

Rum House
by
Michael Sieve



m@rumhouse.net
160 Charles Ave
Shreveport, La. 71105
318.382.5082
Registered WGA #1628205

FADE IN:

EXT. LIQUOR STORE - EARLY EVENING

Establishing shot of a neighborhood liquor store.

CUT TO:

INT: LIQUOR STORE - EARLY EVENING

Sydney Carton, a modestly attractive 30-something, enters the store and approaches the **cashier**. He asks a quick question and is answered with a pointed finger. Sydney walks in the direction and disappears from the view of the cashier. He approaches and studies the shelves of rum. As he looks on, a voice booms from the direction of the front door.

THIEF 1: (O.S.)
Get down on the floor! Everyone!
Down! Now

There is heard a yelp from the fat lady at the counter and then the voice of another masked man. Sydney remains oblivious, as though deaf.

THIEF 2: (O.S.)
ON! THE FLOOR! NOW!

CUT TO:

INT. LIQUOR STORE, FRONT - CONTINUOUS

The **masked thieves** are orchestrating their heist. By the beer aisle a parrot-head flings himself to the floor with his hands behind his head. The cashier takes a knee.

THIEF 1:
Don't even look my way. Everyone
just shut the hell up and stay down
on the ground! No one moves, no one
dies!

The second thief puts the barrel of his shotgun over the counter, pointing now at the cashier.

THIEF 2:
You! Get up! Open the register.
NOW!

CUT TO:

INT. LIQUOR STORE, BACK - CONTINUOUS

Sydney finds his bottle of Old New Orleans and begins his walk back to the cashier. He comes into view of the robbery in progress.

THIEF 1:
(to Sydney)
What th...Where the fuck do you
think you're going?!? Get down on
the goddamn floor! NOW!

Sydney continues his approach to the counter. The cashier looks on in disbelief. The other patrons remain prostrate, nervous.

THIEF 2:
Mother! Fucker! Are you fucking
kidding me!

THIEF 1:
Get! The fuck! Down!

The second thief trains the weapon on Sydney as he arrives at the counter. He is almost convulsing with frustration.

THIEF 1:
You death-wish having son of a
bitch!

THIEF 2:
I'm gonna blast your fucking head
clear off your goddamn shoulders!

Sydney lays down a twenty dollar bill, ignoring the thieves entirely.

SYDNEY:
(to cashier)
Long day, huh?

CASHIER:
(wide-eyed)
Um...yeh.

Sydney then looks to the second thief who has the barrel of the gun directly to his head. What follows is a very daunting silence. The disbelieving thieves are now both shaking, clearly on the verge of some desperate act.

CUT TO:

EXT. LIQUOR STORE - CONTINUING

Sydney leaves the store with his bottle of Old New Orleans in hand.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
People just don't mean what they
say anymore.

FADE OUT.

EXT. SYDNEY'S HOUSE - CONTINUING

Establishing shot of a simple, one story red brick home. Sydney is approaching the front door with bottle in hand and stops to collect the mail.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
You might call it a death wish. I
might agree, except for the fact
that I don't have so much energy as
all that...

He pulls out a number of circulars and one large brown envelope. Sydney is at first surprised to see the envelope. His surprise then fades to acceptance.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
...to go about wishing for
something so mundane as death...

CUT TO:

INT. SYDNEY'S FRONT ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Sydney is at his dinner table. He examines the brown envelope, notes the stamp "Return to Sender". Beneath it and next to the addressee "Julie Thomas" is scribbled by hand, "no longer at this address".

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
I suppose I would call it...a
greatly diminished life wish.

Sydney places the letter onto the dinner table and steps away. He then turns around to look at it once more.

CUT TO:

EXT. SYDNEY'S BACKYARD - EVENING

Establishing shot of a small tropical paradise, a sort of

sanctuary. Palms and roses, a small in ground pool, a lazy dog stretched out nearby, the bistro chair and table setting with an uncorked bottle of Old New Orleans Rum and a half empty glass. It is here we find Sydney in thought.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

Still, there is a peculiar ease to it all, to the quiet end of this greatly diminished life. A liberating sort of bliss. Like it was in the beginning, I suppose. Like it was when the world came to me, perhaps as it first came to you, at such a sleepy pace.

Sydney tops off his drink and then pours a one count on to the ground at his feet. The dog steps up to the puddle of rum and takes a drink.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

That disjointed years-long stretch we think to call innocence. The wonder years of our youth when life was so chock-full of it's panicky little charms. When beautiful meant kind. When love meant...well, love.

Sydney reaches for an old straw hat on the table and puts it on. The dog looks on.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

It's that intractable second act that mucks it all up, that wayward space in the middle when all the gears of life are spinning hard and the whole of the world is tossing wrenches. All of those silly people running about, asking you to buy them a drink, asking you to dance, asking you to tell them that you love them. It just all seems so...desperate from this distance.

A number of empty bottles are scattered about the yard. Another bottle goes about its laps in the pool. Still, another is tipped over in a nearby bird bath.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

It wasn't always like this. There were people. Or, at least the pretense of people. They remain, I suppose, in some ethereal sense. Faces in the mist.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SYDNEY'S BACKYARD, FLASHBACK - NIGHT

A small crowd is among the palms, laughing, dancing around the pool. Tiki torches are blazing. Music is playing. People are hugging Sydney. Some with phones are taking pictures.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

A ghost in the palms.

Julie, a petite woman of 40, walks between two palms, smiling.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

Julie. Smiling as though it was what she was born to do and only here among the fronds.

Julie steps to the pool and mingles happily with the others. She turns about and looks sweetly to Sydney.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

I remember so clearly this music, this song of laughter weighted somewhere in the mix, a thing so rich and thick you could reach up and just snap it from the air.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SYDNEY'S BACKYARD, PRESENT - EVENING

Comparatively, the yard is now eerily quiet. Sydney stands at the head of the pool, lost in thought.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

It's a hell of a thing to miss, a thing like that. And it all zips about my head like some blood-thirsty bug that, for all the world before it, can find only me to torment. And so, I can't help myself. I can't help but swat away at those suddenly remembered days and nights and weeks and months and wonder. And what I wonder is this: Where does time go when you're a we? Why won't it go now that I'm not?

The dog comes to his feet clamoring for attention. Sydney eases a hand to her and gives her a pat.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

As Al Camus once said, "a newly dead man and the show begins at last."

SECRETARY: (O.S.)

Sydney?

Sydney looks to the camera, as though he has just heard the call of his name. It is the same face that he offered to the gunman. Broken. Indifferent.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DOCTOR FRANK'S WAITING ROOM - NOON

The background of Sydney's yard dissolves to a doctor's office. Sydney sits before a table of dated magazines.

CUT TO:

INT. DOCTOR FRANK'S WAITING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

An overly happy **secretary** puts her head through a sliding glass window.

SECRETARY:

Sydney? Dr. Frank is ready for you.

Sydney stares blankly in return.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

Ready. For me. Such an unfeeling string of words.

CUT TO:

INT. DOCTOR FRANK'S OFFICE - CONTINUING

Dr. Frank is a very unfit man of 50. The two make some quick, polite exchanges. Dr. Frank reaches for a pad of paper and a pen.

DR. FRANK:

So, Sydney, how are you doing?

SYDNEY:

All is well.

DR. FRANK
Is it? Well, that's good to hear.
And how is the drinking?

SYDNEY:
(plainly but with
sarcasm)
It's fantastic!

Dr. Frank frowns on the sarcasm, makes a quick note.

DR. FRANK:
I take that to mean that you
haven't contacted Jim at A.A.?

SYDNEY:
No. I have not.

DR. FRANK:
And why is that?

SYDNEY:
I liken the idea to diving ass
first into an unending volcanic
river of rusty razor wire. Also,
I'm not an alcoholic.

Another frown as Dr. Frank jots down another note.

DR. FRANK:
Spoken like a true alcoholic. And
the job hunt?

Sydney looks away, displeased.

SYDNEY:
(again with sarcasm)
Egg-sausting!

Dr. Frank comments as he writes.

DR. FRANK:
Still...not...working. Don't you
think it's time to really put some
effort into this?

SYDNEY:
You know precisely why I'm here, so
why do you ask questions like that?

DR. FRANK:
Because it's my job to ask
questions like that.

Sydney says nothing to this. Doctor Frank sighs, lowers his pad and pen.

DR. FRANK:
Have you at least left your home?
Have you gone *anywhere* this week?

SYDNEY:
You mean other than coming here.

DR. FRANK:
Yes, Sydney, other than here.

SYDNEY:
Point being?

DR. FRANK:
The point being that no man is an island. We are social animals, Syd. It would do you some serious good to...get out. To interact.

SYDNEY:
Good for who?

DR. FRANK:
Well, you, of course.

Sydney is suddenly fidgety.

DR. FRANK:
Yes?

SYDNEY:
Well, yeh, I did go out. I went to the George and Vulture.

DR. FRANK:
Very good. Of course I don't condone drinking and driving or drinking in general, especially in your case but, well, this is a good step. Did you...did you meet anyone, talk to anyone?

QUICK CUT TO:

INT. THE GEORGE AND VULTURE PIANO BAR, FLASHBACK - EARLY EVENING

A slow motion capture of **Miranda**, of her eyes, of her smile, a woman of a simple but genuine warmth and beauty.

QUICK CUT TO:

INT. DR. FRANK'S OFFICE - CONTINUING

SYDNEY:

No. Nothing to report.

Sydney and Dr. Frank share a lengthy glance. Dr. Frank wins out.

SYDNEY:

Ok, so, well, lets say that I did meet someone, let's say...a woman. What then?

DR. FRANK:

Well, Syd, I think you're old enough to know how it goes from there.

SYDNEY:

(plainly enunciating)

That is not...what I'm talking about.

DR. FRANK:

Yes, I know, Syd, but you need to put yourself out there. You have this tendency to let your spirit atrophy. Don't let some misunderstanding from your past be a barrier to your future.

Sydney takes in the office decor, the framed degrees and the cluttered desk.

SYDNEY:

It's not just some misunderstanding. There's a very certain stigma that comes along with this sort of thing.

DR. FRANK:

I understand it fine...

SYDNEY:

No, you don't. You're not within a thousand miles of understanding this thing.

Doctor Frank offers a sympathetic glance.

DR. FRANK:
Look, I have said it before and I
will say it again. Do **not** let this
thing define you.

SYDNEY:
A hundred! Thousand! miles.

DR. FRANK:
You are not that guy, Syd...

SYDNEY:
(plainly)
It doesn't matter if I am or not.

DR. FRANK:
It matters a great deal. Why would
you even say that?

SYDNEY:
Because. It. Doesn't. Matter.

Dr. Frank lowers his head for a moment and then tries
again.

DR. FRANK:
Syd, I am trying to help you...

SYDNEY:
Agreed.

DR. FRANK:
So, why must you be so litigious?

Sydney smiles.

SYDNEY:
Well, it's my job to be litigious.

Dr. Frank leans back, displeased.

DR. FRANK:
Syd, don't throw my words back at
me like th...

SYDNEY: (interrupting)
Litigious? Really? You toss out a
verbal hand grenade like litigious
and expect me to just fall on it!?

DR. FRANK:
All I am trying to say is that for
once in your life you should stop

forsaking yourself to the presumptions of others. Stop saying it doesn't matter when you know deep down in your heart that it matters above all else.

A beat.

SYDNEY:

All right. So it matters. So I'm not that guy. But who cares? It won't change anything. Meeting someone...won't change anything...

Dr. Frank writes on his pad and then looks up.

DR. FRANK:

Syd, trust me. No one cares as much about this as you. You're far more fixated on your past than anyone else will ever be.

SYDNEY:

I would hardly call it a fixation.

DR. FRANK:

Well, I am dying to know, Syd. What would you call it?

SYDNEY:

Well, I don't mean to be litigious and all but I call it the rest of my life.

Doctor Frank puts down his pen, affected by this choice of words.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

But I did meet someone that night. Someone...wonderful...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE GEORGE AND VULTURE, FLASHBACK - EARLY EVENING

Establishing shot of an upscale venue with valet parking.

CUT TO:

INT. THE GEORGE AND VULTURE - CONTINUOUS

Sydney sits quietly at the end of the bar. **Bree**, an

attractive and smartly dressed bartender in her mid 20's, serves him his glass of rum.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
Not her, although Bree
is...exceptional.

Sydney looks around the u-shaped piano bar. Across from him an attractive woman sits with a group of friends. She looks right at him, smiling.

BREE:
That's your move, cowboy.

Sydney does nothing. He sips from his glass, looks back to the woman and then to Bree and then, again, to his rum.

SYDNEY:
So kind of you to think that I
might even have a move.

BREE:
Well, you better think one up.

SYDNEY:
I think I'll stick to my usual m.o.

BREE:
(with a chuckle)
Which is...?

SYDNEY:
Say nothing. Do nothing.

BREE:
Genius.

The woman grabs her drink and walks toward him.

SYDNEY:
Fuck.

Bree smiles and steps away. The woman approaches and takes the empty bar stool next to Sydney. After an awkward pause, she introduces herself.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
(in sync with her lips)
Miranda.

A QUICK MONTAGE AS THE PIANO MUSIC PLAYS. SYD LIGHTENS UP AS THEIR DIALOG CONTINUES. MIRANDA LAUGHS AND FLIRTS AND DRAWS HIM IN.

Miranda leans in a little closer.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
 (in sync with her lips)
 So what do you do?

Sydney's grip on his glass of rum tightens. He says nothing. Miranda, though, is quick to pick up the conversation. She places her hand on his. Nervously he removes his hand from hers. Sydney's expressions vary between pleased to something near terrified.

Sydney checks his watch and signals Bree to close his tab. Miranda's smile lessens. She pulls a pen from her purse and writes her number on a cocktail napkin, takes hold of her drink and walks away. Bree approaches with his credit card and receipt.

BREE:
 She likes you.

SYDNEY:
 (plainly)
 I guess it can't be helped.

BREE:
 You gonna call her?

Sydney sorts through the receipts, signs his tab, stands up and leaves the bar without a word.

As Bree cleans up after him, she spots Miranda's cocktail napkin precisely where it was left, abandoned to the whim of the bar.

FADE OUT.

EXT. KIRKLAND'S GROCERY STORE - AFTERNOON

Establishing shot of a neighborhood grocery store.

CUT TO:

INT. GROCERY STORE - CONTINUOUS

Sydney enters the grocery store, looks for and finds a cart and immediately begins his shopping.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
 The biggest fight I ever had with a woman involved shopping. Julie snapped at me because I didn't take

it seriously. To this day I am not sure what that means. It's odd the things we choose to argue about but, in a way, it makes a bit of sense.

Sydney moves down the aisles, grabbing precisely what he needs.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

It's a gender thing, obviously. And, if you think about it, it says a lot about who we are, about men, about women.

Sydney turns into the soup aisle and spots a middle-aged woman at the far end, over-thinking a can of soup.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

A woman is a diligent shopper. She will study every bag, every can. She will scrutinize volumes of coupons and advertisements. She will study, entirely, her purchase as though what is being considered is the next great love of her life.

As Sydney approaches, the woman puts down the can and vacates the aisle. Sydney continues shopping.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

For men shopping is a directive. It's something that is done more out of a need than a want and the general thought is to do it with maximum efficiency, to complete the task quickly and with as little thought as possible, as though what is being considered might...well, might also be the next great love of his life.

Sydney reaches blindly for a few cans of soup and tosses them into the cart.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

Somewhere in the middle is where it ought to be but, of course, never is. Because the middle is...well, it's no longer there.

Sydney turns into another aisle as another person steps from sight.

CUT TO:

INT. GROCERY STORE, OVERHEAD SHOT - CONTINUOUS

Another aisle, the same thing. No matter what aisle Sydney is in the aisle clears. Someone is always walking away from him.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

Here we find the universe put together under a single roof, a microcosm of all of our wants and needs, shelved and waiting. When we are in a place like this, we're different. We're not caught up in all our usual acts.

CUT TO:

INT. GROCERY STORE, AISLE - CONTINUOUS

Another aisle. Sydney makes a turn and, at the last second, yanks his cart aside so as to avoid running into someone. The **woman**, in her mid thirties, is casually dressed with dark, untamed curls.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

And I guess that's why shopping is so good for the soul. We are who we are. When we shop. Once in awhile that can be a scary thing.

QUICK CUT TO:

INT. TOY STORE OPENING ON BLACK FRIDAY - VERY EARLY MORNING

A crowd of people charge through the doors with crazed abandon, mowing one another down as they begin their lustful race to the aisles.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

But most days...It's ok.

QUICK CUT TO:

INT. GROCERY STORE - CONTINUING

The dark-haired woman looks up at Sydney and offers a gentle smile. Sydney is clearly affected.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
I could've sworn I saw you today.

CUT TO:

INT. SYDNEY'S KITCHEN - LATER

Sydney unpacks his groceries as the dialog between him and **Amy** is overheard. It is implied the two are on a phone call, though Sydney is never seen on a phone.

AMY: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
Me? You mean someone like
me?

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GROCERY STORE CHECK OUT LANE, FLASHBACK

Sydney watches the woman at the check out counter next to him, looking on as each item is scanned.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
Yes, Amy. Someone like you.

AMY: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
I see. Well, she must have been
gorgeous!

There is a fast smile in Sydney's voice.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
She was. She had that chaotic hair
of yours, those crazy black curls
that shoot off in a thousand
directions. She had your taste in
wine.

Sydney watches a bottle of Pinot Grigio go across the scanner.

CUT TO:

EXT. GROCERY STORE PARKING LOT - CONTINUING

Sydney puts his groceries into his car as the woman walks by.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
And perfume.

AMY: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
Wow, Syd. Stalk much!? What else?

The woman reaches her car, a few down from Sydney, and looks back to him for a moment.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
She had your eyes.

AMY: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
Like mine? You mean the same color?

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
Yeh. Same...kindness.

AMY: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
Is kindness a color?

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
(softly, stoically)
Yes.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SYDNEY'S KITCHEN, PRESENT - CONTINUING

Sydney is done putting up his groceries. He throws away the grocery store sacks.

AMY: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
I see. So, did you talk to her.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
No.

AMY: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
Well, that's just stupid. You could have at least said hi.

CUT TO:

INT. SUN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sydney sees Julie's returned letter. He picks it up with a

thought on throwing it away but only ends up moving it closer to the trash can. He leaves it on the bar.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
I think I would have had to say considerably more than that.

AMY: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
You know what I mean...

Sydney looks to the back yard. The dog is on the other side of the window looking in, tail wagging. There is an awkward lull in the conversation.

AMY: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
Ok. Look, I miss you, too. We just have this...distance between us. We'll adapt. We always did.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
You always did.

AMY: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
Syd, seriously, if you don't go out and get laid, I'll come back there and kill you myself.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
Ummm, ok. Thats just a weird thing to say. And you know that's not what this is about.

AMY: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
I know. But, It's time for you to do some adapting, yourself.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
Yeh, I tried that once.

QUICK CUT TO:

INT. SYDNEY'S SUN ROOM, FLASHBACK

A computer monitor's glow lights a darkened room. On screen we see the start of a some sort of sexual chat. Sydney in silhouette stares blindly at a blinking cursor.

QUICK CUT TO:

INT. SYDNEY'S SUN ROOM, PRESENT - CONTINUING

Sydney is at the bar pouring a drink.

AMY: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
That wasn't your fault...

SYDNEY: (O.S.)
It was sorta my fault.

AMY: (O.S.)
(over phone, filtered)
Stop it! We're not talking about
that.

SYDNEY: (O.S.)
Ok.

Sydney hears a knock at the front door.

CUT TO:

EXT. SYDNEY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

A plain clothed **police officer** is at Sydney's front door. The only clue to his identity is the holstered 9mm on his hip. Sydney opens the door with drink in hand. A muted dialog ensues between them.

AMY: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
Look, just...do something. Ok?
Next time we talk, you better have
something fantastic to tell me.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
I might have to make it up.

AMY: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
Jesus, Syd, just go somewhere. Do
something. See someone. Seriously,
you're starting to piss me off.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
I'm not really up for-

AMY: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
Go! Go to where we met. You used to
love that place.

The officer shakes Sydney's hand and leaves Sydney standing alone in his doorway.

FADE OUT.

EXT. THE CUB - EARLY EVENING

Establishing shot of an unimpressive single story structure. A number of patrons sit outside on the patio.

CUT TO:

EXT. SIGN NEAR DOORWAY - CONTINUOUS

A sign on the exterior wall reads "Air-conditions since 1939"

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
Also, misspelled since 1939.

CUT TO:

INT. SYDNEY'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Sydney stares at the sign from the driver's seat.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
We met here. On her birthday. 10 years ago. Yeh, I guess I used to love this place. A lot of places, actually. Nearly every one I've ever known I met in a place like this. Including her. Thankfully her.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE CUB - CONTINUING

Sydney stands hesitantly before the front door. The door to The Cub opens. A couple walks out, the girlfriend clearly inebriated. Sydney steps into the bar and pulls up a barstool.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
Obviously, Amy was the exception to the rule. With a good deal of regularity, I met other people, people like...Beth, something or

other.

Beth, 26, appears next to him now, suddenly an active part of his memory. She smiles as she takes a shot, chases it with a glass of wine.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

Did she even tell me her last name?
She was a nurse. Funny, the things
you remember. And the things you
don't.

Beth turns to Sydney.

BETH:

My name was Beth.

SYDNEY:

But you never told me your last
name.

BETH:

As if you'd even remember that.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

But I do remember it was Beth who
offered to show me her breasts. Not
because I asked or even cared to
see them. Well, I suppose it might
be a lie to suggest that I didn't
care but the point is...

Beth lifts her blouse, much to the amusement of herself and the patrons around her.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

There they were. And it wasn't even
Mardi Gras. That's the funny thing
about nudity these days. You don't
even have to ask for it anymore.
It's just...there.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MARTINI'S BAR, FLASHBACK - NIGHT

Establishing shot of Martini's, another neighborhood pub of no particular wonder.

CUT TO:

INT. MARTINI'S - CONTINUOUS

Sydney sits with **two female patrons** at the end of the smoke-filled bar. A jukebox drones on.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

A slow night at Martini's took the thing to a whole new level. Here I met with two women.

The younger, attractive woman and the older fit woman are clearly drunk. The elder flirts with the **bartender** as she downs a tequila shot. The memory of the younger closes in on Sydney.

YOUNGER WOMAN:

You don't even remember my name, do you?

SYDNEY:

(sips from his glass)
What I remember is that you didn't tell me.

The younger woman smiles, steps up onto the bar. The other climbs up and joins her.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

This was back in the day when the thought of two women stripping on top of a bar was thought to be, to some degree, risqué.

The two women are now dancing very suggestively.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

Back in the day when the mere idea of a mother stripping down her own daughter was considered quite a bit more than perverse.

YOUNGER WOMAN:

(to Sydney)
Come on sweetie. Don't get all shy on us now.

Sydney looks away, clearly uncomfortable, as the two women begin to undress one another. The bartender steps forward with an old VHS camera in hand.

BARTENDER:

Holy crap! I can't believe this is happening to me!

SYDNEY:

To you? You think this is happening to you?

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

Before the days of instant messaging and texting and sexting and, well, anything that involved the Internet. Or that damnable enter key and all the culture changing ramifications that came along with it.

CUT TO:

EXT. MARTINI'S - CONTINUING

Sydney walks out the front door, stops to consider what he just saw.

SYDNEY:

What...the...fu...!

CUT TO:

EXT. THE KILLER POODLE, FLASHBACK - NIGHT

Establishing shot of yet another neighborhood pub housed in a common building.

CUT TO:

INT. THE KILLER POODLE - CONTINUOUS

Sydney sits at the end of the bar, chatting it up with **Phoebe**, an attractive server.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

I met Phoebe at the Killer Poodle, a bar every bit as unfortunate as its name. I bought her all the usual drinks, made her laugh all the usual laughs. She babbled on and on about how she was once in Playboy, some "girls of college" amateur thing.

Phoebe enacts a quick pose of sorts, grabs her chest suggestively.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

She was a train wreck, but she was a beautiful train wreck. We stayed late. Closed the place down. She asked me to drive her home.

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTSIDE PHOEBE'S HOME - CONTINUING

Establishing shot of a single story residence in a lower-middle income neighborhood. Sydney's car pulls up beneath the street light. Phoebe is in the passenger seat.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Phoebe leans in, gives Sydney a good bye kiss. She undoes her seatbelt and climbs toward Sydney. In a moment she is almost on top of him. Sydney remains pinned in place by his seat belt, giving the whole affair a rather comical look.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

By then, she was just the train wreck.

PHOEBE:

(provocatively)

Fuck me.

SYDNEY:

Wh...? Y-You mean...here? Now?

PHOEBE:

Yes. Here. Now.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

(in sync with Phoebe's lips)

"We can't go in the house", she says. "My brothers almost shot the last guy I brought home", she says. "We can have sex in the hedges next to the air conditioning unit, by my bedroom", she says. "And the hum will drown out the noise."

Sydney's eyes widen. Phoebe kisses him again, but he is no longer kissing her back.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

I have a thousand of these stories. Some less memorable than others but they all end the same. Without

really beginning.

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTSIDE PHOEBE'S HOME - CONTINUING

Sydney drives away from a clearly confused Phoebe.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE CUB, PRESENT - CONTINUING

Sydney shakes off the memories. He looks around the bar. Beth is no longer beside him. The place is more run down than he remembers.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

Yeh, I guess I used to love this place.

An attractive **bartender** steps up to take his order.

BARTENDER:

What'll it be?

SYDNEY:

You got any Old New Orleans.

BARTENDER:

Sure sweetie.

SYDNEY:

Straight up.

BARTENDER:

You got it.

CUT TO:

EXT. SYDNEY'S DRIVEWAY - LATER THAT NIGHT

As Sydney pulls into his driveway he can't help but notice a burning cross ablaze in his front yard. At the corner stop sign a beat up pick up truck is seen and heard, racing away from the scene.

CUT TO:

INT. SYDNEY'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

As Sydney parks the car he notes the words "Leave or Die!" spray-painted across the garage door. He turns off the radio and looks back to the cross, curiously unaffected.

CUT TO:

INT. SYDNEY'S KITCHEN - CONTINUING

Sydney rifles through the kitchen, searching earnestly for something. He finds it; a set of long picnic roasting forks. Exiting the kitchen he grabs from the cupboard a bag of marshmallows.

CUT TO:

EXT. SYDNEY'S FRONT YARD - CONTINUING

Sydney sits on a lawn chair, roasting marshmallows over the flames of the 5 foot tall burning cross. The rest of the street is shining with the warmth of Christmas lights. From the house next door **Therese**, a young girl of about 14 steps from the shadows.

THERESE:

Hi.

Sydney offers no reply. Therese is wide-eyed, both amused by and afraid of the spectacle before her.

THERESE:

Did you...did you see who did it?

SYDNEY:

Does it matter?

She looks to the fire and then back to Sydney.

THERESE:

No. I guess not. Are you...afraid?

SYDNEY:

Only when I can't laugh.

THERESE:

(confused)

O...k...So, are you laughing now?

Sydney looks briefly to the girl and then to the carport next door. The driveway is empty. The house is mostly dark.

He turns back to his roast. In a moment he realizes that she is still staring.

SYDNEY:
Theresa, is it?

THERESE:
Therese.

SYDNEY:
Where are your parents, Therese?

THERESE:
It's their anniversary. They're out of town for the night.

SYDNEY:
I see.

Sydney pulls the fork from the fire and points it at Therese, allowing her the roasted marshmallow. She takes it and eats it and offers up a smile. Sydney, however, keeps his focus on the flames.

SYDNEY:
Good night, Therese.

Therese's smile fades. She steps away, quietly walks back to her home. Sydney reaches for another marshmallow and begins again. The flames from the cross begin to weaken. The fire is already dying out. In a moment the flame is gone.

SYDNEY:
Amateurs.

FADE OUT.

INT. SYDNEY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Sydney is just waking up, hungover. He steps from his bed, grabs his straw hat and unlocks the lock on his bedroom door.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The dog waits for him on her bed in the hallway.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

There is a point I would like to make and please, if you don't mind, I prefer to oversell it. I hate mornings. Seriously. I despise every minute of a morning. Why? Well, It's just so hard to pin down an exact reason when there are so damn many to choose from.

The dog is ecstatic for morning. Somewhere from the bedroom an alarm clock goes off. Sydney ignores it and walks on down the hall.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

Alarm clocks, for starters. And don't even try to bullshit me on this one. All of the world hates an alarm clock. It's whole function is to make as much noise as possible at all of the very worst hours of the day.

CUT TO:

INT. SUN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sydney walks the dog through the sun room to the backyard door and watches as she leaps from the house into the new day. He makes his way to the kitchen and opens the fridge.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

Coffee. Eggs. Bacon. Killers, all. Traffic. School zones. Morning show deejays. Good Morning America. The Today Show. Regis and Kelly. Kelly and who gives a shit. Christ, it just goes on and on and on. Shiny. Happy. People. Gibberish. Gibberish. Gibberish.

Sydney reaches for some orange juice, takes a gulp from the container. He turns to face the stove clock. It reads 12:22.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

Life begins at noon, thats my motto. I love the smell of sleep in the morning. Think not is my eleventh commandment; and sleep when you can is my twelfth. Melville said that and a good many folk considered him a right smart

whale hunter.

Sydney breaks out a frying pan and grabs some eggs from the fridge. He begins to prepare his brunch.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

One time I had a job working afternoons. Eleven to seven. God, I loved that job. And I was good at it. And I loved being good at it. In fact, I was so damn good at it that I got promoted. To mornings.

Sydney cracks an egg and pours it into the skillet.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

Fucking hate mornings.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR, BMW M3 - AFTERNOON

The camera takes in the smooth interior lines of this high end import as we hear the young, overly prepared **salesman's** voice, spouting out his pitch.

SALESMAN:

Electronic brake distribution. Electronic traction control. And, of course, the famous M sport suspension system. All wrapped around pure street muscle. 4.0 Liter V8. 450 horses.

Sydney is in the driver's seat, well dressed for the occasion.

SALESMAN:

One of the finest interiors on the market. All the bells and whistles, of course. The finest appointed leather...

SYDNEY:

What exactly is "appointed" leather?

The salesman holds his smile but is clearly halted by the question.

SALESMAN:

I...I'm not...I don't actually...

SYDNEY:

I see...

SALESMAN:

But I do know this. She hit's 60 at
4 and a half seconds. A hundred in
less than 10.

SYDNEY:

(intrigued)

You don't say...

SALESMAN:

Oh, but I do sa...

The light turns green. Sydney grabs the manual shift,
punches the gas. The M3 bolts forward. The salesman is
visibly thrown back into the passenger seat.

SALESMAN:

Shiiiiiiiiii....

The roar of the hard pressing V8 drowns him out.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

The black coupe accelerates at a breakneck speed.

CUT TO:

INT. BMW M3 - CONTINUOUS

The tach hits the red line. Sydney shifts to second and the
engine responds. The salesman looks ahead and a fast panic
crosses his face.

SALESMAN:

(pointing ahead,
stuttering)

I...I...I...the...the...

The engine red lines again. Sydney slams it into third gear
as the speedometer hits 100mph.

SYDNEY:

How 'bout that...

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

The Beemer takes to the highway shoulder as it comes into traffic. It pushes with ease past a number of cars. Up ahead another highway intersects. A number of cars idle at the red light.

CUT TO:

INT. BMW - CONTINUOUS

Sydney is unfazed. The salesman, however, is terrified.

SALESMAN:
(stuttering still)
The...the...the...

SYDNEY:
Yep.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

The BMW decelerates as it turns right to enter the merging lane. The car leans hard into the turn.

CUT TO:

INT. BMW - CONTINUOUS

The salesman is nearing a breakdown.

SALESMAN:
I...I...I...I...wh...wh...wh...

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY, MERGING LANE - CONTINUOUS

The BMW is on the verge of a slide as it begins its exit from the merging lane. The highway ahead is straightening.

CUT TO:

INT. BMW - CONTINUOUS

Sydney downshifts and powers the car out of the turn and

onto the coming highway. The BMW responds and again throws the stammering salesman back into his seat.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

The BMW is racing now, zipping from lane to lane until it finds the shoulder once more. Up ahead there is seen a break in the median allowing for a u-turn.

CUT TO:

INT. BMW - CONTINUOUS

Sydney's composure remains in direct contrast with the salesman's. It is clear the two are on different rides.

SYDNEY:

Electronic brake distribution and
what was it...?

SALESMAN:

Tra...tra...traction control...

SYDNEY:

Sounds cool.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY, U-TURN - CONTINUOUS

Sydney decelerates then pulls up the emergency brake and slides the BMW around, through the u-turn, facing, now the opposite direction. The car comes to a screeching stop.

CUT TO:

INT. BMW - CONTINUOUS

The salesman looks to Syd with a mix of awe and outright fear.

SYDNEY:

The M Sport suspension system?

SALESMAN:

Y...y...yeh...

SYDNEY:

Not bad.

The salesman sits upright, begins to re-compose himself.

SALESMAN:

God damn right, not bad! What'd I
tell you about th...

Sydney slams the car into first, guns the gas and lets up quickly on the clutch. The salesman is again jolted backwards.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY, U TURN - CONTINUOUS

A fast cloud of smoke pours from the tires as the BMW launches again, heading back in the direction from which it came.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY, OVERHEAD - CONTINUOUS

The Beemer hurls itself down the highway once more.

CUT TO:

EXT. DEALERSHIP PARKING LOT - CONTINUING

The car whips into the parking lot and is brought to a screeching halt.

CUT TO:

INT. BMW - CONTINUOUS

Sydney is perfectly satisfied. The terrified salesman offers a smile that comes across more as a whimper.

SYDNEY:

You have a card?

SALESMAN:

(still skittish)
Yeh...yeh, I...I got that.

The salesman pulls a business card from his wallet and

hands it to Sydney. His hand is visibly shaking.

SYDNEY:

Cool. I'll have my people call
you...

Sydney exits the vehicle. The salesman, finally alone,
pulls his cell phone from his pocket and frantically dials.

SALESMAN:

(almost to tears)
Hi honey. It's...It's me. I...I
just wanted to say that I...I love
you...

CUT TO:

INT. SYDNEY'S CAR - CONTINUING

Sydney holds up the card, reading it as he starts his car.
He buckles his seat belt and then opens the glove
compartment where we see a scattering of business cards
from a variety of dealerships. Sydney tosses this new card
onto the pile. He closes the compartment door and puts the
car into gear.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. SYDNEY'S SPARE BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

Sydney rifles through a closet and extracts a small box
filled with letters. And a picture.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

Lately, I've been thinking a lot
about Lydia. Far more than I ever
did when I actually knew her,
which, at the time, was quite a
bit.

Sydney reaches for the picture. It is of a thin woman in
her late 20's with a lively smile.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

And what I find most astonishing of
all is that I ever stopped thinking
about her to begin with.

Sydney stares intently at the picture of **Lydia**.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

But I did.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM, FLASHBACK - DAYTIME

Lydia is lying on a couch, her head resting in Sydney's lap. She looks up at him, talking inaudibly, laughing. He looks down on her, clearly comforted by her.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

There were these lazy afternoons between us. I remember one so clearly, more than the others. I was so in love with everything about that moment, with her. And, out of the blue I just asked...

SYDNEY:

Will you sleep with me?

Lydia looks away. Her smile fades.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

I've always had this very confusing sort of testosterone. Willing, of course, but in no way smart about it. To the point, whereas I might want a certain woman, there is no way of telling her...

Lydia's smile returns, followed by a hearty laugh.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

And whereas a certain woman might want me, there is no way of me being told. Just once I wanted to try the direct approach.

Lydia turns back now to Sydney, looks up to him with wide open eyes and a word on her lips.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

It's only too easy to see from here the kind of courage it took for her to not slap me. Or to just laugh out loud and walk away.

And the inaudible word is yes.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

She was pleased, happy even, to say

it because, I guess, she thought it was the answer I wanted. It was. It wasn't.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SYDNEY'S SPARE BEDROOM, PRESENT - CONTINUING

Sydney sits against a wall in the room, staring at her years-old photo.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
But, in the end, it didn't matter.
It never happened. We just...never happened. Strange, how a simple picture can become so haunting.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DEBRA'S KITCHEN, FLASHBACK - NIGHT

Sydney is at a house party, staring at artsy black and white photographs of a topless girl posted on a refrigerator. He looks around the room and finds the woman in the pictures.

INT. DEBRA'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ansley, 22, works the room, socializing. She turns to the kitchen and offers Sydney a wink.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
What followed Lydia was a number of women designed to help me forget Lydia. Women like Ansley.

Ansley sips from her drink, turns back to her party guest.

INT. DEBRA'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

A **jock** steps up and opens the fridge for a beer. As he closes the door he notices the pictures.

JOCK:
Fuckin-A!

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
She also never happened. I can't say I was terribly upset about that.

Ansley steps from the flashback into the kitchen, frowns.

ANSLEY:
But, why weren't you?

SYDNEY:
I suppose it had something to do
with your breasts.

ANSLEY:
Wh-what about them?

Sydney turns back to the growing number of men who are now flocking to the fridge with wide eyes.

SYDNEY:
They lacked...exclusivity.

Confusion first, then shock as Ansley realizes she is being insulted.

ANSLEY:
Fuck you!

Ansley steps back into the living room. Sydney scans the room once more and finds another smile.

INT. DEBRA'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Debra, a serious looking, seriously dressed woman of 22, plays hostess to a number of yuppies. She spots him and sends a quick wiggle of her fingers.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
Then there was Debra, Ansley's roommate. A Volvo-driving, lawyer-wannabee ice queen with the unchallenged claim of being second cousin to some forgotten 80's actress, one of the Facts of Life girls. I liked her. A lot. So, we had that in common.

As Sydney waves back his attention is caught by a nearby strawberry blond sitting casually on an old console t-v. She seems the very opposite of Debra.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
Wendy. She had this thing about sitting on top of old t-vs and saying, "look, I'm on tv".
(critical)Fucking stupid!
(sentimental)Fucking adorable.

Wendy, 21, looks back at him, smiling, turning herself in his direction so as to imply the joke all over again.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
 She was beautiful. She was really into me...for about two weeks. And then, quite suddenly, she was into someone else.

Wendy turns away and flashes a huge smile to some other party guest.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
 Very much to the dismay of her fiancée.

INT. DEBRA'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Tucked away in a corner a stiff and saddened **fiancée** lurks.

INT. DEBRA'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Sydney steps from the kitchen, toward Wendy but then stops.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
 I think I would have been happy with her.

INT. DEBRA'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sydney looks to the front door, sees Lydia enter. She immediately spots him, thinks to look away, then looks back. She is radiant. Sydney can't help but stare.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
 But the problem with thinking...it only takes you so far.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BEACH FRONT, SOME FAR AWAY FUTURE - EARLY EVENING

A mature, middle-aged Lydia dances about the sands, kicking at the incoming waves. She is barefoot, happy. She looks to the camera as though she is waiting...

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
 (nostalgically)
 So far...

FADE OUT.

INT. DR. FRANK'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Sydney is stretched out on the floor before the couch. Dr. Frank is in his usual chair, with his usual pen and pad of paper in hand.

DR. FRANK:
So whens the last time you thought
of Lydia?

SYDNEY:
About ten seconds ago.

DR. FRANK:
(smiles)
You know what I mean.

SYDNEY:
I woke up this morning and there
she was.

DR. FRANK:
And what sort of thoughts were
they.

SYDNEY:
That I don't remember not ever
seeing her again. I don't remember
the last time I saw her.

DR. FRANK:
Have you thought to look her up
online?

SYDNEY:
No.

DR. FRANK:
Why not?

SYDNEY:
I wouldn't know where to start.

DR. FRANK:
It's not that hard to start, Syd.

Sydney says nothing to this.

DR. FRANK:
(sighing in resignation)
This is part of the diagnosis, part
of your issue. You're passive and
avoidant. And you're easily

scared...

SYDNEY:
I'm not that easily scared, doc..

DR. FRANK:
I beg to differ...

SYDNEY:
Beg away.

DR. FRANK:
Look, Syd. It's just a matter of
finding out where she might be,
what she might be doing. What's the
harm in that?

QUICK CUT TO:

INT. SYDNEY'S SUN ROOM, FLASHBACK

The same glowing monitor from earlier. The online chat is
continuing. The same blinking cursor is beckoning...

QUICK CUT TO:

INT. DR. FRANK'S OFFICE - CONTINUING

DR. FRANK:
Well, let's go back a bit and see
what we can find on our own. What
did she study?

SYDNEY:
Aerospace Engineering. She worked
for NASA for awhile. Last I heard
she was at Cape Canaveral.

DR. FRANK:
(impressed)
Well, you do know how to pick 'em.

SYDNEY:
Yeh, I liked that about her, that
she was smart.

Dr. Frank makes a note of this.

DR. FRANK:
Well, this is progress...

SYDNEY:

(with a touch of sarcasm)
Is it? Obsessing over someone I
haven't seen in 15 years? That's
progress?

Dr. Frank raises an eyebrow to the question.

DR. FRANK:

You're taking steps, Syd. And part
of this will involve a lot of self
reflection on past relationships.
So, yes, that is progress.

SYDNEY:

I don't know. I don't like it.

DR. FRANK:

And why is that?

SYDNEY:

(remorsefully)
It feels like...I feel like I'm in
love with her all over again.

DR. FRANK:

When you say "in love", what do you
mean?

SYDNEY:

Well, Jesus, doc. I mean that I
haven't thought of her in over a
decade and all the sudden I'm not
over her. Again. I spent an hour
rummaging through the closet for
her picture, just so I could see
her smile, just to remind myself of
something I had no business
forgetting to begin with.

Sydney turns away. Another beat before Dr. Frank rejoins.

DR. FRANK:

I think It's entirely healthy, this
need to remember. I think it has,
perhaps, placated something you are
in need of forgetting.

SYDNEY:

(nonplussed)
I don't follow.

DR. FRANK:

When was the last time you thought
of Julie?

Sydney is caught off guard by the question.

SYDNEY:
(thinking on it)
I...well, I guess its been
awhile...sort of. I guess...

DR. FRANK:
And what have you done with her
returned letter?

QUICK CUT TO:

INT. SYDNEY'S BAR - CONTINUING

We see Julie's letter on Sydney's bar

QUICK CUT TO:

INT. DR. FRANK'S OFFICE - CONTINUING

Sydney is bothered by this transition. Dr. Frank, however,
cannot help but smile a bit.

SYDNEY:
Nothing. Yet.

DR. FRANK:
What do you plan to do with it?

SYDNEY:
What do I plan? Well, fuck! What
would you have me do with it?

DR. FRANK:
I'd have you throw it away, of
course.

SYDNEY:
Those are the ashes of my only real
relationship, my only...real...

Sydney can't seem to complete the thought.

DR. FRANK:
You're not gonna say love, are you?

SYDNEY:

No. Not love.

Sydney is affected by this admission. He turns away, looks to the floor and repeats to himself.

SYDNEY:
(softly)
Not love.

FADE OUT.

EXT. SYDNEY'S DRIVEWAY - SAME AFTERNOON

Sydney pulls up to the driveway and steps from the car. The vandalized garage door and burnt cross are still visible. He walks to his front door.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
On love. What can be said of it?

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE GEORGE AND VULTURE PIANO BAR, FLASHBACK - NIGHT

A flashback to Miranda's peering, giddy eyes.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
Not nearly enough. But then...
perhaps too much.

Sydney watches the kindness of her eyes, mesmerized, hopeful.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
God knows every poet, philosopher
and pinhead on the planet has tried
to bottle it, to define it and
still no one knows what to make of
it all. It's just there, this
thing, ridiculous in its habit,
carnivorous in its appetite,
everywhere at once. And then, quite
suddenly, nowhere at all.

Miranda's eyes lower. Her image fades.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SYDNEY'S FRONT ROOM, PRESENT - CONTINUING

Sydney is on a couch, holding a book spread open against

his chest. His eyes are closed. A nearby bookshelf is overrun with a number of books.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

Plato called it "a madness, the greatest of heaven's blessings." Russell Baker agrees. And disagrees. "Love is a madness that masquerades under a hundred rational disguises". Which is akin to Bill Goldman's "love is many things, none of them logical". Dumas said "in love it's every man for himself". Capote advised us to "never love a wild thing".

CUT TO:

Sydney stands before his oil portrait of Audrey Hepburn, gawking.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

As if! Pat Benatar calls it a battlefield. Neil Diamond reminds us that love is on the rocks, ain't no big surprise. Def Leppard, "love bites" and a hundred thousand other rock star variations. My favorite, though, comes from the Mississippi mud of Big Bad Bill Faulkner.

CUT TO:

Back to Sydney on the couch. The book he has pressed against him is William Faulkner's "The Sound and the Fury"

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

"Love...is a bond purchased without design and which matures willy-nilly and is recalled without warning to be replaced by whatever issues the gods happen to be floating at the time." Well, it won't fit on any bumper sticker I know of but, Jesus, what a thing to say.

CUT TO:

EXT. SYDNEY'S BACKYARD - EARLY EVENING

Sydney sits in his yard, wearing his straw hat, reaching for his Old New Orleans, topping off his drink. The dog is

happily at his feet.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

Jennifer was the last woman to say she loved me. It was a Sunday afternoon, ten years ago, almost to the date. I was floating in the pool when the phone rang.

From where he sits, Sydney hears the phone ringing. He looks to the pool and sees his past self reaching for the phone from the raft.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

She went on and on about her morning. Out of bed at 5, in church at 10. Playing golf with her mom. And so on. And then, quite sweetly, she said it.

CUT TO:

A woman speaks into a phone. We see only her lips, moving quickly at first and then slowing as she mouths the words "I love you".

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

Right out of the blue. Which was weird. And then she cried. Which was also weird. And then she apologized and hung up. Which brought her weirdness to daring new heights. That was the last time I heard from her.

Tears streak across her cheek. Her head lowers and then her image fades.

CUT TO:

INT. SYDNEY'S SUN ROOM - LATER

Sydney is at his computer, clicking through files, looking for something.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

It should be noted that Jennifer and I never actually met. I don't even know if that was her real name. Believe me, I've wondered about that, whether or not the last woman who said she loved me was really an Erica or a Monica.

On Sydney's computer monitor we see a picture of an attractive, short-haired blond walking a runway.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

As it was explained to me in an assortment of emails Jennifer was a runway model. In proof of this, she emailed me pictures of a runway model, presumably her. Obviously, I had my doubts but what could I do! I wanted to believe it. I wanted to care. Because caring for a runway model is something you instinctively want to do.

Sydney is mesmerized by the pictures.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

It's no easy thing to forget a girl you never met, to fall out of love with some Internet ghost.

Sydney steps away from the computer and to the nearby bar and pours himself a glass of rum. He looks back to the computer desk.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

But that's what Internet love is. Ghostly. Scary.

Sydney steps back to the computer desk, sits down and begins typing, actively chatting with someone.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

Dee Dee. Unlike Jennifer, I actually met Dee Dee. After a week or so of some on-line flirtations. As encouragement, she told me she looked just like Sandra Bullock.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEAR'S RESTAURANT - NEXT DAY

Establishing shot of a local eatery.

INT. BEARS RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

Across from a table we see the face of **Dee Dee**, a relatively unattractive brunette coming into focus.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
Which she most certainly did not.

Sydney and a very non Sandra Bullock looking woman are at a table ordering a casual lunch, talking with one another.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
Wanting to keep things casual, we met for lunch. By time the appetizers were done, there was mention of a husband and then talk of some considerable dislike for said husband and then, before I even had the chance to regret paying for the meal, she was good enough to invite herself back to my place...for dessert.

Sydney tries to hold on to something like a smile but is starting to fail.

EXT. BEAR'S RESTAURANT, PARKING LOT - CONTINUING

Sydney leaves the restaurant alone, walking at a very fast clip.

CUT TO:

INT. THE GEORGE AND VULTURE - EVENING

Sydney sits at the bar with **Melissa**, a petite woman of 29. She is slowly nursing a draft beer.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
Melissa told me that she looked like Meg Ryan.

Melissa is an impressively attractive woman with very Meg Ryan like qualities.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
Which she most certainly did. And which fascinated the hell out of me. She was fresh from a difficult divorce and decidedly in want of a new friend in life.

CUT TO:

EXT. SYDNEY'S BACK YARD - LATER THAT EVENING

Sydney and Melissa are in the pool, flirting. She is wearing a borrowed t-shirt and shorts. They begin to kiss and, in a moment, Melissa removes the shirt.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

Friend.

Melissa, now topless, laughs and circles Sydney. He is uncomfortable at first but then concedes and, in a moment, they are kissing once again.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

So strange the word these days.

INT. SYDNEY'S BEDROOM - NEXT MORNING

Sydney and Melissa are in bed, wrapped up in one another. Sydney is fast asleep. Melissa steps clumsily from the bed in an attempt to not wake him.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

So tiring...

INT. SYDNEY'S BEDROOM - CONTINUING

Sydney awakes to the sound of Melissa's car door closing. With the blanket wrapped around him he steps from the bedroom, walks on down the hall.

INT. SYDNEY'S SUNROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sydney walks across the sunroom towards the door to the backyard. He opens it.

EXT. SYDNEY'S BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Sydney steps outside, looks up and sees his present self sitting alone, wearing his straw hat, reaching for his Old New Orleans Rum, topping off his drink. The dog is happily at his feet.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

So lonesome...

FADE OUT.

INT. DR. FRANK'S OFFICE - DAYTIME

Dr. Frank sits opposite his usual spot so as to talk to Sydney who is now seated on the floor, leaning up against the Doctor's desk.

DR. FRANK:
But *Amy* was your friend. You
weren't lonesome around her.

SYDNEY:
No.

Dr. Frank is quite pleased with this segue-way.

DR. FRANK:
Are you two still...talking?

SYDNEY:
(hesitant)
Well, yeh...

DR. FRANK:
I see. And what about?

SYDNEY:
Usual things, I guess.

DR. FRANK:
Do you remember your last
conversation.

A beat.

SYDNEY:
She was upset.

This notion intrigues Dr. Frank.

DR. FRANK:
Why was that?

SYDNEY:
She said...she wants me to get out
more. To...meet someone new...or
something.

DR. FRANK:
She sounds like a clever girl.

Sydney is pleased with this compliment.

SYDNEY:
She is.

Dr. Frank appears hesitant to say what he says next.

DR. FRANK:
Well, if you won't listen to me,

perhaps you should listen to her.

A beat.

 SYDNEY:
Perhaps...

FADE OUT.

INT. SYDNEY'S KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

A phone book lies on the counter before Sydney, unopened. He is deep in thought.

 SYDNEY: (V.O.)
Perhaps...

CUT TO:

EXT. SYDNEY'S BACKYARD - CONTINUING

Sydney is in his usual chair, wearing his usual hat. He is making a phone call. In a moment, a **woman** answers.

 MADAM: (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
Heather's Escort Services.

 SYDNEY:
 (nervously)
Yes, I...I don't know who to ask
f...is Heather there?

 MADAM: (V.O.)
 (a light snicker)
First time caller?

 SYDNEY:
Long time listener.

 MADAM: (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
Ha! I get that. Cute. Ok, Mr. first
time caller, hold the phone a sec
while I bring up my screen.

Sydney raises an eyebrow to this.

 MADAM: (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
Ok. So, you are in need of a...

A beat as Sydney realizes what she is asking.

SYDNEY:
Um...a date.

MADAM: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
Of course. And what sort of "date"
are we talking about? Formal?
Casual? Location?

SYDNEY:
Umm...companionship sort
of...thing. Casual. My home.

MADAM: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
Ok, then. Casual. Private setting.
Preferences? Let's start with sex.

SYDNEY:
Um...are you asking me if I prefer
sex?

MADAM: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
Male? Female? Transgender?

A pause as Sydney is caught off guard by the question.

MADAM: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
Undecided on the issue?

SYDNEY:
No...no...I just wasn't expecting
this to be so...um...female.

MADAM: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
Any preferences for height, skin
color, hair color...

SYDNEY:
Black.

MADAM: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
Black what, honey. Hair or skin.

Sydney is again caught off guard. The questioning is clearly making him uncomfortable.

SYDNEY:
Hair. White girl, I guess. If..if
that's ok.

MADAM: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
Of course. (casual, almost sing-
song) Everyone loves a white
girl...

An awkward, lengthy pause.

MADAM: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
You know, I'm just going to go
ahead and ask this. You're not a
cop are you?

SYDNEY:
Wh...what?

MADAM: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
Are you now or have you ever been a
member of any local, state or
federal law enforcement agency?

SYDNEY:
No. No...

A brief silence follows before the woman speaks again.

MADAM: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
Well, you sure sound like a cop. Or
a serial killer...

SYDNEY:
Not...not a cop. Believe me. I
just...I just want a date.

The Madam picks up where she left off, seemingly satisfied
with this.

MADAM: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
Height? Short? Tall?

SYDNEY:
I...don't know. Short, I guess.

MADAM: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)

Some guys like the long legs. But we have short...

SYDNEY:
You don't mean, like, midget?

MADAM: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
No. I don't mean, like, midget.

SYDNEY:
I mean, you know, not too...short.

MADAM: (V.O.)
(dismissively)
But, of course. Age?

SYDNEY:
It's just that I would like her to...look like someone, if that's possible.

MADAM: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
Well, I'm sure it's possible. Age?

Another pause as Sydney squirms.

MADAM: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
Now I have two new girls. Both 18. One is dark haired but a bit tall...

SYDNEY:
Do you have someone a bit...older?

MADAM: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
Older?

SYDNEY:
Who's your oldest?

A beat.

MADAM: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
I see. Well...my oldest girl is 38. But she's, well, only a girl upon request, if you get my drift.

Another pause.

SYDNEY:

Uh huh.

MADAM: (V.O.)

(over phone, filtered)

Raquel is 32 but that girl is definitely not white. After that it depends on whose available.

SYDNEY:

Well...yeh, sure. I mean, I guess that's ok.

MADAM: (V.O.)

(over phone, filtered)

So, I have you down for a white female. Short...but not too short. Black hair. Oldest, pending availability.

CUT TO:

INT. SYDNEY'S FRONT ROOM - EARLY EVENING

Sydney walks across the room to answer the door, as the phone call from earlier in the day plays on.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

Yeh, that...that sounds about right.

MADAM: (V.O.)

(over phone, filtered)

Ok, then. I think I have just the girl. There's a two hour minimum.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

That's fine.

MADAM: (V.O.)

(over phone, filtered)

Allrighty then. All we need now is a time and place and a method of payment, Mr...?

Sydney opens the front door and finds **Lola**, 25.

LOLA:

(wide smile)

Harold Kumar?

Lola is short, petite. She has the overall look of a very

spirited woman. Sydney is discomforted.

SYDNEY:
Y-Yes...that's me.

LOLA:
Funny, you don't look like a
Harold.

SYDNEY:
Yeh. Well, about that. I'm not
really...

LOLA:
No. Harold Kumar it is. I get it.
I'm Lola, also not really. I'll be
your date for the evening. Well, at
least for the next two hours.

Lola offers her hand. Sydney hesitates and then accepts.

SYDNEY:
(nervous)
You're...I mean...wow, you're
exactly on time.

LOLA:
Well, I am bought and paid for.
It's the least I could do.

Lola makes her way into the house, takes note of Sydney's
appearance.

LOLA:
You're a handsome enough fellow.
Married?

SYDNEY:
(startled)
Jesus, no. Seriously?

LOLA:
Girlfriend?

SYDNEY:
No.

Lola's smile eases into something more genuine.

LOLA:
It's pretty common, actually.
Married men make up, like, 80
percent of our clientele. You're

the oddball from where I'm standing. So, what gives?

SYDNEY:
You mean...why...?

Sydney gestures to Lola who then gestures to herself.

LOLA:
Yeh. Why?

SYDNEY:
Well, I don't know off hand but I'm sure my therapist will have an opinion.

Lola is amused by this. Sydney relaxes.

SYDNEY:
I meet with him on Tuesday. I'll keep you posted, if you like.

LOLA:
(beaming smile)
Please do.

Lola sees a small bowl of gummy bears in the center of the dining room table. They appear wet, as though they have been soaking in something.

LOLA:
Cool.

She grabs for a handful of gummy bears, devours one and reacts to the taste.

SYDNEY:
Vodka.

LOLA:
Wow. I mean, wow. OMG! That is just so sexy.

Sydney winces at the acronym as Lola happily swallows a few more.

INT. SYDNEY'S SUN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The two walk into the sun room where the bar awaits. Lola is clearly checking out the digs.

LOLA:
So, Harold Kumar, what do you do

for a living?

SYDNEY:
(a bit embarrassed)
Do you know what a trust fund is?

LOLA:
Only enough to know that I want
one.

SYDNEY:
Well, thats what I do.

LOLA:
Sounds like fun.

SYDNEY:
Not so much. But it does keep me
not busy.

Lola continues to look around.

LOLA:
Well, you have a nice trust fund
home and...a lot of...trust fund
books.

Looking out the sun room windows, Lola is suddenly
enthused.

SYDNEY:
Do you read mu-

LOLA:
(interrupting)
OMG! A trust fund pool. Can we go
skinny dipping?

SYDNEY:
(plainly but with
emphasis)
No.

Lola frowns but then quickly swallows her disappointment.

LOLA:
I bet you have some great parties
here.

SYDNEY:
Not so much.

LOLA:

Why not? Not keen on people?

SYDNEY:
Sort of the other way around.

LOLA:
I see. Well, perhaps if you loosen
up a bit on your skinny dipping
policy.

SYDNEY:
You could not possibly be more
wrong. Would you like a drink?

LOLA:
Sure. Whatcha got?

SYDNEY:
Rum.

Lola walks to the bar and sees thirteen bottles of unopened
Old New Orleans Amber.

LOLA:
You mean like, trust fund rum.
Sounds delish.

Sydney grabs a glass and some ice from an ice bucket. He
pours her a glass of rum and hands it to her.

LOLA:
Got Dr. Pepper or something?

Sydney ignores the request and proceeds to pour a glass of
rum for himself.

LOLA:
Coke? Diet Coke?

SYDNEY:
Just rum.

LOLA:
(skeptical)
Ummm. Ok. So, what shall we drink
to?

SYDNEY:
Our dying breath.

Lola laughs until she notices that Sydney is not laughing
with her.

LOLA:

Ok, then.

Lola raises her glass. Sydney watches as she takes a sip and winces at the taste of the undiluted liquor. She looks away for a moment, noticing at once, the brown envelope, the letter to Julie and "return to sender". Sydney takes his sip, unaware that Lola has spotted the envelope.

LOLA:

So, who's Julie?

Sydney coughs up a bit of rum.

SYDNEY:

Julie...uh...she's sort of an ex.
My last...girlfriend.

Lola turns back to Sydney.

LOLA:

I see. So, she moved, huh?

SYDNEY:

No.

LOLA:

But it says here...no longer at...

SYDNEY:

Yeh. That's her handwriting.

It takes a few beats before Lola understands.

LOLA:

Shut. Up. So, she sent it back?
Without even opening it?

SYDNEY:

Um...well...yeh.

Lola looks back to the envelope.

LOLA:

So, what is it?

SYDNEY:

I...uh...made her this birthday
card...

LOLA:

Well, Fuck! Her!

Sydney fires back with a quick look of scorn. Lola back pedals.

LOLA:

Well, she could have just...you know, thrown it away. I'm just sayin'...

Sydney drops his gaze, takes another sip of rum.

SYDNEY:

Yeh, actually, I've thought about that, too. She has a shredder in her kitchen and another in her bedroom. I mean, I would have never known...She could have just...But, well, here it is.

LOLA:

Wait! Seriously? You dated a woman with a shredder in her bedroom?!

Sydney considers this for a moment.

SYDNEY:

Yeh. I guess I did.

LOLA:

Crazy, right? So what happened?

SYDNEY:

(hesitantly)
I happened.

LOLA:

Sure, of course you did. Seriously, though. What happened?

QUICK CUT TO:

INT. SYDNEY'S SUN ROOM, FLASHBACK

At the glowing monitor, the cursor still beckoning...

QUICK CUT TO:

INT. SYDNEY'S SUN ROOM - CONTINUING

Sydney doesn't answer. He sees Faulkner's book on an end table and shelves it. Lola watches.

LOLA:
I guess you actually read all these
books, then.

SYDNEY:
Yeh. Well, somebody has to.

LOLA:
And you figure that someone is you?

Sydney is quiet again. Lola tries another sip of her rum.

LOLA:
Wow. You know It's not too bad
after a few swallows.

SYDNEY:
Yeh, I do know.

LOLA: (WITH A WINK)
So, whaddya wanna do now?

CUT TO:

EXT. SYDNEY'S BACKYARD - EVENING

Sydney and Lola are seated before the pool, smoking cigars.
On the small table between them are two tall glasses of
rum. Two tiki torches burn nearby.

LOLA:
...so that's when I dropped out of
Fine Arts and switched to
Psychology.

SYDNEY:
Seriously?

LOLA:
Yeh. Seriously. I graduate next
month.

SYDNEY:
A call girl psychologist!
(thinking on it). That could be
huge.

Lola looks to Syd and laughs.

LOLA:
Escort! But, no, this is just to
pay tuition. It's just a...job. To

get me through college. Not everyone has a trust fund, you know.

SYDNEY:
Seems a bit...dangerous?

LOLA:
Can be, I suppose. In high school I worked at Maverick Pizza.

SYDNEY:
Yeh, I remember the place...

LOLA:
One night this order comes in. A meat lovers with extra onions. Funny the things you remember...

Sydney looks to her, endeared by what she has just said.

LOLA:
All the delivery guys were out, so I take it. Turns out to be a bogus address. Couple a guys stepped out of this alley. Robbed me. And then for good measure they raped me. One at a time.

SYDNEY:
Jesus...

LOLA:
Turns out it's all a bit dangerous, Harry.

Sydney is bothered by this macabre story.

LOLA:
Hey, don't get all sentimental on me now. Life happens. It took some time, sure, but I got past it. Leave the past with the past, I say.

Lola looks down and gives the dog a pat on the head.

SYDNEY:
So, why Lola?

LOLA:
Huh? Oh, you mean...I always liked that song, you know, by the Kinks.

Sydney arches an eyebrow.

SYDNEY:
Do you know what that song's about?

LOLA:
Sure. It's hilarious. Why? Are you
worried I'm really a man?

Eyebrow lowered.

SYDNEY:
No, I am definitely not worried
about that.

LOLA:
Not at all, huh?

SYDNEY:
Not in the least.

LOLA:
So, what are you worried about
Harold Kumar?

But Sydney says nothing.

LOLA:
I see. I worry about stupid shit,
too. Like...the end of the world.
I've always wondered what that'll
be like.

SYDNEY:
Like this. But warmer.

Lola reaches for her glass of rum and takes a sip. Sydney
smiles. She responds with a smile of her own.

LOLA:
(recovering from her
drink)
This is nice. I mean, It's really
sort of peaceful. You got a good
thing going here.

Sydney draws a sip of rum while Lola takes another drag
from her cigar.

SYDNEY:
Yeh, It's ok.

LOLA:

So, can I ask you a question?

SYDNEY:
That's my favorite one, so far.

LOLA:
I mean, you're a handsome enough
guy. You could have any number of
girls. So, why are you paying me
\$500 an hour to just sit here and
talk to you?

Sydney considers the question.

SYDNEY:
Because you're the lowest bidder.

A beat.

LOLA:
That's kinda hard to believe.

SYDNEY:
Then don't believe it.

Lola watches Sydney expectantly.

LOLA:
You know, I'd say you're one of
those "glass is half empty" kinda
guys.

SYDNEY:
And I'd say it depends on whats in
the glass.

Sydney turns to her. Lola turns back to her cigar.

LOLA:
You have an answer to everything,
don't you?

SYDNEY:
And to nothing at all.

LOLA:
I don't even know what that means.
Heather said you wanted me to look
like someone? Do I look
like...someone?

SYDNEY:
No. Well, sort of. You're like her

in other ways...

LOLA:
(intrigued)
Julie?

SYDNEY:
No. For starters, Julie's a
blonde...

LOLA:
Ok, then. Who?

SYDNEY:
(hesitantly)
Amy.

LOLA:
I see. And where is dear Amy?

SYDNEY:
She...moved on.

LOLA:
Moved? Away from all this trust-
funding you got going on?

SYDNEY:
Life beckons.

LOLA:
I see. And so you thought...what?

SYDNEY:
Well, I guess...I just wanted
to...see her again.

LOLA:
Well, whats to stop you? Why don't
you just go and see her?

Sydney is struck by the thought.

SYDNEY:
Perhaps.

LOLA:
Do you still love her?

SYDNEY:
We weren't exactly...we're just
friends.

LOLA:

Ha!

Sydney looks at his glass.

SYDNEY:

I need more rum.

LOLA:

Half empty! I was right!

Sydney puts down his cigar and heads back to the sun room.
Lola turns and calls after him.

LOLA:

Wait! In what way am I like her?

Sydney considers his answer.

SYDNEY:

You...sound like her.

LOLA:

(disappointed)

Sound...?

SYDNEY:

You asked.

Lola watches as Sydney resumes his walk to the sun room.

LOLA:

I think It's sweet Harold Kumar. I
think you're sweet.

Sydney stops at the back door and turns to face her.

SYDNEY:

You're drunk.

Lola gives her best funny girl face.

LOLA:

Absolutely. My two hours are nearly
up. Are you sure there isn't
something else you would rather do,
you know, for \$500 an hour?

SYDNEY:

No. You can go when you
want...I...guess that's all.

Lola's smile erupts.

LOLA:
All things considered, it's a lot
less dangerous here. I think I'd
rather stay.

SYDNEY:
It's not that big a trust fund,
Lola.

LOLA:
It doesn't have to be. I'm my own
girl after work. And in fifteen
minutes my name is Brandie.

CUT TO:

INT. SUN ROOM - MIDNIGHT

Sydney is helping Lola walk. He leads her to the hallway.
Lola's speech is slurred throughout.

LOLA:
Will you respect me in the morning?

SYDNEY:
What's not to respect?

INT. SYDNEY'S HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

LOLA:
You're nice. Sometimes I don't like
my lif...my job, I mean. But
tonight, I like it. I mean, if you
weren't an older man and if I
wasn't a call girl...

SYDNEY:
Escort!

Lola laughs at the correction.

LOLA:
You're...nice. Did I say that
already?

SYDNEY:
You did.

LOLA:
You see the good in...people. I
know you don't think you do or
maybe you don't...want to. But you

see the good...

SYDNEY:

Yes, yes. I see the good. Ok, here we are.

INT. SYDNEY'S SPARE BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sydney walks Lola to the bed, drops her onto it. Lola laughs as Sydney removes her shoes.

LOLA:

You don't sleep here?

SYDNEY:

Only you.

LOLA:

(with a drunk giggle)

Only me!

Lola pulls herself under the covers. Sydney leans down and helps to tuck her in.

LOLA:

Tell me a bedtime story, Harold Kumar.

SYDNEY:

I don't do bedtime stories.

LOLA:

(pouting)

Bedtime story!

SYDNEY:

Be a good girl and pass out.

LOLA:

I don't want to pass out. I'm having fun. It's...nice being here. With you.

SYDNEY:

You're drunk.

LOLA:

Yes, yes I am. And whose fault is that? Who drinks rum without coke? That's just fucked up...

Sydney doesn't answer. Lola undoes some of the covers so as to make more work for him.

LOLA:
So, why didn't you ever get
married?

SYDNEY:
No one ever asked me.

LOLA:
(smiling)
I see. Well, you should at least
have a girlfriend. Or a boyfriend,
if that's more your thing.

SYDNEY:
That is not more my thing. That's
not anywhere near my thing.

LOLA:
Well, I had to make sure. A
girlfriend, then. You're a handsome
guy. And you're nice. You have a
nice home and...a fust trund. I
mean, a woman would be pretty lucky
to fall into your hands.

SYDNEY:
Not so much.

Sydney stands to leave.

LOLA:
Oh, quit being such a Negative Ned!
Come on. Don't you get...don't you
get lonely?

Sydney pauses.

SYDNEY:
Yeh.

LOLA:
Yeh?

SYDNEY:
I guess.

LOLA:
You guess?

SYDNEY:
Good night, Lola.

LOLA:

Brandie.

SYDNEY:
Ok. Brandie.

LOLA:
(suggestively)
You sure you don't wanna stay?

Sydney reaches for the light switch.

LOLA:
Wait. Can I...will you, at least,
tell me your name? Your real name.

SYDNEY:
(hesitant)
Sydney.

LOLA:
Wait.

SYDNEY:
What?

LOLA:
It's just that...I'm curious...

SYDNEY:
Yeh, we've established that.

LOLA:
What do you look for in a woman?

A beat as Sydney considers the question.

SYDNEY:
Hope.

Lola is quieted. Sydney turns the light off.

SYDNEY:
Will you do me a favor?

LOLA:
(anxious to comply)
Sure, anything.

SYDNEY:
Don't wake me when you leave.

Sydney closes the door behind him.

LOLA:
 (to herself)
 Sydney...

CUT TO:

EXT. SYDNEY'S BACKYARD - JUST AFTER MIDNIGHT

Sydney is at his bistro table, sipping now from the bottle. His shirt is untucked. He is curious by the continued presence of Lola.

INT. SYDNEY'S FRONT ROOM - HALF AN HOUR LATER

Sydney stumbles into the room. He peers out the front window and sees that Lola's car is still parked on the street.

INT. SYDNEY'S GUEST BEDROOM

Brandie is asleep to one side of the bed. Sydney is now in the room with her. He sits to the far side, with her back to him. His head is lowered, in his hands. He whispers, so as not to wake her.

SYDNEY:
 A bedtime story. Well, lets try
 this one...

Sydney lifts his head and looks to the window.

SYDNEY:
 (slowly, enunciating)
 I killed a woman once.

A beat.

SYDNEY:
 I guess I didn't actually kill her.
 But, the simple fact is, had we
 never met, she would be alive
 today. So, where do I go with that?

Brandie's eyes are now open but she is too afraid to move.

SYDNEY:
 We met at this bar during one of
 those all you can drink buffets.
 She was pretty hard to miss...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BAR ROOM, FLASHBACK - LATE NIGHT

Lanie, 22, sits atop the bar, looking down on Sydney who is seated before her.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
...sitting on the bar like some
songstress perched on her piano.
God, she just reeked of danger. The
bar closed. I walked her to her
car. She kissed me.

EXT. BAR PARKING LOT - CONTINUING

Sydney and Lanie stand before her car. She leans in and kisses Sydney hungrily.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
It's such a strange thing to
remember...her kiss. She had this
sort of passion, you know, but
there was nothing to it. It was
just so ordinary, so pointless and
yet...so driven.

The two are making out, aggressively, almost comically.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
She called the next day. Wanted to
come over for a movie or something.
And so, I thought to surprise her
with a dinner but...she didn't come
alone.

CUT TO:

INT. SYDNEY'S HOME FROM YEARS AGO, FLASHBACK - NIGHT

Sydney is preparing a meal. There is a knock at the door. Sydney answers and in walks Lanie and **Meredith**, a lively woman of 20.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
Meredith was spunky...and loud.
And...

Meredith introduces herself. She is very...

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
Drunk.

INT. SYDNEY'S OLD HOME, LIVING ROOM, FLASHBACK - AN HOUR
LATER

Sydney and Lanie are on a couch in the dimly lit room watching a movie. Meredith sits nearby with a beer in hand, struggling to maintain consciousness.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

And then...

Meredith passes out in her chair, drops the can. Lanie notices and gives a quick giggle. She leans in and gives Sydney a peck.

CUT TO:

INT. SYDNEY'S OLD HOME, BEDROOM - CONTINUING

From an outside streetlight we see the silhouettes of Sydney and Lanie dragging Meredith into the room and placing her on the bed.

Sydney begins to leave but is stopped by Lanie. She walks him to the other side of the bed, pushes him on to it and then climbs on top of him. She kisses him passionately, then takes off her shirt.

As she removes her shirt, a hand reaches for and rests on Sydney's arm. A surprised Sydney turns his head and is greeted by the crisp green eyes of an drunken, aroused Meredith.

Sydney turns back to Lanie who begins to grind on him, writhing, all the while looking not back at him but to Meredith. The women are smiling at one another. Meredith releases her grasp of Sydney and reaches for Lanie.

Sydney sits up, grabs Lanie's arms and pushes her aside. He stands and starts to leave the room, gets as far as the door where he finds the memory of Lanie waiting for him.

LANIE:

Seriously?

SYDNEY:

I didn't want all that. I never did.

LANIE:

(unimpressed)

Yeh? So, what did you want?

EXT. SYDNEY'S OLD HOME, DRIVEWAY, FLASHBACK - LATER

Sydney sees the two women to Lanie's car. Lanie stops and

smiles and offers him a soft kiss. Meredith hobbles into the passenger side. Lanie whispers that she is sorry and kisses him again.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

We agreed to try again. This time, just the two of us. A romantic dinner, something simple. I guess I just...I used to have this need to say yes. So, I said yes.

CUT TO:

INT. ITALIAN RESTAURANT, FLASHBACK - FOLLOWING EVENING

Sydney sits alone at a table. He has been there for awhile. He orders another glass of wine.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

She never showed.

CUT TO:

INT. SYDNEY'S OLD HOME, LIVING ROOM, FLASHBACK - MIDNIGHT

Sydney sits at home in the darkness alone, staring at a phone that never rings.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

It was several days before I knew. She went out that night. Alone. The bartender told the police that she drank a pitcher of bourbon and coke. A fucking pitcher. She was just so...small. She was jumped in the back parking lot as she was trying to find her way back to her car. Beaten. Raped. Three times.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAILER PARK, FLASHBACK - AFTERNOON

Establishing shot of a typical trailer park.

CUT TO:

INT. TRAILER - CONTINUING

We see a silhouette of a woman, fuzzy, out of focus.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

I went to see her a few days later.
But I had no idea what to say or
do. I mean, what do you...say?

Lanie is now in focus, smiling a broken smile. Swollen eyes. The bruises around her neck are entirely visible.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

It was eerie how she wouldn't talk
about it...

CUT TO:

INT. TRAILER, FLASHBACK -CONTINUING

Sydney and Lanie sit on a couch with a portfolio between them.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

She showed me her portfolio. She
wanted to be a model. She said it
like it was something that already
happened. Like it was something
that could never happen again. She
told me to pick out a picture.

Sydney pulls a small picture from her portfolio. It is a wallet size photo of Lanie in a long red dress.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SYDNEY'S GUEST BEDROOM, PRESENT - CONTINUING

SYDNEY:

She never took my call again. By
the time I heard about her suicide,
she was already in the ground.

Brandie's eyes are tightly closed now. She is trying not to move.

SYDNEY:

All because I wasn't...because I
wouldn't...fuck her the way she
wanted to be fucked. I put her in
that ground. I killed that girl.
Because I wanted what I wanted.
Because I...I just, I wanted

something...else...

Sydney breaks off. A beat.

SYDNEY:
 (light sob)
 I told you I don't do bedtime
 stories.

Sydney stands to leave. He is at the door when he stops.

SYDNEY:
 (softly)
 Sweet dreams...Brandie.

As Sydney leaves, Brandie's eyes open. She looks at the dresser mirror against the wall, where a small wallet-size picture of a girl in a long red dress is tucked.

FADE OUT.

INT. SYDNEY'S BEDROOM - NOON

Sydney wakes up hung over. In a moment he remembers Brandie. He steps out of bed and walks down the hallway to check on her.

CUT TO:

INT. SYDNEY'S GUEST BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Brandie is gone. The bed is made.

CUT TO:

INT. SYDNEY'S KITCHEN - CONTINUING

Sydney sees an omelet simmering in a pan. There is a tall, glass vase next to the stove holding a single-stemmed white rose. Against the vase is a folded piece of paper. Sydney opens the note and reads it.

"Sweet Dreams - Brandie"

FADE OUT.

EXT. WOODED FOREST - DAYTIME

A hooded man rides fast on horseback, plotting his way through the woods. He arrives at a rundown shack. He

dismounts and grabs an old rifle from the saddle bag.

INT. SHACK - CONTINUOUS

The hooded man walks into the shack. There is a wide-eyed **boy** sitting with his knees wrapped in his arms, silenced with fear. The boy points to the floorboards.

Beneath the rotting floor is a wolf. The animal is angered and desperate to break through. It is clawing and biting.

The hooded man steps in front of the boy, raises the rifle. The first shot splinters the floor, pushes through and slightly wounds the animal. The second shot finds its mark, hits the wolf in the eye, killing it instantly.

The man turns to check on the boy. The child is now pale with fear. He is looking straight ahead, to the opposite end of the room.

Another wolf. This one is tame, scared. It begins its slow approach. Its head is down, its tail between its legs.

As the wolf approaches, the room begins to change. Rotting planks of wood become new again. The room, with each step, seems refreshed. The boy is now whimpering with fear.

The man drops his hood. It is Sydney. He raises the rifle and prepares for the shot. The wolf stops in its tracks. It looks up like a lost pup, defenseless. Sydney squeezes the trigger.

CUT TO:

INT. SYDNEY'S BEDROOM - LATE MORNING

Sydney snaps awake at the sound of the shot. He is sweating.

DR. FRANK: (O.S.)
Wow. That's a hell of a dream, Syd.

CUT TO:

INT. DR. FRANK'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Sydney sits at Dr. Frank's desk. The doctor, in his usual spot, has stopped writing and lowered his notepad.

SYDNEY:
I'm glad you like it.

DR. FRANK:

Very symbolic. Seriously. It can be interpreted, as most any dream can, in a number of ways but rarely do I come across a dream that is so...archetypal.

SYDNEY:

God bless you!

DR. FRANK:

Actually, It's quite enlightening. Would you like to explore this a bit.

SYDNEY:

I think we should.

DR. FRANK:

Ok, well lets start with the very simple theory, one that I subscribe to, that everything and everyone in your dream is you.

SYDNEY:

Ok. So, I'm a wolf.

DR. FRANK:

Actually, you're both wolves. And the little boy. You're the gunman, obviously. You're even the gutted cabin.

SYDNEY:

Ok. Sure. I love this theory. I'm a scared boy in a shack. And I'm the shack. And I'm a gun happy ass monkey. What's not to like?

Dr. Frank offers a slight, comforting laugh.

DR. FRANK:

These images represent some facet of you. The cabin, for instance, represents the state of your mental well being.

SYDNEY:

That can't be good.

DR. FRANK:

It isn't. And it is. You remember the part about the second wolf?

SYDNEY:
Hard to forget.

DR. FRANK:
And how the spirit of the room changes as the wolf makes its approach? Your mental and spiritual health is at the start of some re-awakening.

SYDNEY:
That doesn't sound like me at all.

DR. FRANK:
Yes, well, you're also the scared little boy. He is, for lack of a better word, your soul. You're the wolf beneath the floor board. This is your anger. And the wolf in the room is your sense of peace and awakening.

SYDNEY:
Ok, so, my soul is scared of peace?

DR. FRANK:
Yes! What's more, by killing your anger, you are effectively killing your ability to achieve any sense of peace.

SYDNEY:
I don't get it.

DR. FRANK:
I think you do. When was the last time you remember being angry or even venting your anger?

QUICK CUT TO:

INT. BMW M3, FLASHBACK

We see a satisfying grin on Sydney's face as he is shifting gears. We hear the roar of the engine and the whimper of the poor salesman beside him.

QUICK CUT TO:

INT. DR. FRANK'S OFFICE - CONTINUING

SYDNEY:
Well, I guess It's been awhile...

DR. FRANK:
Syd, think about it. You have an anger management problem insofar as you allow yourself no anger to manage.

SYDNEY:
(unimpressed)
What if I don't want to be angry?

DR. FRANK:
Nobody wants to be angry, Syd. I'm just saying that you need this balance. You need this release. This is what your soul is craving. Your sub conscious is trying to tell you something. You should listen to it.

Sydney and the doctor make eye contact. Sydney looks pleased with the diagnosis.

DR. FRANK:
It's a good sign. Something prompted this, Syd. You have taken a step forward. Has something... *happened* in your life, something you're not telling me about?

SYDNEY:
(hesitantly)
Well, this past weekend, a prostitute came over...and, uh, spent the night.

Dr. Frank is suddenly wide-eyed. His pen and pad of paper are once again a fiery show of activity.

DR. FRANK:
(mostly to himself)
Oh, thank you God, thank you for this fine day!

FADE OUT.

EXT. SYDNEY'S FRONT YARD - DAY

Sydney clumsily mows the front yard, pushing a reel mower with one hand, holding his glass of rum with the other.

AMY: (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
 ...my God, I can't believe you! So,
 what was she like?

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
 A bit like you. Not so much that
 she looked like you but...she asked
 questions like you.

AMY: (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
 What's that supposed to mean?

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
 Exactly.

Sydney is weed eating around the burned cross.

AMY: (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
 So, did you kiss her?

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
 Why do you ask that? You always ask
 that question.

AMY: (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
 I do not...

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
 Remember that girl I met, the last
 one I had a date with, um, you
 know...whatsherface.

AMY: (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
 Trish!

Sydney looks up to the sky, noting the approaching clouds.
 A clap of thunder sounds in the distance.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
 One date. And that was the first
 thing you asked when you dropped by
 that night.

AMY: (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
 Was not.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

Was to.

AMY: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
So, did you kiss her?

Sydney notes a strong gust of wind, smiles a small smile.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
No.

AMY: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
Oh, my God. Seriously, Syd. She's a
call girl...

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
She's an escort...

AMY: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
You are such a dork. Kiss the girl.
Especially when you're paying to
kiss the girl.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
I wasn't paying to kiss...I don't
want to pay to kiss the girl. I
didn't pay to kiss you...

AMY: (V.O.)
(laughing)
You paid plenty!

EXT. SYDNEY'S BACKYARD - CONTINUING

The storm is nearing, intensifying. The dog steps quickly
to Sydney for comfort.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
Do you remember that night? When
you kissed me?

AMY: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
Of course I do.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
I remember. Like it was yesterday.
You said I was a good kisser.

AMY: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)

Why (laughs) why would you remember that?

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
I don't know

AMY: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
It's strange the things you remember...

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
(with a reflective smile)
Yes. It is.

Sydney opens the door to let the dog in but then closes it, remaining outside.

AMY: (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
So, what else do you remember?

Sydney smiles at the question.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
I remember how jealous Julie was of you. I remember how good you smelled that one night. New Year's Eve. I had never been in love with a smell before. I remember the last time I saw you, that you gave me such a big hug before I left. I remember the feeling of your arms around me, the sound of your tears. I remember dreaming about you that night. And pretty much every night since.

Sydney is pleased by the charge of these memories.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
I remember...that it's your birthday today.

Amy is quieted. There are now only the sounds of the coming storm. High trees sway, their snaps and pops adding to the clamor. A steady rain begins to fall.

CUT TO:

INT. SYDNEY'S FRONT ROOM - CONTINUING

Tolstoy's Anna Karenina sits atop a bookshelf.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
(almost as a whisper)
He in his madness prays for storms,
and dreams that storms will bring
him peace.

CUT TO:

EXT. SYDNEY'S BACKYARD - AN HOUR LATER

It's raining hard. Thunder claps sound off. Sydney floats on a raft in his pool. An open bottle of Old New Orleans stands squarely on his chest. He is holding it steady with one hand, holding up a golf club with another. He looks happy.

FADE OUT.

EXT. SYDNEY'S BACKYARD - DAY

A golf club lies at the bottom of the pool, alongside a sunken bottle of Old New Orleans. The yard is full of downed tree limbs. The raft is caught up in a palm tree.

INT. SYDNEY'S SUN ROOM - CONTINUING

The sun room is a slight mess. Wetted footprints lead into the room from outside and then from the sun room to the front room of the house.

INT. SYDNEY'S FRONT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

On the dining table there is placed a thoroughly soaked shirt. The wetted foot prints continue on into the hallway.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The footprints are seen running the length of the hallway to Sydney's bedroom where they end at the door.

INT. SYDNEY'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sydney is face first in a pillow, in a deep sleep. Julie's letter is now on the night stand beside the bed, along with Lydia's picture.

CUT TO:

INT. SYDNEY'S BATHROOM - LATER

Sydney showers. We see steam building up on the mirror as the reflection shows a drawn shower curtain.

INT. SYDNEY'S BEDROOM - CONTINUING

Sydney is dressing. He opens a closet of his finer clothes and reaches for a shirt and tie.

INT. SYDNEY'S KITCHEN - CONTINUING

Sydney has Julie's letter in hand. He studies it one last time and then tosses it in the trash can.

INT. SYDNEY'S FRONT ROOM - CONTINUING

Sydney reaches for his keys on the dining room table and then walks to the front door. He opens it, steps out, closes and locks the door behind him.

CUT TO:

EXT. JAGUAR DEALERSHIP - NOON

Sydney eyes rest on a new Jaguar XKR-S. Off camera, we hear the approach of the **salesman**.

SALESMAN: (O.S.)

She's a beaut. The finest machine
on the road

SYDNEY:

(plainly)
Yeh, she's ok.

SALESMAN:

Ok!? She's perfection. She's a
lean, mean, street machine. It
doesn't get much better.

Sydney walks to the other side of the vehicle. The salesman follows.

SALESMAN:

550 Horsepower. Tops out at 186.

0-60 in 4.2...

SYDNEY:
You don't say.

SALESMAN:
She's the fastest Jaguar has ever
built for the road. Hell, man, I
dare you to give her a spin. It'll
sell itself in about a minute flat.

Sydney looks up to the salesman with a smile.

CUT TO:

INT. JAGUAR XKR-S - CONTINUING

Sydney is in the driver seat, the salesman seated next to him. Sydney's finger reaches for the red start button, then stops. Sydney retracts his finger. The salesman's smile fades a bit.

SALESMAN:
Every...everything ok?

SYDNEY:
(with a building
confidence)
Yes, actually.

A pause. The salesman's smile lessens.

SALESMAN:
Do...you...?

SYDNEY:
Is it ok if we just sit here for
awhile.

The salesman is confused. He turns about, scanning for something or someone.

SALESMAN:
(almost laughing)
Are you hiding from someone?

SYDNEY:
If I was hiding from someone, I'd
be sitting in a Honda.

The salesman's smile is gone.

SYDNEY:
(sympathetically)
You drive a Honda...

SALESMAN:
Yeh.

SYDNEY:
Good car. Reliable.

SALESMAN:
Yeh.

A beat.

SALESMAN:
I guess I could stand to
just...hang a bit.

The salesman quietly adjusts the seat.

SYDNEY:
(more as a statement than
a question)
You're not married.

SALESMAN:
Ex...excuse me.

SYDNEY:
A girlfriend?

SALESMAN:
Yeh, yeh. Two years now.

SYDNEY:
Are you going to marry her?

The salesman considers this.

SALESMAN:
I-I don't know. I think...I wanted
to...but, sometimes I just...well,
I don't know...

SYDNEY:
Don't put too much thought into it.
There is no such thing as a
stationary love. Men are either
loving more or loving less.

The salesman reflects on this.

SALESMAN:
Sure, yeh. More. Or less.

SYDNEY:
Thomas Hardy.

SALESMAN:
(stiffly)
Right.

CUT TO:

EXT. DEALERSHIP - CONTINUOUS

Sydney and the salesman sit comfortably, going nowhere at all in the fastest car Jaguar ever built for the road.

FADE OUT.

INT. THE GEORGE AND VULTURE - EARLY EVENING

Sydney is at the end of the bar, sipping on a glass of rum. Bree smiles and flirts as she tends to other customers. In the background, the piano man plays.

A smartly dressed woman, **Amber**, 38, enters the bar. Sydney watches as she strolls over to a table and is greeted by a number of well-dressed yuppies.

BREE:
Someone you know?

SYDNEY:
(plainly)
Yeh.

Sydney gulps his remaining rum and stands and walks over to the woman's table. She turns around, is caught off guard by Sydney's presence, then recovers.

SYDNEY:
Hey.

AMBER:
Hi, Syd.

SYDNEY:
Can I talk to you for a minute?

Amber acquiesces. She steps away from her table.

SYDNEY:
How are things?

Amber crosses her arms.

AMBER:
What do you want, Syd?

A beat.

SYDNEY:
Just to...I want to see her.

AMBER:
And what makes you think she would
want to see you?

SYDNEY:
She would. You know she would.

AMBER:
Then go see her.

Amber turns to leave.

SYDNEY:
But I don't...know where she is.

Amber turns back around, confused.

AMBER:
What do you mean you don't-

SYDNEY:
(interrupting)
Just tell me where she is.

AMBER:
Jesus Christ, Syd, you know where.

SYDNEY:
No. I don't.

AMBER:
Sydney, this is *NOT* funny.

Sydney is very fidgety.

SYDNEY:
(nervously)
I went to see your father. He...
slammed the door on me. Your mother
won't take my call. I don't know

where...how...I just want to see her. That's all I want.

Amber turns away, then turns back.

AMBER:

(furious)

You did this to yourself. And you did this to Amy. For fuck sake Sydney, she isn't so hard to find. Jesus, just leave her alone. Leave me alone. Seriously! Don't! Ever! Fucking! talk to me again!

Amber returns to her table, her friends having heard every last word. Sydney steps after her but is stopped by her **boyfriend** who grabs his arm. Sydney is suddenly very aware of his anger.

SYDNEY:

(loudly)

I will put my **fist!** Through your **face!**

The boyfriend freezes and turns to Amber who is shocked by Sydney's anger. Hal lets go his grip. Sydney steps up to her.

SYDNEY:

(building up to a rage)

Just in case you don't recognize it, this is me talking to you. Again. This is me telling you that I love her, that she....loved me, that she is my friend. That you were my friend. And that I have never done anything to hurt either one of you. Ever! She knows that. You know that. So, spare me your raving lunatic bullshit. I have done nothing but admire and adore HER! Unconditionally. Without exception and without ever suggesting that she owed me anything in return. So, don't sound off on me in front of your pretty little hate brigade just because you have this infantile need to prove to your so-called friends that you can go from zero to heartless ice bitch at the drop of a hat and for no fucking reason whatsoever. I have seen the ugliest

the world has to give, Amber and
let me tell you something sweetie,
you've got no game. NONE! So step
off!

Sydney holds a beat to collect his breath. Amber remains frozen in fear.

SYDNEY:
(more calmly now)
You don't deserve to breathe the
air that she...you don't deserve to
be her sister.

Somewhere in the midst of this rant the piano man gave up his song. The bar is silent. Amber gasps, loses a tear.

SYDNEY:
(plainly)
Seriously. Get over yourself.

Sydney glares at Hal as he steps toward the exit. The crowd parts. Looking up Sydney sees one face in particular. He stops in his tracks.

Brandie stands next to an older, well attired **gentleman**, an obvious "date". She reaches into her purse for her phone, opens an app and then walks toward Sydney with the phone held up. There is a picture on it.

BRANDIE:
That's you.

Sydney stares at the mugshot on her phone.

SYDNEY:
(deflated)
Yeh.

Brandie puts her phone back into her purse and then puts her arms up and around Sydney and gives him a sustained hug. She then steps back and watches as Sydney makes his exit.

BRANDIE:
(whispered)
Sweet dreams, Sydney.

FADE OUT.

INT. CHURCH - THE NEXT MORNING

The church is empty. Sydney sits in a front pew, lost in thought. The door to the sacristy opens. Footsteps are heard. A man approaches.

FATHER MACK: (O.S.)
Hello Sydney. I pray that you are well.

SYDNEY:
Hi, Father Mack.

Father Mack steps into the pew and takes a seat next to Sydney. He is a kind-looking elderly man.

FATHER MACK:
Are you doing all right today?

SYDNEY:
Yeh, sure. I guess.

Neither man looks to the other. A number of beats pass before Father Mack audibly swallows.

FATHER MACK:
You know that...you are not allowed here.

SYDNEY:
Yes. I know.

Another beat. Another swallow.

FATHER MACK:
(awkwardly)
I am afraid that I must ask you to leave.

SYDNEY:
Yeh.

FATHER MACK:
Sydney, this is just as hard for me-

SYDNEY:
(interrupting)
Have you ever read Melville, Father?

Father Mack is confused.

FATHER MACK:
Well, yes, of course. You gave me

that copy of Moby Dick. Said you didn't want it anymore. Said you didn't like it so much.

SYDNEY:
So much meandering.

FATHER MACK:
Well, I never thanked you. I enjoyed it immensely.

Sydney looks up to the crucifixion.

SYDNEY:
What do you think He might say?

FATHER MACK:
About the book?

SYDNEY:
About me.

Father Mack smiles.

FATHER MACK:
Well, of course, He would forgive you.

SYDNEY:
Yeh, I know. I felt it right away. It was like this light going off in my soul. It was beautiful, comforting. But then I come back here...

Father Mack turns a bit red. He looks to the crucifix.

FATHER MACK:
It's just not that simple anymore, Sydney.

SYDNEY:
But that's the thing, Father. It's exactly that simple. That's why they put Him up there. With nails. All He ever asked of us was the very simplest of all possible things.

Sydney stands to leave. He steps into the aisle and begins his walk to the exit. He stops and says without turning.

SYDNEY:

Christian kindness has but proved
hollow courtesy.

Father Mack turns to him.

FATHER MACK:

What?

SYDNEY:

Herman. Melville. Your immensely
enjoyable whale hunter.

Sydney exits.

FADE OUT.

EXT. SYDNEY'S FRONT YARD - AFTERNOON

A car pulls into Sydney's driveway. Amber steps out and begins her walk to the front door noting the vandalized garage door and the remnants of the burned cross in the front yard.

CUT TO:

EXT. SYDNEY'S FRONT DOOR

Amber's hand is shaking as she reaches for the door bell but then decides to knock. There is no answer. Amber knocks again. Still no answer. She turns to leave as Sydney opens the door.

SYDNEY:

(confused)

Hi.

AMBER:

(relaxing)

Hi.

SYDNEY:

Hey, um, look, I'm...I'm sorry
about...

Amber avoids his gaze.

AMBER:

No. No that's ok.

SYDNEY:

Please, come in.

AMBER:

No...I...I can't. I just wanted...
Look, I...I didn't know that my
dad...I mean, I thought you knew
where she was. I mean, why wouldn't
you?

SYDNEY:

I don't know. It's just that...I
didn't know how to go about asking.
I didn't know how to start. So, I,
uh, didn't.

AMBER:

Yeh. Ok. Ok, Syd.

Amber reaches for something in her pocket. She hands it
over to Sydney. They hold one another's gaze for a beat.

AMBER:

Do you...do you still talk to her?

Sydney opens the note.

SYDNEY:

Yeh.

Amber is profoundly saddened by this admission.

AMBER:

Will you, uh, will you tell her I
said hi.

SYDNEY:

Yeh. Sure.

Amber offers up a half-smile.

AMBER:

Well, ok, then. I gotta go.

SYDNEY:

Ok.

AMBER:

Good bye, Syd.

Sydney is quiet. Amber turns to leave and confronts the
scorched cross. She turns back to Sydney with a look of
remorse. Sydney closes the door. Amber once more looks to
the cross and then lowers her head to cry.

FADE OUT.

INT. DR. FRANK'S WAITING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Sydney sits, reading an old copy of US News and World Report.

SECRETARY:

Hey Sydney, Dr. Frank is ready for you.

Sydney rolls his eyes.

CUT TO:

INT. DR. FRANK'S OFFICE - CONTINUING

We join the two in mid session

DR. FRANK:

So, what're you going to do?

SYDNEY:

I don't know. Go see her I guess.

DR. FRANK:

Have you talked to her?

SYDNEY:

(hesitantly)

Well, no. Not...not in awhile...

DR. FRANK:

When was the last time you talked to her?

SYDNEY:

It's been about a week. Wednesday. It was her birthday.

Dr. Frank makes a note.

DR. FRANK:

I think you should go see her. It's an excellent idea. This is precisely what you have been needing.

SYDNEY:

And what's that?

DR. FRANK:

Closure, Syd. This will give you the closure you need.

SYDNEY:

What if I don't want closure?

An awkward beat.

DR. FRANK:

You know what your problem is?

SYDNEY:

There's only one?

DR. FRANK:

Your problem is that you're an old fashioned soul born into a new fashioned world.

SYDNEY:

What does that even mean?

DR. FRANK:

That you should have been born generations ago. It means that you're a dead heart romantic caught up in an increasingly sexual culture.

SYDNEY:

(unimpressed)

Sounds awful.

DR. FRANK:

Yes. It is.

SYDNEY:

So what do I do?

DR. FRANK:

Well, you tried adjusting. Clearly that didn't work. So, my advice to you is to go back to being the man you were born to be. Start caring again.

SYDNEY:

About what?

Dr. Frank closes his pad and then opens to the first page. He seems to be going back to something.

DR. FRANK:

Well, let's begin with the things you used to care about, shall we? How about Cynthia...

SYDNEY:
Would really rather n...

DR. FRANK:
(interrupting)
...your childhood friend who, after college, seduced you and then rejected you entirely, after the fact. Apparently because you dismissed her in the heat of a very certain passionate...

SYDNEY:
(interrupting)
My fault. I was kinda drunk.

DR. FRANK:
Her abandonment of you, Syd, is inexcusable. Don't defend it. She was your best friend for 10 years. She was the very first friend you ever had. She was the first woman you truly loved.

SYDNEY:
(quietly, defeatedly)
It's not her fault.

DR. FRANK:
(more aggressively)
It's not YOUR fault! You believed in her. You were faithful to her as a person and as a friend on every conceivable level. This is where it all began, Syd. Your whole life since then has been an attempt to replace her. And it leads all the way to end of the line.

Sydney is uncomfortable with this. Dr. Frank turns a few pages in his notes, finds his place and then continues.

DR. FRANK:
Holly from work. Again, seduction followed by dismissal because of your want of something more. Your one and only fiance who slept with a fraternity brother on your birthday, effectively ending the engagement and establishing, as well as it can be established, serious trust issues that haunt you to this very minute. Stephanie.

Angela. Lori. Gina. Women who had no interest in what you had to give, but only in what there was to take.

Sydney's discomfort has peaked. He turns in his chair, pretending not to hear.

SYDNEY:

I just...

DR. FRANK:

(interrupting)

How about Lanie? Who sallied up to you during some routine happy hour, who seduced you and who left you, who is dead by her own hand, although you can't seem to stop blaming yourself.

SYDNEY:

Yeh...but...

DR. FRANK:

(aggressive)

No "yeh butts" Syd. Hell, I'm just getting warmed up.

Dr. Frank continues rifling through the pages, picking and choosing the memories as he comes across them.

DR. FRANK:

Erin, the dear girl who was so nice a friend and who would get drunk with you and make out with you and then wake up swearing that she remembered nothing of it, repeatedly breaking your heart and with such indifference...

SYDNEY:

Well, I mean, she didn't remem-

DR. FRANK:

(interrupting)

Oh, yes, Sydney, I assure you she did. But that's not the point.

SYDNEY:

(unsteadily)

Then what the fuck is the point?

DR. FRANK:

The point is that these are the relationships that forged your identity as a young man. All your life you have made yourself emotionally available to a culture that has no want of emotion. These are the relationships that taught you, again and again, to accept less and less, until you accepted anything at all that was handed you. You sold yourself down the river. No one did this to you, but you. Not because you wanted to, that much is clear, but because you allowed others to convince you that there is no real value in what you have to give.

A number of beats pass before Sydney speaks up.

SYDNEY:
(dejectedly)
Well, sure, I mean, I can see that...I'm past all that...

Doctor Frank turns back a number of pages in his notes.

DR. FRANK:
Ok, so your past Erin and Holly and the rest. So, lets consider the ones you're not past. There's Alice, the kindly co-worker who invited you to Christmas dinner with her family when you moved to South Carolina and knew no one in town. Some girl named Rachel, who you never even met but who you saw once. ONCE! At a bar. And you only remember her for her eyes and the way she laughed. Michelle from college. The fat girl who you fell for because, in your words, "no woman ever made me laugh as hard as she did". The fat girl, Syd! How often do you still think of her?

SYDNEY:
Ok. Yeh, I mean...

DR. FRANK:
Then there's Lydia...

SYDNEY:

(glaring)

OK!

A considerable pause.

DR. FRANK:

You didn't dive off the cliff, Syd. You were pushed...by an overbearing sexual culture that made constant demands of you, that distorted your want of the one simple connection you always wanted, but were never allowed.

SYDNEY:

I don't...I don't know...

DR. FRANK:

It's time to start again, Syd. And this time no more avoiding. No more playing the "yes" game. No more seductions and short play. Start by forgiving yourself! Let it all go. What's past is past.

Dr. Frank is exhausted by his emotional rant. He takes a breath, then closes his notes and finishes his thought on the matter.

DR. FRANK:

There is nothing behind you, Syd.

QUICK CUT TO:

INT. SYDNEY'S SUN ROOM, FLASHBACK

The cursor on the glowing monitor is blinking. The letters are typed and appear. "OK". An enter key is pressed. Sydney's face is now aglow before the monitor. He looks saddened, demoralized.

QUICK CUT TO:

INT. DR. FRANK'S OFFICE - CONTINUING

Dr. Frank leans in toward Sydney.

DR. FRANK:

There is nothing beside you, that much is clear.

FADE OUT.

EXT. POLICE STATION PARKING LOT - NOON

Establishing shot of local police station.

DR. FRANK: (O.S.)

There is only that which lies
ahead.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

Well, it's not much of an excuse
but I guess it's the only one I
have.

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE STATION - CONTINUING

Sydney sits at a small desk in a small office. He is filling out a form of some sort, while **Officer Adams**, a plain clothed police woman opposite him is typing on her computer.

Close up on Sydney's form. It reads "SEX OFFENDER REGISTRY". He is done filling it out and hands it back to the woman.

OFFICER ADAMS:

Ok, Mr. Carton. Still at the same
address?

SYDNEY:

(flatly)

Yes.

Officer Adams cracks a sympathetic smile. She looks again to the form.

OFFICER ADAMS:

Still unemployed, I see.

SYDNEY:

Still unemployable.

OFFICER ADAMS:

Mr. Carton, you have an excellent
resume. Someone *will* hire you.

Sydney is silent. Officer Adams continues reading over the form.

OFFICER ADAMS:
Still no email accounts.

SYDNEY:
No.

OFFICER ADAMS:
You know you can email all you
want. You're not prohibited from...

Sydney remains silent.

OFFICER ADAMS:
But, you do use the Internet.

SYDNEY:
Not so much.

OFFICER ADAMS:
Have you viewed any pornography?

Sydney rolls his eyes.

SYDNEY:
No.

OFFICER ADAMS:
(plainly, reading from
the page)
Any unsupervised contact with a
minor?

SYDNEY:
No.

Officer Adams smiles again.

OFFICER ADAMS:
I'm sorry. It's just such a waste
to put you through all this. We
hate this more than you.

SYDNEY:
(half smiles)
It's absolutely impossible for you
to hate this more than me.

OFFICER ADAMS:
(a quick laugh)
Ok. Yeh. I'm sure you hate it more.
But, trust me, we don't enjoy this.
Every year they pile on more and
more laws. It makes the whole thing

so unworkable. It's just senseless, especially in your case, where there's not even a victim.

SYDNEY:
I'm sorry for being such a burden.

OFFICER ADAMS:
(typing)
You're not the burden, Mr. Carton.
The politicians are the burden.

Officer Adams removes a small digital camera from her desk and turns it on.

OFFICER ADAMS:
Well, at least you brought your handsome face. Look this way?

Sydney turns to face the camera.

SYDNEY:
Should I smile?

OFFICER ADAMS:
Actually, you can't. There's a law against it.

SYDNEY:
(German accent)
Ja wol.

Officer Adams takes the picture and then connects the camera to her computer for the transfer.

OFFICER ADAMS
Almost done.

She hands over another piece of paper.

OFFICER ADAMS:
Just sign here and initial here.

Sydney grabs a pen and leaves his marks.

OFFICER ADAMS:
And we're done. Only 23 more years to go.

SYDNEY:
And then I can die?

Officer Adams is startled by this but smiles and plays

along.

CUT TO:

EXT. CEMETERY - AFTERNOON

The camera pans across a cemetery.

OFFICER ADAMS: (O.S.)
And then you can die.

INT. CEMETERY OFFICE - AFTERNOON

The cemetery manager is looking over Amber's note, referencing a registry at his finger tips.

MANAGER:
Yeh. I remember that one. Last
March. Hell of a storm. But a good
crowd.

He leads Sydney out the door and gestures in a very specific direction.

EXT. CEMETERY PLOT - CONTINUING

Sydney stands before Amy's headstone, unable to speak. After a number of beats he starts.

SYDNEY:
Hi

SYDNEY: (V.O.)
Fuck Cancer!

Sydney fights back tears.

SYDNEY:
I'm so sorry, Amy. That I wasn't
there. That you died without me.
That I couldn't give you what you
so freely gave me...in my time of
need. That I was...in prison,
because I typed some stupid shit in
some stupid, god-damned chat room.

Sydney looks around to see if anyone is watching.

SYDNEY:
I always loved you, but then I
didn't really have much choice, did
I? You're the very definition of
love at first sight.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. FLASHBACK TO GEORGE AND VULTURE - EVENING

The familiar eyes and smile of Miranda, but as the camera slowly pulls back we see the slightly transformed face of Amy, a woman who looks so very much like the woman from the grocery store.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

I know I never told you. I never really knew how to say it. Because I never know if it's...too much. Or, not enough. It's always one or the other, you see.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CEMETERY - CONTINUING

Sydney stares down, lost in thought.

SYDNEY:

I never knew how to love someone, you know, just right. But I think, maybe, I came pretty close with you. Yeh, pretty close. Thank you for letting me love you. Just right.

Sydney takes a knee and places a deep red rose on the grave.

SYDNEY:

Your sister says hi.

Sydney stands and begins his walk away from Amy.

CUT TO:

INT. SYDNEY'S CAR - CONTINUING

The car is still running. Sydney opens the door and steps in. He reaches for the shifter. A woman's hand reaches out from the passenger side and gently comes to rest on top of his.

FADE OUT.

EXT. SYDNEY'S BACKYARD - AFTERNOON

Sydney sits at his bistro table at the head of the pool.
The dog sits happily at his feet.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

When I was young, my dad told me
to marry my best friend. At the
time, my best friend was a 12 year
old named Clyde. You are welcome to
imagine my confusion.

Sydney reaches for his Old New Orleans.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

Of course, I get it now.

Sydney pours his drink.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

He also told me that I must accept
responsibility for everything that
happens in my life. Even if,
especially if, it's not my fault.

Sydney takes a sip.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

In other words, to live a life of
blame is to live no life at all.

Sydney puts down his glass and pets the dog.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

These were the words of my father.
They have served me well. They
always will.

Sydney puts on his straw hat.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

I don't really have any words of my
own to give, so I will leave you
with a generous thought from Mr.
Henry Louis Mencken.

One last look at the palm trees, at the now manicured yard.

SYDNEY: (V.O.)

If, after I depart this vale, you
remember me and have a thought to
please my ghost, forgive some
sinner and wink your eye at some

homely girl.

CUT TO:

The dog is clearly distracted, anxious even, as it eyes something in the pool. The camera pulls back, revealing the bars of the wrought iron fence that separate the pool from the lawn, the budding roses to the other side of the fence, the edge of the pool, then the start of a bare foot dangling from a raft, the leg, then the very casually clad torso of a woman lying on the raft. There is a small bowl of gummi bears resting on her stomach. A hand reaches into the bowl. We follow the hand to the mouth as the gummi bear is swallowed. Brandie smiles.

FADE TO:

END TITLE: RUM HOUSE

FADE TO BLACK.