crotch -- then back to his face.

CONRAD

Found one!

MANNING

Make sure you bring out my bathing
suit as well, Conrad! It was a hell
of a swim today. Let's do it again
tomorrow.

Manning smirks at Cora and saunters over to the couch -- grabs a pillow and places it over his crotch.

Conrad runs into the room.

CONRAD
Bring out your what?

Manning throws a pillow at him...Conrad catches it, sees his mother -- holds it over his crotch.

CONRAD (CONT'D)
Mother.

CORA
Son.

CONRAD
(snark)
What are you doing here?

CORA
Surprise.

CONRAD
You could have called. We have a phone you know.

CORA
What fun would that be? Being unpredictable is what makes us a Worthington. A bedroom for me down here?

She gestures to a hallway. Conrad nods.

CORA (CONT'D)
Lovely. Perhaps we can all dress for a nice supper together.

She heads down an opposite hall, her bag in hand.

Conrad looks mortified. He slinks backwards down the hallway, the pillow still firmly pressed against his crotch.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Cora sits at the table, playing with the scarf about her neck. Three empty plates are nearby.

Manning drinks a scotch. Conrad is absent.

CORA
Maine lobster is as good as they
say.

MANNING
The trick is killing them when they
least expect it.

CORA
Excuse me?

MANNING
The only reason they're tender is
because they have no idea they're
gonna die. You have to talk to
them. Soothe them. Tell them it's
going to be alright, then *plunk*.
Into the water they go. And before
they know it, they're dead. Die
with a smile on their face.

Manning gestures to flour and spices on the counter.

MANNING (CONT'D)
Baking a cake for dessert?

CORA
I don't know what I was thinking.
Had a fit of domesticity for a
moment.

Conrad enters.

CONRAD
What are we talking about?

CORA
Killing lobsters.

CONRAD
How fun. Speaking of killing...
here.

He hands a stack of pages to Cora.

CORA
Is this--

Conrad nods.

CONRAD
I hope you like it. Couldn't have
done it without Manning -- and of
course, you, mother.

CORA
I have to read them right now!

They both laugh.

She stands up, wine glass in hand -- heads to the deck.

CONRAD
(to Manning)
Let's go for a walk. Give her some
privacy.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

The men stroll through the woods.

MANNING
I saw the way she looked at you.

CONRAD
What do you mean?

MANNING
When you handed her the pages. The
way she looked at you, she's proud
of you. She really is.

CONRAD
She's always been there for me. No
matter what, I could always count
on her.

Manning nods -- looks off. He's deeply torn; his face cold.

CONRAD (CONT'D)
What's wrong?

MANNING
Nothing. Come on. Let's see what
she thinks.

INT. HOUSE ON CLIFF ISLAND - NIGHT

The men enter the house. Cora is still on the deck.

CONRAD
We're back.

The wind whips her dress up, reveals her legs, thighs... The
white scarf about her neck flutters.

Conrad runs to her. Kneels beside her.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

So?

CORA

It's wonderful.

CONRAD

Really?

CORA

The ending still needs work.

CONRAD

(with a glance at Manning)
So I've heard.

CORA

But you really did it. Oh my sweet boy. I'm so proud.

CONRAD

We were thinking of heading back Saturday. Show it to Addison Monday. What do you think?

CORA

I think that's a great idea. Until then, you, my dear boy, are locked inside this house until the ending is perfect. Agreed?

MANNING

I concur.

CORA

So you have zero distractions, Manning and I will go sailing for the day. When we return, we expect a sublime finale.

Cora and Conrad glance at Manning.

MANNING

I guess I'm going sailing.

EXT. BOAT DOCK - DAY

Manning stands on the edge of a small dock -- a small sailboat floats on the water. Cora stands nearby.

It clearly hasn't been used in some time -- there's a dirty tarp haphazardly covering the fact that it could use a fresh coat of paint.

Manning pulls off the tarp -- coughs as he waves at a plume of dust.

CORA
This thing safe?

MANNING
(Brooklyn accent)
You're in good hands.

CORA
I wonder about that.

She stands before him holding a small PICNIC BASKET.

Her hair is pulled up and back -- her décolletage exposed -- her red dress capturing the sun.

She's flawless -- looks ten years younger.

He extends his hand to her -- she takes it and starts to board the boat -- before she does, Manning stops her and takes her in...all of her, from top to bottom.

CORA (CONT'D)
Keep your eyes on the boat, sailor.
We don't want to capsize.

INT. HOUSE ON CLIFF ISLAND / EXT. DECK - SAME

Conrad types. He stretches, gets up and takes his typewriter to a table on the deck.

He puts on sunglasses -- sees Cora and Manning down the shore. A pair of binoculars sits on a side table.

EXT. BOAT / OCEAN - SAME

Cora opens an umbrella to fend off the sun. Manning smiles at her as he navigates the motor.

It comes to a stop. Quiet. Manning opens the picnic basket.

DECK

Conrad types and types.

BOAT

Manning takes out the champagne. Pops it. The cork goes into the water.

MANNING

Shit. Cora, do you mind?

She looks at the cork bobbing on the water near her.

CORA

Hold this.

She hands him her umbrella.

DECK

Conrad bites his finger -- distracted. Picks up the binoculars.

POV THROUGH BINOCULARS

Cora hands Manning her umbrella. He takes it and moves closer to her as she bends over the side of the boat.

BOAT

MANNING

Little farther, darling. That's it.

Cora bends over. Over. A bit more.

POV THROUGH BINOCULARS

Manning is leaning over Cora, his right hand open.

CORA

Stretches her fingertips to the cork as it bobs. Almost there. She looks up and sees that Manning's shadow is over her -- too far. *Why is he leaning so close to her?*

She SCREAMS.

POV THROUGH BINOCULARS

Cora SCREAMS and falls over the side of the boat. Conrad gasps.

BOAT

Manning catches her just in time. One second more...

MANNING (CONT'D)

You alright? I was trying to help you. You were going too far.

CORA

I feel dizzy.

Manning hands her a glass of water. He goes to the back of the boat and sits behind her. She seems to fall back into his lap.

As she does, he tips the umbrella so they're very effectively shielded from Conrad's view.

POV THROUGH BINOCULARS

The boat sways in the water. Shadows can be seen through the umbrella but hard to tell what's really happening.

CONRAD

Walks to the edge of the deck, binoculars in hand. His breathing is raspy, jagged.

POV THROUGH BINOCULARS

The boat floats and then turns in the water; there!

Conrad can see them. Is Manning -- no. It must be the angle.

Is Manning kissing her?

CONRAD

Lowers the binoculars. Blinks twice. Looks through them again.

POV THROUGH BINOCULARS

Manning wipes Cora's mouth with his handkerchief, one arm around her waist. She's sitting up.

What did he see?

INT. HOUSE ON CLIFF ISLAND - AFTERNOON

Manning and Cora enter the house.

MANNING

Conrad!

Conrad enters the foyer.

CONRAD

Mother! You alright? I thought I saw you fall out.

CORA

You saw me -- were you watching us?

CONRAD

Yes. I just wanted to make sure you were okay. You haven't gone boating much.

CORA

I knew it was too much sun today. Don't know what I was thinking. Trying to get that goddamn champagne cork out of the water. Should have let some duck choke on it and die. Thank you again for saving me, Manning.

MANNING

You're the last person who needs saving... but you're welcome. Go rest. I'll start dinner.

She heads to her bedroom.

When she's gone, Manning heads over to the bar, pours a splash of smoky bourbon into two glasses -- hands one to Conrad.

MANNING (CONT'D)

To a great ending.

Conrad takes it from him -- stares at Manning for a beat longer than truly necessary and then downs the drink.

They clink.

INT. HOUSE ON CLIFF ISLAND, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Conrad combs his hair in the mirror. The window is open.

The white curtains wave back and forth in the summer breeze.

He can hear snippets of conversation from Manning and Cora on the deck next to his room.

MANNING

Manhattan ... Island ... could be
... Emily ...

CORA

... take care of ...

Conrad strolls out of his bedroom.

HALLWAY

He strolls down the small hallway -- rounds the corner.

LIVING ROOM

He enters, sees Manning and Cora talking with great intent -- she touches his forearm... He gently removes her hand.

He points down the beach -- at her, at himself -- he's emotional.

Conrad walks towards them. One step after the other.

CORA (CONT'D)

...then it has to be done. Tonight.

CONRAD

Hi.

Cora startles.

CORA

You scared me.

CONRAD

Was I interrupting something?

MANNING

We were talking about having a party when we get back to the city.

CONRAD

Party? Why?

CORA

(amused; to Manning)
I told you.

Conrad frowns, confused.

MANNING

She said you wouldn't want to celebrate finishing until the book was published. I said that was preposterous. Apparently your mother was right.

CORA

I know my son.

CONRAD

I just don't want to jinx it.

CORA

Our dark days are behind us, little one. Let's all get some rest, it's a long ride back tomorrow. Tie up loose ends and head back to the city.

She kisses Conrad on the mouth; heads to her bedroom.

CONRAD

Who's Emily?

MANNING

Excuse me?

CONRAD

Emily. I heard you mention her.

MANNING

Remember the bourbon we had that first night? I brought it up for us to share. Just you and me.

Conrad glances behind him to make sure Cora went to bed.

He then steps towards Manning, wraps his arms around the other man's waist. Kisses him once on the chest -- then looks up into Manning's eyes.

It's the look of a man reborn -- saved, eternally found.

Manning looks away -- it's almost too much for him.

Conrad gently guides him back. They kiss with great, tender care.

CONRAD

Goodnight.

Manning waits a moment until he's gone, then he turns and looks down the long beach, his face an odd kaleidoscope of emotions.

Manning heads into the--

KITCHEN

He's flustered -- paces -- walks over to the block of knives -
- his hand absently toys with a knife handle.

He turns, turns, turns the knife handle -- stops. Looks at his hand.

He pulls the blade from the butchers' block -- it's long, heavy, and has a razor sharp edge.

EXT. SHORELINE - NIGHT

Nathan stands on the edge of the shoreline and looks out over the water. He's a man haunted.

The moon, high in the sky, is nearly full. Ripples of moonlight grace the water.

Tears rise in his eyes and spill freely down his face.

He turns from the water, his body limp.

EXT. FOREST / NATHAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

He trudges through the forest -- it's absolutely still -- comes to a small home nestled in the trees.

A small amber light hangs over the entrance, illuminating the blood red door at the entrance -- cozy windows dot the outside of the tiny house.

He passes to the back of the house -- an axe is wedged in a large block of wood, chopped pieces to the side.

INT. NATHAN'S HOUSE - LATER

A fire cackles and roars in the fireplace.

Nathan pulls a photo album from the wall. Opens it. Inside are photos of him and a YOUNG GIRL.

One reads: "Emily -- Age 5"; another: "Emily - Age 7".

Then, a photo of a TEENAGE EMILY cuddling a joyful Nathan. The words "Father & Daughter Dance" is on the page.

My God he's so young.

SNAP.

Nathan looks up at the sound of a branch snapping. He looks to his small windows. Nothing.

He puts the photo album down on the sofa. Pulls another album from the wall -- this one is hidden deep in the shadows.

His hands shake as he turns the pages. Photos of him and Emily in New York City. He flips pages. Blank, blank, blank.

Stops on a page. He runs his hand over his mouth, over his silver stubble. He stifles a moan.

It's a photo of a group of people in front of a building. All of the people look exotic, strange.

Closer we see they're circus performers of some sort.

Nathan's eyes float along the photo until they stop at one boy. A teenager. In the corner. Dark eyes, dark hair.

A boy who looks a lot like--

SNAP.

Nathan startles -- looks up.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

INT. HOUSE ON CLIFF ISLAND, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Conrad rises from his bed. He reaches to turn on the light, and he fumbles, hits the side table. It tips to the side.

He grabs it before it falls, but the contents of the drawer spill out. The newspaper clipping Nathan gave him is half-open.

Conrad looks at it. It's old, weathered. It's from the Coney Island Times.

It's an advertisement for an attraction called "**The Coney Island Illusionists**".

Conrad looks off and remembers:

SPLIT SCREEN

FLASHBACK: INT. O'LEARY'S BAR - NIGHT

The postcard protruding from Manning's copy of The Fall of the House of Usher -- *the same lettering, the same words.*

KITCHEN

Conrad gets a glass of water -- drinks it. Puts the glass in the sink.

He doesn't notice that one of the slots in the butcher block is missing a knife.

HALLWAY

Conrad stops outside a partially open doorway...

CONRAD

Manning? You awake? I need to ask you something.

He pushes on the door.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Manning?

Conrad can see by the faint moonlight the bed is empty.

INT. NATHAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Nathan's flustered.

He shoves the photo albums under the cushions of his couch.

Walks over to a small box that says FISHING TACKLE -- passes a clock: 10:30 p.m.

He opens the tackle box -- A SHINY REVOLVER lies inside.

He shuts the box -- places it on a table near his couch.

Crosses the space -- stops at the front door, his hand on the deadbolt.

NATHAN

Who is it?

CORA

Mr. Powers? It's Cora Worthington.
I'm so sorry for coming by so late.

(MORE)

CORA (CONT'D)

I don't mean to be a pest, I just... I liked what you said about getting to know your neighbors. I asked that lovey man at the grocery store who else lived on the island full-time and he told me about you. I brought you something to thank you for driving me. I know it's late. It's the New Yorker in me. We never do sleep, do we?

Nathan considers this -- takes in a deep breath -- opens the door.

Cora stands before him dressed in a flowing white dress -- her hips tilted to one side, her head back a smidge, exposing her flawless neckline.

She extends the cake to him.

CORA (CONT'D)

Forgive me?

INT. HOUSE ON CLIFF ISLAND, DECK - NIGHT

In his pajamas, Conrad walks along the edges of the deck.

CONRAD

Manning?

He looks and sees nothing.

Wait! There. Down the beach. He sees a figure.

INT. NATHAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Cora cuts the cake in Nathan's kitchen. She puts two slices on plates.

Nathan stares at her, his face lit by the flames from the fire.

His hand rests on the tackle box next to him.

Cora turns around, plates in hand -- walks over to him, hands him a slice of cake.

CORA

It's marzipan angel cake. I hope you like it. It's a family recipe from the old country.

She sits -- crosses her legs -- her gams catch the moonlight pouring into the room from a small nearby window.

Nathan can't help but stare.

CORA (CONT'D)

Don't insult me now. Please have a bite.

He takes a bite.

NATHAN

It's very good.

He takes another bite.

As he does, Cora notices the edges of the photo albums beneath the cushions.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Do you believe me?

Cora puts her cake aside and says in a very slow measure:

CORA

You say he knew Emily and that he's dangerous. That they met and that they fell in love. I want to believe you, of course. But how can I? Educate me.

She leans forward -- her cleavage visible.

Nathan glances briefly at her breasts -- turns his back to her and reaches under the couch. He looks over his shoulder to make sure she can't see what he's doing.

The flames from the fire lick her face -- she smiles a sweet, charming smile. *My God she's beautiful.*

He pulls out an album -- opens it -- extends it to her.

She looks at the photos Nathan was looking at moments prior.

NATHAN

She had to live in New York. Couldn't resist it. Was like it had a hold of her. I know what that's like, let me tell you. City is a drug. Once it's got you... I told her to leave, to get out before it ate her up, but... I was too late. It was in her blood.

CORA

I know how she feels.

NATHAN

She understood things. Where she got her desire for life is beyond me. I've always been a bit melancholy to be honest. I told her not to go. I told her it's a filthy city.

CORA

It really is.

NATHAN

It's my fault what happened. I should have been stronger. I was a weak man. She started school, and that's when she told me she'd met him.

CORA

Barrett?

NATHAN

Barrett. The name makes me sick. He seduced her. He's good at it, you know. Born for it. You could tell he was one of those boys that ripped the legs off insects just to watch them crawl away and die. He's got something wrong with him. It's my fault. It's all my fault.

(beat)

I don't care about your son, by the way.

CORA

That's very kind of you.

NATHAN

I've seen his kind before. It's a sickness, I know. Not that your son is sick.

CORA

I did the best I could.

Nathan gives her a look.

CORA (CONT'D)

We love our children -- misfortunes and all, don't we?

NATHAN
(tearing up)
We do.

CORA
You miss her very much.

Nathan nods his head. Cora stands.

NATHAN
When she found out what he was, it was too late. I told her he wasn't right, I could see it... but they never listen us, do they? Why don't they listen to us?

CORA
It's terrible.

NATHAN
You can help me prove he killed my Emily.

Cora looks at a photo in the book. One particular photo.

Clearly it's of Manning and Emily being married.

The next photo is Emily and Manning on the deck of the house they're all staying at on Cliff Island.

Nathan coughs.

CORA
Are there more photos of them?

NATHAN
Them? No.

CORA
But more of him.

Nathan leans forward. Coughs again. And then again.

Cora closes the photo album.

NATHAN
We'll go to the police. You'll tell them all you know about him.

CORA
No, we can't.

NATHAN
Why?

CORA
Because you'll be dead.

Nathan coughs again into his hand. Looks down.

Blood. Lots of blood.

Cora rises -- takes his plate, hers -- meticulously washes them in the sink.

Grabs her cake tin and holds it close.

Nathan is now on his knees. The coughing is grotesque. Blood pours down his chin.

She walks over beside him -- her shadow splits him down the middle.

Nathan clutches his stomach. Thick rivulets of blood pour out of his mouth.

As he dies, she strokes the back of his head.

CORA (CONT'D)
Emily is waiting. And I must be going.

Nathan glances up at her -- his face a twist of horror and death -- but in his eyes is venom.

NATHAN
He's in love.

Cora stares at him -- her face as still as marble -- flames lick her face.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
He loves Conrad. He loves him. He loves him.

Cora kicks him in the face -- he spins onto his back -- spits blood -- his hands flutter like trapped hummingbirds.

She rubs off a spot of blood from her heels on the side of the couch -- lifts up the cushion -- removes the other photo album and glances through it.

Takes the one photo of Manning with the strange group of people -- grabs a nearby poker and dislodges one of the logs -- it rolls across the floor and lights the couch on fire.

With very lady-like elegance, she steps around the body of Nathan, opens the front door and leaves.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Cora trudges through the forest, the moon bright and high in the sky.

Her white dress flowing in the summer wind. Behind her the flames lick the inside of the house, turning it into a red-hot inferno.

A slight smile rises on her face.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Conrad walks down the beach, close to the tree line -- a sweater around him. He's still in his pajamas. He comes to the Shadowed Figure on the beach he saw from the deck.

CONRAD

Manning?

The figure turns around -- it is Manning, but my God he looks devastated. His eyes are red from crying.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Manning. What's wrong?

MANNING

Oh, Conrad.

Manning drops something in his hand and runs to Conrad. They embrace.

CONRAD

Manning. What's wrong? What are you doing out here?

MANNING

I have these nightmares sometimes. It's like I'm dying, I think I'm dying. I've had them since I was a boy. I have to get up and out of bed to remind myself I'm still alive. I know it's weird.

CONRAD

It's just a nightmare. You're okay now.

MANNING

I am, I am. You're here. I'm okay now.

They kiss.

CONRAD

Can I ask you something? That man we met, that older man -- he gave me this. Told me to not tell you about it. I don't know why. Do you know what it means?

Conrad hands Manning the newspaper clipping.

MANNING

Can't really see it. Let me look at in the moonlight.

Manning steps out from the shadow of the trees and looks at the page in the stark white moonlight.

The moment his eyes land on the clipping they turn dark, almost seem to collapse inward. A shiver of terror runs through his body -- he swallows it, locks it away -- deep down it goes, hidden, far, far inside.

MANNING (CONT'D)

I have no idea. He's an old man.

They walk back towards the house together.

As they do, the thing Manning dropped catches the moonlight in the distance.

It's the knife from the kitchen.

In the far, far distance, unseen yet by Conrad or Manning, something burns bright and hot and red.

EXT. BOAT - DAYBREAK

Cora stands at the front of the ship. PASSENGERS stroll past them and board the huge boat.

In the far distance the skyline of Manhattan looms.

Conrad joins her.

CONRAD

That poor man.

CORA

Well, it's why you can't live alone when you're older. You need someone to take care of you. And from what the Fire Marshall said, chimney fires are a huge problem here.

CONRAD

So sad.

Beat.

CORA

(bit whimsical)

Our time comes when our time comes.

She kisses him.

He snuggles close to her.

CONRAD

Do you remember when I was a boy?
When we would go to those operas in
the summer by the water?

CORA

I do.

CONRAD

And when the part would come when
the orchestra would swell you'd
grab my hands and pull me close and
we'd cry together? Because it was
almost too much to take?

CORA

I do. I do.

Cora closes her eyes as tears fall. She pulls her son close into her and they hold each other as the ship sails into Manhattan.

CORA (CONT'D)

Little chilly tonight. I'm going to
freshen up. Be right back.

Cora heads to her suite on the boat.

INT. BOAT, LOWER DECK - DAYBREAK

Cora opens up her room and finds Manning sitting inside.

MANNING

Sit down.

CORA

Don't you use that tone--

MANNING

SIT. DOWN.

Cora slowly closed the door behind her. She slinks across the floor of the cabin and sits in a small plush red chair across from Manning.

Manning's New York accent is so thick you could cut it with a knife.

MANNING (CONT'D)

You don't know your son.

CORA

I warn you--

MANNING

You're a fuckin' beast, you know that. You fuckin' repulse me. You abomination. How did you do it? Tell me. Tim? How did you do it? Did you like it? Did it turn you on, you sick fuck?

Cora stares at Manning. She doesn't move a muscle.

MANNING (CONT'D)

Didn't think I knew, did ya? A sewer rat like me from Brooklyn. Fuckin' idiots is what we are. Don't know our ass from our elbow, do we? But we do know another sewer rat when we meet one. That's right. You just got nicer clothing is all, but you still stink like the streets. Where's Conrad?

CORA

I just left him upstairs on the deck.

MANNING

You sure?

CORA

Of course I'm sure. I don't make mistakes with details.

(beat)

And for your edification I did what any loving mother would do. Tim was feeding my son's mind with lies, and I won't stand for that.

Her voice is deep, low and thunderous. The voice of insanity.

Manning rises.

MANNING

Tell me how.

A beat. She stands. Closes in on him.

CORA

(effeminate, new voice)

Connie, I've met someone. You'd love her. She's just like you. Spitting image. She even has your eyes. I love you, Connie. You know that. But I can't live the life you want. It's wrong. I want a family. Children. Please understand. I'll love you forever. Yours, Timmy.

(beat; normal voice)

Said he went to Europe. He went to the bottom of the Hudson. It was easy. Like my husband. Conrad crumbled when he got the note. I nursed him back to life. Like I do. Like I always will. I'd give my life for him. Would you?

He's silent.

She SLAPS him.

CORA (CONT'D)

Would you?!

SLAPS HIM AGAIN.

He takes it; smirks -- walks out of the cabin.

INT. CABIN NEXT DOOR - SAME

Conrad sits on a chair in his cabin next door.

His eyes are wide, in shock.

He heard it all.

He stands up. Walks to his door. Opens it.

HALLWAY

He steps into the hallway shadows -- watches Manning emerge from the cabin next door -- Cora shortly thereafter.

EXT. SOUTH STREET SEAPORT - NIGHT

Passengers step off of the boat, one after the other. Manning appears, followed by Cora and then Conrad.

Conrad stands at the top of the ramp and hesitates.

CORA

I'll order dinner from Johnny's
when we get home. That way you can
prepare for Addison.

Cora looks behind her -- no Conrad. She stops. Spies him standing at the top of the landing.

CORA (CONT'D)

What are you doing? Let's go.
People are waiting.

Conrad stares at his mother, barely noticing the irate PASSENGERS behind him. He follows her.

EXT. TAXI STAND - NIGHT

All three stand waiting for taxis.

CORA (CONT'D)

Why don't you come over for a
nightcap, Manning? We can celebrate
the finish line?

CONRAD

I'm really tired mother.
(to Manning)
I hope you don't mind.

MANNING

Of course not.

He tips his hat to Cora, then Conrad.

MANNING (CONT'D)

It was a wonderful trip.

CORA

To many more.

Manning jumps into a taxi cab.

INT. HOTEL MARSEILLES, PENTHOUSE - NIGHT

Conrad and Cora enter the apartment and put their bags by the front door.

CORA
Go rest. I know you're tired.

CONRAD
Thank you mother.

He grabs his bag -- heads to his bedroom.

CORA
Is everything alright?

CONRAD
Yes, mother.

CORA
Good. Sleep well.

CONRAD
Goodnight.

He kisses her -- heads to his--

BEDROOM

Conrad puts his bag in the corner; removes his shoes, socks and sits on his bed.

He pours a drink and crosses to the huge windows overlooking the building across the way.

A MAN cleaning bedsheets; a GIRL dancing; a BOY singing.

He unpacks his suitcase -- takes out the newspaper clipping Nathan gave him for "***The Coney Island Illusionists***".

EXT. NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY - DAY

Conrad runs up the stone steps -- past the imposing lion sculptures flanking the famous entrance.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Conrad huddles in a small corner of a mammoth section of the research library. He flips through a huge book.

INSERT: BOOK

Page after page of old newspaper clippings. He stops when he comes to a section: "Coney Island Times".

He flips the pages: "Famed Theater Company A Sight to Behold" then, "Theater Company Full of Spectacle and Wonder".

He stops when he sees one: "Theater Troupe Shatters After Dismal Season".

His finger traces down the page... Words leap out at him: "...one of a kind..." and "...patron to homeless kids and orphans..." and finally "...the family photo."

Conrad follows his finger and comes to a photo of a bunch of people standing in front of the troupe. Rag-tag, exotic, and seemingly happy -- nothing but smiles.

He reaches into his pocket and takes out the clipping Nathan gave him at Cliff Island.

He matches it up with the photo in the book and sees they're the same.

He traces his finger to a section of the photo in the book that's missing from his clipping.

It's a marquee on the famous Coney Island Boardwalk: "**Coney Island Illusionists**" -- replete with the famous tragedy and comedy masks.

The photo in the research book is much clearer -- Conrad leans in, looks at an OLDER MAN standing in front of everyone, his arms outstretched like a maestro.

His mustache is bushy and twirled on the ends -- Conrad traces a tiny line of print at the bottom of the photo: "The famed illusionists led by the renowned L.B. Jefferies."

EXT. CONEY ISLAND - NIGHT

Conrad holds the torn page from the book in his hand -- he walks down the boardwalk. Night has fallen. Rain is coating the slick wooden planks.

Conrad pulls his Fedora over his eyes as he looks at storefront after storefront.

He stops. Holds up the torn page from the book in the air -- next to the marquee in front of a darkened theater.

It's a match.

EXT. ABANDONED BUILDING - NIGHT

With slow, measured steps he walks up to the front of the building. It's all boarded up.

He walks up to the small sign covered in water. Wipes it:

"Coney Island Illusionists - Amazing Sights 7-Days A Week"

Conrad looks around for signs of life. Nothing. There's an alley to the side of the building.

EXT. TURN-IN ALLEY - NIGHT

Conrad rounds a bend -- walks in the pitch black -- comes to the back of the building. There's a door at the bottom of the concrete steps -- a dirty window to the right of it.

In the distance is the slow build of POLICE SIRENS -- louder and louder.

CONRAD descends the steps...waits for the sirens of the speeding cop cars to get near him -- and when the sound is at a fever pitch -- SMASHES his elbow into one of the windows.

He winces. He cut his hand. Blood pools. He sucks his finger.

INT. ABANDONED BUILDING - NIGHT

He's inside. Black darker than black.

He strikes a lighter.

A flame sputters to life. The place is filthy -- cobwebs -- the sound of rats somewhere. You can taste the mildew.

He casts the flame into a few corners -- old theatrical props, masks, lighting equipment.

Into another corner he casts his flame. Old bicycles and chairs for the beach -- buckets for sand.

Nothing of interest.

He's defeated and ready to go -- wait! Over there.

A file cabinet. In the corner. Dusty, old, and dented.

With his light in front of him, he walks to the cabinet. Tries to open it -- it won't budge. Hits it with his elbow. He hears something come loose...

...He opens the file cabinet. Accounting papers -- billing statements -- plays and scripts -- nothing.

He shuts it, trains his flame on the next file cabinet -- opens it.

It's long, empty -- *but wait.*

What's that in the corner?

He removes what appears to be a 'false front' to a hidden section. Pulls it aside.

Behind it are old file folders. He pulls them out. A thin stack -- 20, maybe 25 of them.

He slides over to a lone window on the far wall -- light from the dim streetlamp on the boardwalk outside affords him enough light to read.

He blows out his flame.

Opens the files. Looks at the first one.

It's a CHILD. Small photo. The kid looks dismal. Young. Can't be more than eight or nine. The bottom reads "Transfer from Syracuse Valley Orphanage" - and beside it reads: "Stipend - \$4 a week until age 16."

He looks through file after file of KIDS. All the same -- nothing but sad, faceless kids.

He looks around -- a sign, anything for a clue.

There!

An old spring box mattress -- a detached sink.

Did someone actually sleep here?

He trains his flame on the wall -- reveals aged photos attached with yellowing tape.

A family photo -- various illusionists and yes -- there's L.B. Jefferies, the leader and wait -- wait...

A man. Young. Black hair, stubble - a grim look on his face but that smile... Conrad would know that smile anywhere.

It's Manning.

Conrad *rips* the photo off of the wall.

EXT. ABANDONED BUILDING - NIGHT

Conrad crawls out of the building -- a LIGHT FLASHES on his face.

OLDER COP
Come outta there, you.

Conrad wiggles out of the window -- nearly s
tumbles. An OLDER COP and a YOUNGER COP stare at him.

OLDER COP (CONT'D)
What were ya doin' in there?

Conrad discreetly shoves the photo of a younger Manning deep into his back pocket.

CONRAD
Nothin'. Just going for a walk and
next thing I knew I ended up in the
basement.

OLDER COP
Losin' time, huh?

CONRAD
Yeah, I guess so.

The Older Cop sizes him up.

CONRAD (CONT'D)
Aren't you supposed to take me in?

YOUNGER COP
Yeah. Aren't we?

The Older Cop chuckles. Eyes Conrad in an odd way.

YOUNGER COP (CONT'D)
Place is dangerous you know. It's
condemned. Ever since they took
that loony bird away.

OLDER COP
Would you shut up?

CONRAD
He talking about L.B. Jefferies?

OLDER COP
Yeah. Not that he's supposed to
shoot off his trap. But yeah. Guy
lost his marbles.

(MORE)

OLDER COP (CONT'D)

Bellevue or somethin'. I'd lose my marbles too running this freak show. Weird kids everywhere. None of 'em were right in the head, if ya ask me.

(sizes up Conrad again)

So...you were just wanderin', huh?

CONRAD

Is that a crime?

OLDER COP

Do yourself a favor. Go wander somewheres else.

CONRAD

Will do, officer.

The Cops walk away, swinging their billy clubs.

The Older Cop eyes Conrad again--

OLDER COP

Maybe you'll find what you're looking for somewhere else.

Conrad frowns.

EXT. BELLEVUE HOSPITAL, MANHATTAN - NIGHT

Conrad trudges down a rainy, dark street -- stops when he comes to a tall, ornate iron gate that spells out "BELLEVUE HOSPITAL".

INT. BELLEVUE HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Conrad passes through a circular waiting area -- his shoes echo on the gleaming white floor.

He stops in front of a young female attendant -- name tag: JENNIE KELLY. She stands behind a counter.

CONRAD

Hello.

JENNIE

May I help you?

CONRAD

I'm looking for a Mr. L.B. Jefferies? I was told he's here.

JENNIE
One moment please.

Jennie fumbles with a directory -- looks flustered.

CONRAD
You new?

JENNIE
First day. One moment please.

She looks through a file -- stops when she sees something.

JENNIE (CONT'D)
Oh. Yes. Mr. Jefferies is here.
He's in the south ward. Are you
family?

CONRAD
No, I -- I'm a writer. I'm doing a
piece on the old theater he ran in
Coney Island. My deadline is in two
days and I haven't got anything.
Sorry to bother you so late. We
want his side of the story of -- of
what happened. I'm sure you know
why he's here.

She nods.

JENNIE
Says on the card. I'm afraid I
can't let you see him unless you're
family.

CONRAD
Please. I just got this job. If I
don't meet with Mr. L.B. Jefferies
for even just five minutes I'll get
fired. You know how hard it is to
get a job nowadays.

JENNIE
Took me four months to get this
one.

CONRAD
(leans in)
Five minutes. You can have a guard
watch me.
(all charm)
You can watch me.
(MORE)

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Maybe we can even go out for a
cuppa joe after this if you wanna?
I know a great spot by the train.

She thinks about it -- looks into his eyes. She can see he's
desperate...and cute.

JENNIE

I can't get fired. This is my first
day.

CONRAD

I promise.

JENNIE

(to herself)

Dear Lord, Jennie, you're such a
bleeding heart.

INT. BELLEVUE HOSPITAL, HALLWAY - NIGHT

Jennie quickly walks down the hallway -- Conrad right behind
her. They pass door after door. Now and then they hear
someone yell or call out, but otherwise -- dead.

JENNIE

Funny how it's so quiet, huh?

STAIRCASE

They ascend a spiral staircase -- come to a landing -- Jennie
walks a few feet, stops at a door. Slides open a partition at
the top -- looks inside, then closes it.

She takes a ring of keys from her pocket -- glides it into
the lock, turns, and the door opens with a creak.

Conrad takes a step forward and looks inside.

INT. BELLEVUE HOSPITAL, PADDED ROOM - CONTINUOUS

CONRAD enters the dark, gloomy room. A single light overhead.
On a cot sits a man in his late-60s.

He's very well tended. Hair is combed.

Is he freshly shaven? Where does he think he's going?

CONRAD

Mr. Jefferies? My name is Conrad
Worthington.

(MORE)

CONRAD (CONT'D)

I'm a writer doing a piece on the theater in Coney Island you owned. I wonder if I might have a word with you?

JEFFERIES

Of course. Please. Have a seat. I'd offer you some tea, but we can't eat or drink alone. Not sure what they think I'd do with a tea cup.

Conrad carries a chair from the corner and sits. He hands Jefferies the photo of Manning he took from the wall in Coney Island.

CONRAD

Do you recognize this man?

Jefferies slowly takes the photo. Looks at it for a moment, and then speaks with tremendous warmth.

JEFFERIES

Of course I do.

CONRAD

What's his name?

JEFFERIES

Am I in trouble?

CONRAD

No, you're not in trouble. Do you know his name?

JEFFERIES

Is this a game? I love games.

CONRAD

I'm afraid not.

JEFFERIES

Barrett Pincus. Barrett was special. Gifted. The other ones were as well. But Barrett... He knew how to play the game. "I found you. Yes, I found you. Now you have to give Papa Jefferies a big kiss." He never would give it to me right away. He knew I wanted it too much. Made me wait. He knew I liked it when me made me want it. I did want it. Oh, yes, I did.

(perks up)

Is he here?

CONRAD

Thank you, Mr. Jefferies.

Conrad pockets the photo -- walks to the door.

JEFFERIES

So he's not here?

Before Conrad leaves, he glances at Jefferies. He's got his hands over his face.

Then he opens his palms wide and smiles. It's uncanny but his face is filled with childlike wonder.

JEFFERIES (CONT'D)

Peek-a-boo. I see you.

INT. O'LEARY'S BAR - NIGHT

Conrad nurses a drink.

Vin polishes glasses -- the phone at the bar rings. He answers it. Look at Conrad.

VIN

It's for you.

Vin slides the phone down the bar -- Conrad catches it, holds the receiver to his ear.

MANNING

(on phone)

Conrad? Baby? I need you to come to the apartment.

CONRAD

Fuck you.

MANNING

I can explain everything. Meet me at the apartment. Hurry.

Manning hangs up. Conrad stares at the receiver.

EXT. O'LEARY'S BAR / INT. CAB - NIGHT

Conrad jumps into a cab.

CONRAD

96th and Central Park West.

The CABBIE nods and pulls into traffic. Conrad's eyes are vacant, staring at the passing city but seeing nothing.

INT. HOTEL MARSEILLES, LOBBY - NIGHT

Cora walks in, the white scarf about her neck floating in the air. The porter desk is empty.

She presses the elevator button. A moment, and then it opens. Tommy holds the door.

TOMMY

Ms. Worthington.

CORA

Tommy.

TOMMY

The gentleman is waiting for you upstairs. He said you're expecting him. I hope it was alright I let him up. Lovely British man.

CORA

Of course. Thank you, Tommy.

Cora shows no sign of emotion as the elevator doors close.

INT. HOTEL MARSEILLES, HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

The elevator doors open on the Penthouse floor. Cora slowly steps out, turns and sees Manning standing by her apartment door.

MANNING

(Brooklyn thick)

We need to talk.

Cora takes him in -- the way he leans against the wall by the door -- his raised left eyebrow, his hair falling over his eyes -- his mischievous look.

Without a word, she reaches into her bag, takes out her key and opens the door.

CORA

After you.

INT. HOTEL MARSEILLES, PENTHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Cora flicks on the lights. A dull, amber glow fills the space. Manning pretends to shut the door, but leaves it open a crack.

Cora doesn't notice.

MANNING

Drink?

CORA

Gladly.

Manning strides into the living room -- mixes drinks.

Cora walks in after him -- puts her bag on a side table and looks him up and down -- glances about the living room.

He hands her a drink. She takes it. They clink glasses and drink in silence.

Cora sets her glass down on the table next to her purse -- looks at Manning -- her eyes are youthful; full of desire.

She removes her jacket, folds it and drapes it over a baroque purple chair next to the table holding her drink and purse.

She slides off her shoes -- places them neatly at the base of the chair.

Her fingers gently unbutton the red buttons of her blouse -- one after the other -- she opens her blouse.

CORA (CONT'D)

Come here.

Manning smirks -- downs his drink -- places the empty glass next to hers.

MANNING

We gotta talk first.

CORA

After you fuck me.

MANNING

Something's up with Conrad. I met him after we got back for a drink and he was funny. Off.

CORA

My son's always been off. You know
how artists are. One foot in
madness, the other in genius.

MANNING

Like mother, like son.

INT. HOTEL MARSEILLES, LOBBY - SAME

Conrad walks into the lobby. Tommy smiles at him and reaches
under the counter.

TOMMY

That British fellow friend of yours
told me to give you this. He's
upstairs now with your mother.

Conrad frowns as Tommy hands him a small, sealed envelope.

CONRAD

Thank you.

Conrad pushes the button for the elevator -- looks at the
envelope. It's blank. Pristine.

DING.

The elevator arrives. He steps inside and opens the envelope
as the doors close.

INT. HOTEL MARSIELLES, PENTHOUSE - SAME

Manning sips from his drink.

MANNING

It was like he knew something.

CORA

He doesn't know anything. Top me
off. Hurry up. Conrad said he was
meeting an old friend for dinner.
He'll be back soon.

She hands him her drink glass. He tops it at the bar.

MANNING

Would be awful if he found out,
don't ya think?

CORA

Look what I have for you.

She holds up a thick envelope. Extends it to him.

CORA (CONT'D)
You've been a good boy.

He crosses the living room -- shards of moonlight crisscross over his face.

He hands her the drink, takes the envelope and looks inside. It's filled with \$100 dollar bills.

CORA (CONT'D)
Count it.

MANNING
I trust you.

CORA
You shouldn't.

Cora stands and finishes her drink, her back to Manning. He glances behind him, towards the foyer.

He sees a shadowed figure standing in the open doorway of the apartment.

Manning turns Cora around, puts his meaty hands on the sides of her head, and kisses her with a force that takes her breath away.

He leans in -- kisses her neck -- tastes her.

She rears her head back -- utters a moan of deep desire -- places her hands on his dark mane -- her slender fingers move in and out of his hair.

He lowers his mouth -- down, down, down -- now at the crest of her breasts -- to that center sweet spot.

She bites her lip lest she cry out.

MANNING
I remember the first time we met.
What you said to me.

Up Manning's mouth moves -- lips on flesh, tongues touching.

Cora's moans change... They become threaded -- ragged, as if she can't get enough air.

MANNING (CONT'D)
Do you remember?

CORA

You're a fucking filthy man.

MANNING

You liked it when I told you what happened to me. What they did to me at that place on Coney Island.

CORA

Kiss me.

Manning kisses her with a passion unlike any other -- full, unbridled, a passion for the ages.

MANNING

Tell me what you said.

CORA

"You doesn't know what love is. You're hollow. A shell. They ripped your heart out of you when you were a boy. Now you're mine."

MANNING

A shell you could use to betray your son.

CORA

Yes. Yes.

MANNING

Like you did when you killed Tim. Your husband.

CORA

For Conrad. It's always been for him.

Manning stands up. Cora's head is back, her breath feverish and shallow. She looks up at Manning standing over her -- he moves to the side and standing behind him is Conrad.

In his hand is the envelope he got from Tommy, and the note that was inside.

Manning grabs Conrad's face in his hands and kisses him.

Conrad is mute, in shock.

MANNING

Did you hear that, Conrad? She did it for you.

Manning walks over to Cora and tightens the white scarf about her neck.

Cora's eyes widen -- her fingers roam down, to the white scarf around her neck -- the one getting tighter and tighter.

What's happening?

She struggles to get her flawless red tipped finger nails under the scarf, but she can't. It's futile.

He's too strong. He's too intent.

He sets her down on the chair -- raises a knee -- lifts up her dress -- exposes her thighs.

Her eyes widen; true horror grips her.

There is no turning back.

This is the end.

He towers over her -- his looming shadow splits her down the center -- all he can see is her left eye rocking back and forth in its socket, exposed in a shaft of pale amber light.

Manning says with a grovel--

MANNING (CONT'D)

Before you die, bitch, I want you to tell him.

Cora's single eye rocks side to side -- from Conrad to Manning then back to Conrad -- a tear falls.

She shakes her head 'no'.

Manning tightens the scarf.

Cora's feet kick at the floor -- she knocks over a heel.

MANNING (CONT'D)

NO MORE GAMES.

Manning's voice is thunderous, too much for the room -- it shreds their reality apart.

Cora looks at Conrad -- her single eye cloudy, red veins popping -- and in a voice far, far away -- strangled by her favorite and most cherished scarf, she whispers...

CORA

I had to, Conrad. I had to.

MANNING

What? Had to what?

Her eye rockets back to Manning -- she shakes her head 'no' again -- this time the gesture...it's weak, broken. She's on the verge of an abyss.

Manning swivels his head like a Cobra and leans into her, his lips mere seconds from hers.

MANNING (CONT'D)

Tell him it was for you. It's always been for you, hasn't it Cora?

Cora tries to speak but the scarf is crushing her windpipe.

MANNING (CONT'D)

What's wrong, Cora? Can't talk? For once YOU'RE NOT FLAPPING YOUR GODDAMN GUMS? Don't worry. You won't have to. You'll have Emily for company soon, AND SHE COULDN'T SHUT THE FUCK UP EITHER.

Manning tightens the scarf -- Cora tries to scream, but she can't -- she's right there, right at death's door.

Manning's face is a constellation of torment -- it rises up and alters his features -- he's unrecognizable.

He glances over at Conrad and the instant he does, his eyes soften, his features relax and there! There he is.

The boy lost. The boy forgotten. The boy no one wanted.

The man who loves Conrad and will do anything to save him.

MANNING (CONT'D)

For you, my love.

He turns his attention back to Cora.

MANNING (CONT'D)

(British accent)

And you, Cora, can now properly fuck off you filthy fucking cunt.

Cora claws at him -- but it's no use. He's possessed.

Conrad steps forward.

Something hidden rises up in him.

It's big. Primal. Bigger than any of them.

Conrad utters a throaty scream -- grabs a handful of Manning's hair and pulls him backwards with every bit of strength he has.

Manning screams out in shock and falls -- hits the floor with a sickening thud.

Conrad scrambles to his mother -- loosens her noose.

He can't. It's too tight.

CORA
(barely a whisper)
Hurry.

Conrad looks behind him -- Manning is on the ground moaning.

He turns back around -- fumbles with the scarf -- sweat rolls down his face. It's free!

Cora coughs -- her eyes water, her face is a horror.

She reaches out to Conrad -- pulls him into her in a fit of mad and desperate love.

CORA (CONT'D)
I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry.
Please...forgive me. Please. Please
forgive me.

They pull from each other and lock eyes, and in that instant the bond that can never be broken, shall never be broken, lives, thrives, grows larger in that moment.

Conrad helps her up from the chair.

CONRAD
Can you stand?

CORA
I think so.

She rises -- they share a smile that surprises them both.

We're gonna be okay.

They smile and move from the chair when Conrad is yanked back -- his hands cartwheel -- and he slams onto the floor.

Manning towers over him. Blood rolls down his face from where he hit his head on the floor.

He runs his fingers through his bloody hair -- looks at Conrad -- then his eyes fall to something on the floor beside him.

It's the photo of Barrett Pincus -- the young boy in the photo from Coney Island -- it fell out of Conrad's pocket.

Manning's face twists, contorts in pain -- but he shoves it back into the blackness, back into the cave of his heart.

He leans over a dazed Conrad -- kisses him -- picks up the white scarf from the floor.

MANNING

I love you.

He rises to a standing position -- chest high, eyes bright. Turns to Cora--

MANNING (CONT'D)

And I really fucking hate you.

Takes a few steps towards a cowering Cora -- pushes her back into the chair.

He circles his bloody fingers around both ends of the scarf and then wraps it around her neck.

She fights him but is no match for the torrent of hurt, of rage coursing through him.

Conrad slowly rises from the floor -- dazed, getting his bearings.

He sees what's happening. It's too late. It's happening.

Cora's eyes slide to Conrad.

He stares at her -- she at him -- and with great deliberation he guides her eyes to the lamp on the table next to him.

The lamp with a strong thick metal base.

Her eyes flare open -- *yes*.

She reaches over to it -- her fingers outstretched.

CONRAD

Manning.

Manning turns, looks over at Conrad.

WHAM!

Cora slams the metal base into Manning's head.

Manning's confused. He touches his head. Blood flows.

Cora leans forward -- weak from being attacked -- but adrenaline flows.

She half-rises -- raises the lamp in her hand -- blood on her face, on the lamp shade -- in her mouth.

She towers over Manning. The Devil has arrived.

He rolls his head back -- blood pours down his face -- his hair is matted about his forehead like thorns.

MANNING

Yes, do it. Yes. Please.

Manning glances at Conrad, and their eyes meet as Cora brings the lamp down onto him like a guillotine.

Manning's blood splatters Conrad's face.

It's a macabre scene from an unspeakable nightmare.

Over and over she smashes the lamp into his face.

She stops mid-swing. Looks at what she's done -- drops the weapon. It hits the floor with a sickening THUD.

Silence.

She sways in place. Her breath is ragged.

Blood pools around the lifeless figure of Manning.

Tears stream down Manning's cheeks.

The blood flows in a steady stream around his body but one thing stops it -- the photo of a young and happy Barrett Pincus and the note that Conrad dropped, the one Manning left for him earlier.

It reads: *Come upstairs. Don't make a sound. I love you forever. M.*

With great patience, the blood finds its way onto the photo and swallows it whole.

FADE OUT.

INSERT: THE BOOK "BLACK ANGEL BY CONRAD WORTHINGTON"

Underneath it, a big sticker: "#1 NY Times Bestseller!"

INT. BOOKSHOP - NIGHT

The book sits in a window of a bookstore in midtown Manhattan. Clearly, time has passed.

The book has been published. And it's a hit.

Standing at a podium in the far-reaches of the store is Conrad. He reads to from his book to a packed, rapt audience:

CONRAD

*"For he knew in his broken heart
he'd never be free of her, free of
her grip about his pale, tenuous
heart. Her blood was his blood; her
will was his will. No matter how
far he would go in this world, and
no matter how he would try to
escape, she was his Black Angel,
and he was hers, and no force on
this planet would ever free him."*

INT. TAXI CAB - NIGHT

Conrad and Cora ride silently through the late-night city streets. Cora has her white scarf about her neck -- she puts her slender hand on Conrad's--

CORA

We did it, darling. You and me.
We're unbeatable.

Conrad smiles, his eyes filled with excitement, amusement... and something else. Something hard to define. Something dark and powerful.

INT. HOTEL MARSEILLES, PENTHOUSE - NIGHT

Cora enters the dark apartment, takes off her white gloves and holds them in one in hand -- removes her scarf and drapes it over a dark red chair in the large, cavernous living room.

New furniture, new drapes.

She walks over to the fireplace, strikes a match in a nearby holder and starts a small fire.

Conrad closes the front door and enters.

CORA

I'm going to take a shower and retire. Tea sounds nice, don't you think?

CONRAD

Yes, mother.

Cora stretches her neck and walks down the long, long hallway to her bedroom and closes the door.

Conrad stays in one spot. A moment passes, then he hears the SHOWER RUNNING.

He walks over to a table where a copy of his book sits. He opens it up.

Inside is a note card with the embossed title "Addison Lefkowitz, ESQ".

There's a handwritten note beneath it:

"Congratulations on your spectacular success, Conrad. All the worst is behind us you now. Time to soar into the new horizon. You've arrived. -- Addison"

The shower in the background STOPS.

Conrad looks over to his mother's long, shimmering white scarf which lies on the chair. It catches the light from the moon outside; it's cutting.

Cora's bedroom door opens. A shaft of milky light tries to cut into the darkness but it's useless -- blackness is everything.

She appears, dressed in a black silk robe that's a tad too revealing.

CORA

Did you make us tea?

CONRAD

Yes, mother.

CORA

Thank you, Conrad.

CONRAD

Of course, mother.

Conrad takes the scarf in his hand.

CONRAD (CONT'D)
I'll be right in.

Cora nods and turns to walk back into her bedroom. She pauses in the doorway and without turning her head far --

CORA
No one will love you like I do,
Conrad.

CONRAD
I know.

CORA
Do you love your mother?

CONRAD
I do. More than anyone.

Satisfied, she nods and walks into her bedroom.

Conrad looks at the scarf in his hand. He walks over to a light in the corner and turns it off.

He walks over to another light and turns that off as well.

The apartment is dark.

With the scarf in hand, he walks down the long, long hallway to his mother's bedroom. It seems to extend into infinity -- the walls elongate, contract until they are a focal point to one place, one inevitable spot: His mother.

He stops outside of her bedroom -- looks at the scarf in his hand -- wraps it around his hands and lowers his head.

He enters her room and closes the door behind him with a firm click.

INT. CORA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Cora sits at a table in the corner of her bedroom, brushing her hair in a three-paneled mirror. She's wearing a nearly transparent nightgown. Her breasts are visible.

CORA
Did you bring my tea?

CONRAD
Sorry. I forgot.

CORA

It's alright, sweetheart. I'm sure you're distracted with all the interviews you've had to do for the book.

CONRAD

It's been a lot.

He walks up -- stops behind her. Their faces are reflected in the panels of the mirror. Cora reaches behind and wraps her arms around his waist. Pulls him in close.

CORA

I have so many ideas for your next book. I can't wait to get started.

She releases her hold on him -- stands and walks to a small bar in the corner -- pours them both a drink.

CORA (CONT'D)

No more distractions. Just you and me and whole new bunch of stories.

She spins about, her eyes twinkling with excitement. She crosses the room and hands him his drink. He takes it and downs it. Smiles.

CORA (CONT'D)

Someone's thirsty.

CONRAD

You have no idea. You taught me that, you know? To never be truly satisfied.

CORA

But we are now. Look at us! We're the happy ending.

CONRAD

Yes. We are.

She downs her drink, turns her back to him and pours herself another.

Why not? It's a celebration!

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Just one detail.

CORA

What's that?

She swivels about, a huge smile on her face as Conrad wraps the white scarf about her neck...and tightens it.

CONRAD

One tiny, little detail.

Cora drops her glass -- is SHATTERS.

Her fingers fumble with the scarf -- she can't get her hands under it. Conrad's face is dark, twisted and set.

She falls to the ground. Conrad follows her down down down.

Her eyes bug open -- wider and wider -- Conrad tightens his grip on the scarf.

Cora's feet kick and kick in a strange, frantic and jarring way. Her nightgown opens, revealing her bare breasts.

CORA

I... I...

Conrad yanks harder on the cloth until a final gasp of breath slithers out of her mouth.

CONRAD

I love you, Mother.

She's dead.

Conrad stares down at her for a beat. At her lifeless body, her wide eyes. He closes her dressing gown. Stands.

He turns and looks at his reflection in the paneled mirrors and stares at himself for a moment.

All three versions of him.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Conrad walks across the shadowed living room to the copy of Black Angel he looked at earlier.

The fire CRACKLES in the background.

He opens the book to the first page and reads aloud:

CONRAD

*"For he knew in his broken heart
he'd never be free of her, free of
her grip about his pale, tenuous
heart. Her blood was his blood; her
will was his will.*

(MORE)

CONRAD (CONT'D)

No matter how far he would go in this world, and no matter how he would try to escape, she was his Black Angel, and he was hers and no force on this planet would ever free him."

He rips the page out of the book. Pours himself a very big glass of whiskey, walks over to the fire and throws the paper inside.

He watches it burn. The flames tease and lick his content and peaceful face.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Fuck you.

Slams back his drink and throws the glass into the fire.

A huge flame erupts inside the fireplace.

Conrad smiles a smile of true and resounding satisfaction.

SLAM TO BLACK

ROLL CREDITS*

*As they do, we hear the sound of Conrad's Underwood typing away.