

CRASHING

by

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FADE IN:

1

INT. LIMBO/FUTURISTIC BEDROOM - DAWN

1

Shadowy, few details. A MAN wakes up, disoriented.

MAN (V.O.)

Okay...wake up...don't know where I
am...don't remember what I did...
drinking...drunk...plausible
explanation...

He turns over, sees a NAKED WOMAN sleeping beside him.

MAN (V.O.)

Wish I remembered that part...or do I?

He quietly scoots to top the edge of the bed -- fumbles
with his pants on the floor -- finds a TINY ELECTRONIC
DEVICE.

EXTREME CLOSE-UP -- PLATINUM LED CARD

The logo reads: *Mr. Memory*

The man whispers into the little device.

MAN

What's her name? What happened?

MR. MEMORY

(whispers back)

Mary. She was very drunk. You fucked
her twice.

MAN (V.O.)

(not whispering)

Mr. Memory -- stupid idea.

CUT TO:

2

INT. LIMBO/FUTURISTIC BEDROOM - DAWN

2

The scene starts over again, exactly as before: a man
wakes up, disoriented.

MAN (V.O.)

Where am I? Okay, I'm in this
situation...what do my eyes see?

He sees that the woman wears a necklace.

MAN (V.O.)
How many beads -- one, two, three,
four...no...meaningless...no!

CUT TO:

3

INT. LIMBO/FUTURISTIC BEDROOM - DAWN

3

The scene starts over again -- the man is sleeping -- wakes up -- disoriented. He turns over -- sees the naked woman sleeping beside him.

She opens her eyes -- smiles.

WOMAN
Good morning.

MAN
(voice over)
Good.
(out loud)
Good morning.

WOMAN
Who are you?

MAN
I was just going to ask you that.

WOMAN
But you didn't.

MAN
Didn't give me a chance.

WOMAN
Oh, but I think I did.

MAN
Isn't that an obvious thing to say?

WOMAN
But aren't we in an obvious situation?

MAN
Obviously.

WOMAN
And I knew that you were going to say that.

MAN
I used to surprise myself.

WOMAN

Not anymore.

RICHARD (V.O.)

Fucked.

The woman DISAPPEARS.

RICHARD (V.O.)

Congratulations. She was naked and she was boring...or was she?

The man DISAPPEARS.

CUT TO:

4 INT. CHUNG KING RESTAURANT - DAY 4

Cheap Chinese with new light fixtures.

RICHARD'S eyes never leave the manuscript as he takes a bite of a lunch special. He red-lines a page -- slashing paragraphs and sentences until only a parsed phrase remains.

He turns to the next page and starts the reduction process all over again.

RICHARD (V.O.)

Maybe she wasn't boring. But I was. Bored to death with the book. And still suffering to finish it in some satisfactory manner.

DISSOLVE TO:

5 INT. RESTAURANT - LATER 5

The plate is gone, the place is empty -- except for the writer. Just a tea cup left on the worn linoleum table as he slashes through the last of the manuscript pages.

RICHARD (V.O.)

I hated the book so much I'd rewritten it five times, top to bottom. I was nearing another bottom. And if it weren't for the contract -- and the advance -- the advance that had long ago declined...

A single word is left on the page. He slashes through that.

6 EXT. PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY - DAY 6

A 1967 RED BMW COUPE speeds along the highway and hangs a turn onto Broad Beach Road.

7 EXT. MALIBU HOUSE - DAY 7

Richard pulls his sport car into the driveway as a LOCKSMITH VAN is leaving. The garage door opens and the car slips into a spot beside a Mercedes.

Richard closes the garage door. He walks toward the front door. And stops when he sees:

RICHARD'S POV - THE FRONT DOOR

A suitcase sits on the aged-brick front doorstep.

WIDE ON SCENE

He puts a key in the front door but it doesn't fit. He bends and examines the lock. It's new.

He rings the bell. No answer. Rings again. Looks around -- nods to himself -- it all makes sense. He takes out a cell phone, dials.

WOMAN (V.O.)

It's Margot. Speak. BEEP.

He flips the phone shut. With a shrug, he picks up the suitcase and starts back towards the garage.

He clicks the remote. The garage door stays closed. He tries again -- same result.

Suitcase in hand, Richard starts walking away down Broad Beach Road. Just like The Tramp -- but with a cell phone.

RICHARD

Peter -- Margot's just kicked me out...She changed the locks...No, I'm not working on it -- I can't -- the computer's in the house...Just a suitcase...I'll call you later...

He hangs up -- continues walking.

RICHARD (V.O.)

Used to be, you didn't want to talk to anyone, you left the house.

(MORE)

RICHARD (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Now you leave the house and you still
have to talk. I could write a book about
that. That might make a better book...
anything would make a better book.

The cell phone RINGS. Richard glances at the LED and
silences the ringer.

8 EXT. WESTWOOD BLVD. - DAY 8

Richard gets out of a TAXI with his suitcase.

9 EXT. UCLA - DAY 9

He sits on a bench and shuffles through the sheaf of
manuscript pages that he marked up at lunch. Only a
couple of slim paragraphs survived his brutal editing.
The pages don't look any better to him sitting on the
bench.

He looks up from the pages to the students walking by.

10 INT. CORRIDOR, DRESCHER HALL - DAY 10

Suitcase in one hand, cell phone in the other, Richard
wanders down the hallway.

RICHARD

Diane, hi, it's me...What's the room
number?...No, I'm here...

He opens the door revealing:

11 INT. CLASSROOM - DAY 11

The classroom is full. All the chairs are occupied, and
pulled into a circle. And not just UNDERGRADS, but
GRADUATE STUDENTS and FACULTY have crowded in -- now that
seats have run out, they stand against the walls.

Richard steps in and surprised by the SRO crowd. Heads
turn to look at him.

He spots DIANE FREED, talking on her cell phone.

RICHARD

(into phone)

See?

They smile hello and both hang up their phones. Diane
taps her wrist watch in a mild reproach. Richard taps
his watchless wrist in mild retort.

Diane rises to meet Richard. A moment of awkwardness as they hover between a kiss and a hug. Richard aims a hello kiss at her lips, it lands on her cheek.

DIANE

Why the suitcase?

RICHARD

Long story. Actually, a short story.

Diane -- then Richard -- notice that the room has gotten very quiet -- all eyes and ears are on them.

DIANE

(whispers)

A short story with a catchy opening.
Shall we begin?

RICHARD

Shall we?

She indicates the lone empty chair, next to hers.

DIANE

(clears throat)

I'm very pleased to welcome novelist
Richard McMurray.

There is loud, sustained applause, surprising Richard.

DIANE

So, without further adieu...

RICHARD

I haven't done this in a while, what do
you usually...?

DIANE

Usually, you read a piece and then talk
about writing.

(nods at pages he is holding)

Is that from your new book?

RICHARD

It is -- or was. I was working on this
at lunch and...

(leafs through the pages)

Thankfully -- for you -- I edited all the
boring, repetitive stuff out and I was
left with...

(importantly rustles pages)

(MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

"One morning Richard McMurray awoke to find that he had been transformed into a giant cockroach."

An awkward moment -- is he serious? -- then the room erupts with laughter.

RICHARD

(holds up pages)

Actually, there's nothing left. Consider yourselves lucky.

BOY STUDENT

Mr. McMurray?

RICHARD

Richard. Or Rick.

BOY STUDENT

Rick. What's the new book about?

RICHARD

After four years it's not so new. Actually, it's shit. But some very good news today. My wife -- or is it ex-wife? how quickly do they become ex's? -- she locked me out. And my computer in. So I can't work on my book. She thought she was punishing me by taking my book away. And it feels like...the best thing that's happened to me in...four years?

Some students take notes.

DIANE

Richard's always been hard on himself.

RICHARD

You didn't read it.

ANOTHER STUDENT (O.S.)

What do you think of "The Trouble With Dick" now?

RICHARD

Haven't read it since they ripped the galleys out of my hands. I'm afraid to read it again -- I'd just see a zillion things I'd want to change. At the time I remember thinking it was pretty good -- I'm sure it could have been better, but I did the best I could and I wasn't looking over my shoulder -- I was too young to have a shoulder.

YET ANOTHER STUDENT

What are your plans now?

RICHARD

(nudges suitcase with his
foot)

Don't know where I'm going to sleep
tonight. But I've escaped from Malibu
and that feels great.

(a realization hits him)

Wow. I feel great.

Diane tries to maintain a pose of professorial poise, but she, like everyone else, is charmed by Richard's devil-may-care candor.

DISSOLVE TO:

12

INT. CLASSROOM - LATER

12

Richard is still talking and the class is still enthralled.

RICHARD

...I'm not very good on theory -- Diane can attest to that -- but it always seemed to me that there were two kinds of writers -- those who write from inside their heads and those who write about what's outside. The inside of your head -- my head -- is fairly limited -- but reality is inexhaustible. So I opted for writing about stuff on the outside. Of course, easier said than done. Hey, feel free to bust me.

Students for the next class mill impatiently in the doorway.

DIANE

We're out of time, but I want to thank Richard for sharing so much with us.

The class applauds -- even louder than at the start. Faculty and students press in -- to shake Richard's hand and to have him sign copies of "The Trouble With Dick," his first novel.

Diane is doing a pretty good job of trying to not look jealous.

KRISTIN reaches the front of the line of well-wishers. She tries not to seem as serious as she is.

KRISTIN

Is it really true, you don't have a place to sleep tonight?

RICHARD

That is a true fact.

KRISTIN

You could stay with me -- my roommate and I -- if you don't mind sleeping on the couch.

Richard takes her measure -- there seem to be five emotions working in different directions, and yet she seems calm and collected and together. As near as he can tell, it is a humanitarian offer, not a come-on.

RICHARD

Well, if I said yes, then that would be a plan, and I'm sort of loving not having a plan, for as long as that lasts.

KRISTIN

So not having a plan is your plan?

RICHARD

Another dream punctured.

KRISTIN

Now I know why your books are so funny.

Students for the next class crowd in. Diane apologizes to the PROFESSOR and helps him rearrange the desks into straight lines.

RICHARD

Book. Singular.

KRISTIN

I'll have to read it again.

There's a moment to say good-bye but she steps away without either one saying it.

Richard looks over and sees Diane watching him.

CUT TO:

13

EXT. ART DEPT. COURTYARD - DAY

13

They are still watching each other. Intimacy and wariness commingle.

RICHARD

It's weird, we wind up living in the same city and I haven't seen you in, what, five years?

DIANE

No, we live in different worlds. I mean, Malibu.

RICHARD

Hey, Malibu and I are no longer one.

DIANE

Tell me about Malibu.

RICHARD

Okay. I sat in this room and I looked at my computer. Or I looked at the waves. Sometimes I confused the two.

DIANE

And what about Margot?

RICHARD

She owned the house. Maybe she even owned the waves. I paid her rent.

DIANE

On the house? Or the waves?

RICHARD

That's the thing about Malibu -- it all conflates. Boring.

DIANE

Successful novelist. Married to beautiful actress. Living in Malibu. Sounds mythic.

RICHARD

Care to deconstruct me? Isn't that what you beautiful brainy professors do?

DIANE

I wouldn't presume.

RICHARD

You would and you have, but allow me. "Successful novelist" -- cult hit, seven years ago.

DIANE

Genre-bending coming-of-age story.

RICHARD

Please, let me deconstruct myself, then you can take your own whack at the pieces. Cult novelist gets confused by the encomium "genre-bender" -- his egregious use of SF in an otherwise conventional first novel fools him into trying the same trick twice. "Beautiful actress" -- that phrase actually deconstructs itself -- either she's always acting or she's not and tormented cult novelist can't tell the difference and neither can she. And -- what else am I?

DIANE

"Living in Malibu."

RICHARD

I've already taken care of that. Or, rather, she has, god bless her.

Diane looks at him differently. Her perceptions of Richard and the Good Life have been deconstructed.

DIANE

Are you okay?

RICHARD

If you'd asked me that yesterday I probably would have lied and said yes. Hell, if you'd asked me that this morning...and you? Doctor of Literature. Teaching at the great university. Living the life of the mind.

DIANE

You've never been to a faculty meeting.

Diane sips her coffee. Richard studies her face.

RICHARD

Do you have a boyfriend?

DIANE

(surprised by the question)
No. Not at the moment.

RICHARD

(smiles)
So we're both available. What are you doing tonight?

DIANE

Richard, whoa, this is a little fast.

RICHARD

Life is fast.

DIANE

That sounds like a familiar line.

RICHARD

Only because we're familiar.

DIANE

Down, boy. Drink your coffee.

Kristin appears at the coffee kiosk with JACQUELINE, who we also recognize from Diane's class -- her acid green sweater is an intentional eye magnet. Jacqueline wears more make-up and baubles than Kristin. The yang to Kristin's yin, she is more serious than she seems at first.

KRISTIN

Hi. Sorry to interrupt, but I wanted you to meet my roommate.

JACQUELINE

Jacqueline. Hi. Thank you for today.

KRISTIN

Have you found a place to stay?

Richard looks at Diane then back at the girls.

RICHARD

Haven't officially started looking.

KRISTIN

Our couch is extremely comfortable. And it's still available.

JACQUELINE

You said you need a place to sleep and we've got a place and...

KRISTIN

It would be an honor.

RICHARD

So you were serious?

Kristin nods solemnly.

RICHARD

Well...okay. Why not?

Diane is surprised by the offer -- and his acceptance -- and the implications.

Kristin scribbles on a piece of paper, rips it from her notebook, hands it to Richard.

KRISTIN

So...see you later?

Kristin tugs Jacqueline away.

JACQUELINE

(in no hurry to leave)

See you.

Alone again, Richard can see that Diane is hurt.

DIANE

Richard, if you need a couch, you can sleep on mine.

RICHARD

I don't *need* a couch.

DIANE

But if you're planning on staying with them...

RICHARD

I wasn't *planning* anything.

DIANE

Then stay with me.

RICHARD

Whoa yourself.

DIANE

Let me help.

RICHARD

Don't need help. This is a lark.

DIANE

It's just that I'm their teacher.

RICHARD

I'm not.

DIANE

But you met in a pedagogical context.
That implies something.

RICHARD

It's just a couch.

DIANE

And what's wrong with mine?

RICHARD

What's wrong is that you never would have
offered if they hadn't.

DIANE

But I did.

He stops -- looks at her -- deeply -- then smiles.

RICHARD

What a weird fucking day.

CUT TO:

A14 EXT. TIKI APARTMENTS - AFTERNOON/TWILIGHT A14

Richard carries his suitcase up the walkway, past a Tiki
God that adorns the support pillar.

14 INT. THE APARTMENT - NIGHT 14

Richard knocks on the door.

KRISTIN (O.S.)

It's open.

He opens the door -- enters -- sees Kristin, slouched on
the couch, in sweats, reading "The Trouble With Dick."

RICHARD

Hi.

KRISTIN

You really came.

RICHARD

You're really reading it.

She sits up and closes the book. He takes a moment to
look around the room -- Ikea furniture, lots of books in
piles here and there.

KRISTIN

I read it in high school and, wow, the Diana character -- that's Professor Freed? Diane?

RICHARD

Should have been cleverer with the pseudonym. First novel.

KRISTIN

So you guys have a history. I mean, it's her but it's not her. How did you do that?

RICHARD

I just did it.

Jacqueline comes in from her bedroom, in cut-offs and a holey T-shirt.

JACQUELINE

You still a pothead?

RICHARD

Well...not really.

JACQUELINE

Too bad.

RICHARD

Why?

CUT TO:

15

INT. APARTMENT - LATER

15

Richard and Jacqueline and Kristin sit on the floor, passing around a joint. Psychedelic drone music pumps from the stereo.

RICHARD

What is this?

KRISTIN

Public Domain. Their second CD.

RICHARD

It's amazing.

KRISTIN

They're from Portland. I'll burn you a disc, if you like.

JACQUELINE

Do you listen to music when you write?

RICHARD

Sometimes. Do you?

JACQUELINE

Always. Power pop stuff. Hits. Only hits. "Best of" stuff. H-I-H-O's my thang.

He takes a toke, draws a blank.

JACQUELINE

Hits in, hits out. H-I-H-O.

Richard nods.

RICHARD

Hi-ho, Silver, and away!
(off Jacqueline's blank look)
The Lone Ranger.

Jacqueline nods. Richard's phone RINGS. By habit, he looks at the LED -- and is hit with pot paranoia and indecision.

RICHARD

Fuck. It's my agent. Should I talk to him? Got to talk to him *sometime*.
(looks to the girls)
Should I?

JACQUELINE

Get it over with.

KRISTIN

Or don't bother.

Impulsively, he presses the button.

RICHARD

Hi...
(gestures for Kristin to turn down the music)
With friends...Marty, she locked me out of the house...I only had chapter one with me...I called Peter, he's on it...I know...I know...Yes...Good-bye.
(hangs up)
Fuck. Did I sound high?

JACQUELINE

No--

KRISTIN

Yes--

They both laugh.

RICHARD

Why in the fuck did I answer the phone?

KRISTIN

It's a primal mammalian urge. We're hard-wired to do it.

They fall silent. For a long beat.

JACQUELINE

Dead air.

They all nod knowingly.

CUT TO:

16

INT. APARTMENT - LATER

16

Richard and Kristin sit cross-legged on the floor, browsing through piles of paperbacks. The second movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony surges on the stereo. No sign of Jacqueline.

KRISTIN

(holds up "Vox")

Read it?

(he nods *no*)

Boringly horny. Have you read "The Mezzanine?"

(he nods *no*)

The whole book is Nicholson Baker's thoughts as he rides an escalator back from lunch, carrying a new pair of shoelaces. It's sort of like Tristram Shandy -- consciousness atomized into a thousand shimmering details.

RICHARD

Give me one.

KRISTIN

Okay. He had this thing about not being able to pee while a guy was standing next to him.

RICHARD

I can relate.

KRISTIN

And he discovered this trick -- if he imagined that he was peeing on the head of the guy next to him, then it was easy to pee -- not on the guy -- but into the thing.

RICHARD

Urinal.

KRISTIN

Not a word I often work into conversations.

RICHARD

So do you have that problem?

KRISTIN

Peeing next to a guy?

RICHARD

Bathroom shyness -- is that a weird question?

KRISTIN

We pee in stalls.

RICHARD

I know that.

KRISTIN

And I grew up with two sisters. "The Mezzanine"'s here somewhere.

Jacqueline appears, dressed to go out.

JACQUELINE

(does a turn)

What do you think?

KRISTIN

I'd fuck you.

The girls laugh -- Richard smiles.

JACQUELINE

Sheets?

KRISTIN

My extra set's in the hamper.

JACQUELINE

You can use mine. See you guys later.

KRISTIN

Soy milk.

JACQUELINE

Right.

Jacqueline leaves.

Kristin looks at Richard.

KRISTIN

Finally. We're alone.

He looks uncertain -- she laughs -- he relaxes.

17

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

17

Richard closes the door and looks around. Quite a collection of hair conditioners on the bathtub ledge. A scramble of make-up thingies by the sink.

RICHARD (V.O.)

Kristin's towel...or Jacqueline's? And the shampoo...which is which?...Similar because...same demographic, family, education, that kind of shit, and they are roommates, but...different...

Richard lifts up the toilet seat. As he pees, he opens the medicine cabinet and examines the contents.

RICHARD (V.O.)

Vagisil -- Jacqueline...Eye drops -- Kristin...Tampons -- shared? -- any Tampons in that mezzanine book, ask her that? Do I talk louder to myself stoned? (smiles to himself)

What a strange, great, *unexpected* place to be peeing tonight...story takes place in the length of time it takes my pee to hit the water...got to tell Kristin, *she* should write it...

*

18

INT. HALLWAY DOOR - NIGHT

18

Two bedrooms and a bathroom are off the small hallway.

Behind the closed bathroom door, the toilet flushes. Richard steps out, smiling -- then hurries back and lowers the toilet seat.

19

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

19

Kristin is curled up reading the marked-into-oblivion manuscript pages.

KRISTIN

This is great, I mean, what I can make out--

RICHARD

(sees what she is reading)
Hey, who said...?

KRISTIN

Fair game. I read *everything*. It's wonderful.

RICHARD

It's okay -- maybe. Sort of. Out of context. Some good sentences. As a fragment.

KRISTIN

Is there more in the suitcase?

RICHARD

Oh, God. I hope not. That would be perverse.

KRISTIN

What is in there?

He takes a breath. With trepidation, he opens the suitcase: ruffled tuxedo shirt, swim trunks, Hawaiian shirt, ripped blue jean jacket. No manuscript.

RICHARD

Thank God. She kept it. And the fantastic thing is, she thinks she's *punishing* me.

KRISTIN

But these pages are good.

RICHARD

The book's not.

KRISTIN

That's all your clothes?

RICHARD

All she gave me. Four years of marriage,
there's the remains. I'd count that as a
relatively clean escape.

He gingerly takes the pages away from her.

RICHARD

Okay. Now it's my turn.

KRISTIN

What?

RICHARD

Let me read something of yours.

KRISTIN

God -- no.

RICHARD

Why not? Diane has.

KRISTIN

That's different. And...I don't know
what I'd show you...

RICHARD

Well, the offer stands.

KRISTIN

(nudges the ruffled shirt
with her toe)

I could write a story about your
suitcase. There's a story in there, I
think.

Richard nods his head *maybe*. Kristin yawns.

RICHARD

Long day?

KRISTIN

Yours sounds longer.

She stands and stretches.

CUT TO:

Shoes off, a copy of "The Mezzanine" open in his lap,
Richard plucks a fat roach from the ash tray and lights
it.

Kristin comes in, wearing silk pajamas, carrying bedding. He offers her the roach and she declines.

KRISTIN

Here's a blanket and sheets...Do you need anything else...something to eat or...?

RICHARD

I'm fine.

The moment hangs. Finally:

KRISTIN

Well, then...good night.

RICHARD

'Night, Kristin.

She leaves. Richard relights the roach and picks up the book.

CUT TO:

21 INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

21

Richard has made up the couch, and lies under the sheets, a small lamp propped on the arm rest, reading "The Mezzanine."

There is laughter and the front door opens -- Jacqueline, with a tequila-fueled smile, followed by BRAD, a shaggy blonde surfer.

JACQUELINE

Hi. Brad, Richard. Richard, Brad. Richard wrote "The Trouble With Dick."

BRAD

The flick?

JACQUELINE

The book.

BRAD

Cool.

JACQUELINE

(sees book)

Oh, man -- "The Mezzanine" -- you've been Kristin-ized.

(to Brad)

It's a book about a broken shoelace.

BRAD

Cool.

RICHARD

It's great.

JACQUELINE

Greatest story ever told about a shoelace.

She pulls Brad by the hand.

JACQUELINE

Sweet dreams.

Richard hears laughter -- a door closing -- then muffled sounds of Jacqueline and Brad talking -- then not. He tries to get back into the book, but can't.

He looks around the room -- soaking in the unfamiliar objects -- the strange sounds --

CUT TO:

22 INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

22

Richard is asleep, illuminated by the reading lamp. The lamp clicks off -- Richard wakes with a start.

Jacqueline stands over him, in a clingy silk robe.

JACQUELINE

Oh. Sorry.

He sits up -- sees that Jacqueline is holding a plate of spaghetti.

CUT TO:

23 INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

23

They sit at the wobbly Formica table, both finishing a snack of cold spaghetti.

JACQUELINE

I'm going to write a best seller. Does that make you hate me?

RICHARD

(smiles)

No. What genre?

JACQUELINE

Me. I'll turn myself into a genre. And fulfill my destiny.

RICHARD

Destiny?

JACQUELINE

Of my name. Jacqueline Susann wrote terrible books and nobody reads them anymore but everyone remembers her -- the idea of her. Imagine well-written, post-modern Jacqueline Susann.

RICHARD

I'm trying. Post-modern?

JACQUELINE

Why can't there be really hot post-modern sex?

RICHARD

No reason...

JACQUELINE

Sex transcends style.

RICHARD

Sex is style.

JACQUELINE

Sex is whatever you want it to be. It's a mirror. What's that look?

RICHARD

Thinking.

JACQUELINE

You think it's silly. A silly ambition.

RICHARD

No.

JACQUELINE

I don't care.

RICHARD

No--

JACQUELINE

No, I do care, but I'm still going to do it.

RICHARD

You know what you want. I respect that.
I envy it.

JACQUELINE

But you don't respect *what* I want.

RICHARD

But I don't have to. You do.

She nods.

RICHARD

Fuck. Write a hit book. More power to
you.

JACQUELINE

You did it.

RICHARD

By accident.

Jacqueline stands and leans over to pick up her plate -- the front of her robe drapes down and Richard can easily see all there is to see. He averts his eyes. Jacqueline is amused by his tact.

JACQUELINE

Well...guess it's beddy-bye.

RICHARD

Research?

JACQUELINE

What?

RICHARD

Brad.

JACQUELINE

(gets it, smiles)
Sent him packing. Nothing new there.

RICHARD

Sorry. Research takes patience.

JACQUELINE

And tenacity. Time for bed.

It sure seems like an offer.

RICHARD

Time for couch.

He lies back down on the couch -- pulls the sheets around him -- his eyes drift across the strange objects -- he sees the copy of "The Trouble With Dick" open on the coffee table.

24-25 OMITTED 24-25

25A POV SHOT - INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (DREAM SEQUENCE) 25A

Shadows of headlights rake across the unfamiliar ceiling.

Wearing her robe, JACQUELINE approaches the couch -- starts to bend over -- just before Richard sees her breasts--

JUMP CUT TO:

Wearing Jacqueline's robe, DIANE approaches the couch -- starts to bend over -- just before Richard sees her breasts --

JUMP CUT TO:

Wearing Jacqueline's robe, KRISTIN approaches the couch -- starts to bend over -- just before Richard sees her breasts --

CUT TO:

26 INT. APARTMENT - MORNING 26

Richard opens his eyes -- the ceiling looks strange -- hears the sound of a faucet -- he slowly gets his bearings -- sits up -- peers over the couch and sees:

Kristin washing her breakfast dishes. She sees him.

RICHARD

What time is it?

KRISTIN

Quarter to ten -- late again -- I left you some coffee.

She starts for the door.

RICHARD

And Jacqueline?

KRISTIN

Gym junkie. Long gone.

RICHARD

Can I use one of your computers to check my e-mail?

KRISTIN

I guess. Sure. See ya.

And she's out the door.

RICHARD

Hey, Kristin! Key?!

He scrambles up from the couch -- peeks out the door.

RICHARD

Kristin?!

She's gone.

He walks over to the kitchen area, taking the measure of the place. It feels different, being alone.

His cell phone RINGS. He finds it on the floor -- checks the number.

RICHARD

Peter. Hi...She suspects *me* of hiding assets? The book isn't community property, it's from *before* we were married...Yes, I realize I transferred it to the corporation and she's an officer...What?! I have *no* access to the bank account? No credit cards? Hey, you're a lawyer, fix it!...Peter, I'm crashing on the couch of a couple of English students -- I've got sixty bucks in my wallet.

(annoyed)

Yes, they're over eighteen.

(exasperated)

No, I don't want to sleep on *your* sofa.

(softens)

No, you don't have to messenger me any money. Just make this go away, okay?
Thanks. Bye.

Richard hangs up. Disgusted, he tosses the phone aside.

CUT TO:

27 INT. JACQUELINE'S BEDROOM - DAY 27

Sipping coffee, Richard goes into Jacqueline's room. An unmade queen-size bed fills up most of the room. Dresser drawers are open, CDs and books cover the floor, a print of Klimpt's "The Lover" is tacked on the wall.

There's no room for a desk and chair. Richard sits on the edge of the bed facing Jacqueline's PC. He glances at her books and folios of what appear to be her writing.

Richard clicks the mouse, but he can't find an icon for an internet browser. He tries "Start" and three columns of sub-folders pop onto the screen. Frustrated, he leaves.

28 INT. KRISTIN'S BEDROOM - DAY 28

On the wall is a print of "Starry Night." Kristin's bed is neatly made. He smiles at the lime green iMac on her orderly desk.

The log-on screen has two choices: "KRISTIN" and "GUEST." Richard debates with himself -- briefly -- enters "KRISTIN."

The iMac asks for a password. Richard looks around the room -- tries "Tristram" -- "Van Gogh" -- "Mezzanine" -- they don't work.

On top of a neat stack of papers is a letter addressed to Kristin. When he picks up the envelope, a picture of a border collie drops out. On the back is written "Pandora's latest pose."

He tries "PANDORA." Bingo! While the program loads, he unfolds the letter -- gives it a quick read -- notes the signature: "Love, Kelly."

Embarrassed by his own snooping, he puts the picture and letter back in the envelope and turns to the computer screen.

A folder is labelled "Letters to Kelly." He opens it. Dozens of files are inside. He opens the most recent file.

Kristin's VOICE reads the text on screen:

KRISTIN (V.O.)

Kelly, I know you've been lonely since Ed was called up, but I don't think you should be having sex with strangers.

(MORE)

KRISTIN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Maybe you checked this guy's credit history, but did you check his medical history? There are a lot of STD's driving around in SUV's.

With great difficulty, Richard closes the file and logs off. He looks in her desk drawers -- finds a legal pad -- takes it with him as he leaves the room.

29 INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY 29

Richard slouches on the couch, writing on the legal pad. Stops. Tries to start again. Can't.

30 INT. KRISTIN'S BEDROOM - DAY 30

Richard returns, legal pad in hand. Without pause, he enters her password and starts reading more of the letters, taking occasional notes.

KRISTIN (V.O.)

This guy Vincent is nice, Kel, but he's a jejune writer. His pecs are buff but not his paragraphs. Maybe I'd be better off dating someone in the physical sciences. Sometimes I just want to stand in Royce Quad and yell, "Richard, are you here?"

Richard looks puzzled.

KRISTIN (V.O.)

Rick?

Then he realizes Kristin is back. Hurriedly, he closes the computer file and tidies up.

KRISTIN (V.O.)

(louder)
Hey, Rick!

Richard finishes tidying just as Kristin comes in.

KRISTIN

Didn't you hear us?

RICHARD

No -- checking my email -- bad news.

KRISTIN

Oh?

31

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

31

Richard finishes telling his narrative to Jacqueline and Kristin.

RICHARD

...so until my lawyer gets it
straightened out, I have no money.

JACQUELINE

Wow...you don't seem that upset.

He just shrugs. The girls look at each other.

KRISTIN

You can stay here for a while.

RICHARD

Yeah?

JACQUELINE

Yeah.

RICHARD

Only if you agree to let me pay for all
the food and at least a month's rent when
my finances get straightened out.

KRISTIN

No.

RICHARD

I insist.

JACQUELINE

How long do you think it'll take?

RICHARD

A couple of days. A week at most. My
lawyer's very good.

JACQUELINE

Yeah, but how good is your wife's lawyer?

Richard hadn't thought about this. He doesn't answer.

JACQUELINE

Listen, how about if instead of the rent
you pay in services?

RICHARD

Services?

JACQUELINE
Literary consultation.

RICHARD
I read your stuff, make some comments?

Jacqueline -- then Kristin -- nod yes.

RICHARD
It'd be my pleasure. Really.

JACQUELINE
How did a genius like you end up on our couch?

RICHARD
Just lucky, I guess.

CUT TO:

32 INT. HOUSE - DAY (**JACQUELINE'S FICTION**)

32

Furniture in boxes. A WOMAN enters with a reasonably good-looking MAN. She tours the man through the house, professional, distant--

JACQUELINE (V.O.)
Her profession was empty rooms, always someone else's rooms that she showed and sold on commission. Anonymous spaces and faces. If it was a he and he looked okay, she thought, you can sleep with me, have your way, eye to eye, and I prefer it not so perfectly polite -- but I will not show you -- you must see, what little clues -- are you misreading the signs -- there is a reward for seeing me.

--until he blocks the entrance of a walk-in closet.

JACQUELINE (V.O.)
You must kiss me. You must take that chance. Without me helping you. And I will not tell you why.

But he doesn't kiss her. He points at the ceiling, asks a question -- they retreat from the closet -- the door closes.

33 WOMAN'S POV

33

Pan across the ceiling and walls, to the sound of a man grunting.

POV continues until the man looms in ECU -- eyes closed.
(It is the POV of the woman having sex with the man.)

JACQUELINE (V.O.)

Why was I doing this? Didn't know him,
didn't like him, didn't remember his
name. But...I got him to say yes.
Because of me. Just wish he was better.
Because if he was good, if it was good,
any good, then I'd stop talking to
myself. Details. Collection of details
pouring into my senses. Input. In put.
Defines me.

CUT TO:

34

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

34

Richard reads at the kitchen table. He lowers the pages.
Thinks about them. Nods to himself: *not bad*.

He picks up his legal pad and starts writing. There are
FLASH CUTS of Jacqueline playing the role of the "woman"
in her story as Richard writes:

RICHARD (V.O.)

She thought she was revealing one thing,
but she was revealing something else.
Her words were a window into her world.
A prime artifact of what she was
thinking.

FLASH CUT: Jacqueline smiles seductively at the real
estate client.

RICHARD (V.O.)

Not as a fiction writer. An artifact of
herself. Already I can't see her as who
she is, but rather as a character that I
am observing, recording, manipulating.
As much as I can manipulate words.

(stops writing, looks around)

I'm talking to myself like her character
talks to herself. At least she was
getting laid. Maybe she's right -- the
Jacqueline Susann mode of literature.

FLASH CUT: Jacqueline and the client get closer and
closer -- and kiss.

RICHARD (V.O.)

So...if I think about Jacqueline, this Jacqueline, as a character, does it elevate what I am doing into..and why do I have to elevate it...for who...whom...

(starts writing again)

She has definite talent as a writer. A voice. Subject matter. Theme. Not completely aware of what she is doing -- but who is? And why is self-awareness necessarily a defining quality?

FLASH CUT: The deed done, Jacqueline straightens out her clothes, shows the client the rest of the house.

RICHARD (V.O.)

And what am I doing? Critiquing her in a way that preserves my own tenuous self-image?

Wearing sweats, Jacqueline comes in and watches Richard write. She waits for him to stop writing before she speaks. He stops. Taps pencil. Sees her. Smiles.

JACQUELINE

Didn't mean to interrupt.

RICHARD

You didn't.

JACQUELINE

So what did you think?

She sits down.

RICHARD

You definitely put me in the girl's head. I wish there were more details.

JACQUELINE

It's just a beginning.

RICHARD

I can't factor that in. You hand me something, I'm going to read it without excuses.

JACQUELINE

Fair enough.

RICHARD

Your character talks about input -- what she gets from her senses -- so give me that. That's what I want. Don't just put me in her head. Put me in that room.

She nods thoughtfully. She picks up her pages -- sees that there are no notes on them.

RICHARD

Here's an idea. Sometimes Larry McMurtry writes a book in the first person. Then he rewrites it in the third person. Personally, if I wrote a book that was half-decent one way, I don't think I'd have the energy to write it all over again.

JACQUELINE

But your new book --

RICHARD

(worried)

What new book?

JACQUELINE

The one you talked about in class.

RICHARD (V.O.)

The *old* new book.

RICHARD

Yes?

JACQUELINE

You said you rewrote that five times.

RICHARD

Not by choice. Not as a strategy. And without a good result. I was hoping that the first draft was something that I could tweak to perfection. The thing that's admirable about McMurtry's approach is that he writes an *entire draft* of a novel knowing full well that it's only a stepping-stone to his end result. The craft, the craftiness, of that is stunning.

JACQUELINE

I think I see how that could work.

He gets a faraway look -- takes his own advice -- picks up the legal pad -- starts writing.

RICHARD

Sorry. If I don't write it down, it's gone.

She beams at him with a mother's -- or a den mother's -- pride.

JACQUELINE

The novel?

He keeps writing as he talks.

RICHARD

The...? No...something new.

(voice over)

Fuck.

(out loud)

Something, anyway. Maybe.

JACQUELINE

(steps away)

I'll just...thanks.

(he doesn't understand)

For the tip -- third person.

RICHARD

Third person...

He nods. She nods. She walks quietly back to her bedroom.

He starts writing again. FLASH CUTS visualize the scenario he is imagining:

RICHARD (V.O.)

She tiptoed away, not tiptoes, but the quiet susurrations of cotton sock on shag. She was gone, his words chasing her all the way back to her bedroom. And as Richard sat there with paper and pen, he imagined the room that she was sitting in, he imagined his words in her head. Her room was as small and purple as her prose. She listened for the sound of his pen scraping on paper.

FLASH CUT: Jacqueline in her bedroom -- she goes to the door -- listens -- peeks out.

RICHARD (V.O.)

She rose from the bed and quietly twisted the knob, opened the door a crack -- hungered for some small clue -- laid back on the bed -- five senses -- and if she closed her eyes did that mean four? Shrugged off her clothes because she wanted to feel the air and not herself -- not herself -- not --

FLASH CUT: Jacqueline lies naked and utterly still on her bed.

Richard keeps writing at a torrid pace.

RICHARD (V.O.)

Afraid to stop and re-read this...afraid to stop because I'm just starting...

Behind him, Jacqueline reappears in the doorway, still dressed in sweats, notebook in hand. With exaggerated quietness she sits down on he couch.

CUT TO:

35

REPEAT ACTION - INT. KITCHEN - DAY

35

Jacqueline steps out of the bedroom with purple pad and pink pen, and sits down on the couch.

JACQUELINE

I hope you don't mind me...?

RICHARD

Don't be ridiculous. I spend far too much time sitting alone.

She sees him smiling at her pink feather-topped pen. She smiles at his smile.

INTERCUTS:

His eyes, watching her, sometimes surreptitiously, sometimes exchanging a smile, sometimes quickly avoiding eye contact. His pen, moving on paper.

Her eyes, watching him. Her nervous tics -- tapping foot, twisting hair, rubbing fingernail polish. Her pen, moving on paper.

RICHARD (V.O.)

She sits, the subject pinned and pining...not a distraction but *it*, seen and imagined. Caught in a few quick lines -- self-conscious in all the right ways and unself-conscious of the self that I am stealing. Character from my novel just walked into the room, sat down in front of me saying "here I am, take your best shot, see if you can capture the contradictions, the flickers of attention and inhibition, the moment to moment-ness of *me*. If I weren't here, then you could kid yourself, but I am. Beauty is *otherness*."

He stops for a second. Shivers. She sees him stop -- she stops. Then she starts writing again. Then he starts writing again.

RICHARD (V.O.)

Like racing each other to orgasm -- who can write the most words, the faster the better they feel, the same kind of delicious friction, fuck, that makes it sound cheap. No, notice the sacredness of this random moment -- a moment that's gone unless I catch something about...

He stops writing -- watches Jacqueline -- gets lost in the details of *her* -- hair, eyes, mouth, shoulders.

RICHARD (V.O.)

...how do you describe that delicate-fractious angle of her chin? Compare it to...how many degrees off axis from...what? She's younger, further away from death, less fearing of it, more confident, less battered...different set of images pounded into her from different channels...and yet...her face seems smoother and cleaner as she writes...more there and less...fuck, I'm getting vague...

He starts writing again.

RICHARD (V.O.)

First person? Or third? Think in whole sentences. She sat across the room from him in an attitude of...okay. Stop. Pick a moment. The best one. And go all the way into it.

(MORE)

RICHARD (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The moment where she sat down, as her
body settled into balance.

FLASHBACK: Jacqueline sits down on the couch again. But
a little out of focus.

RICHARD (V.O.)

I'm imagining it backwards.

FLASHBACK: She sits down again, but differently, arrives
at a different posture.

RICHARD (V.O.)

Cubist strokes -- paintings perceived
instantaneously, words sequentially...

He stops writing -- looks up -- the couch is empty,
Jacqueline is gone.

The patch of sunlight on the wall -- gone.

RICHARD (V.O.)

Run out of ideas, but still running...

CUT TO:

36

REPEAT ACTION - INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

36

Richard is totally focused on his writing. Bookbag slung
across her shoulder, Jacqueline walks quietly out the
door, careful not to break his concentration.

He stops writing -- looks up -- Jacqueline is gone.

He puts down his legal pad and walks toward Jacqueline's
room.

RICHARD

Hey, J, say hey -- do you have a...?

The door is ajar -- he pushes it open wider -- she is
gone.

RICHARD

Jacqueline? Oh, Jackie? Oh, Jackie O.?

37

INT. JACQUELINE'S BEDROOM - DAY

37

Her sweats lie in a heap on the floor.

RICHARD (V.O.)

How did she dress and leave without me
noticing? Was I that into it, that
inspired? Or that out of it?

(MORE)

RICHARD (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Look around. Don't see her journal. But the whole room is hers. All her stuff. Exposed. And under the surface? A whole book here. It's wrong but -- no, not if it's what I do. It's what I do. I'm doing it. Obvious thoughts of an obvious writer. And a tired game. Tiresome. Stop. Stop. *Stop!*

CUT TO:

38

INT. JACQUELINE'S BEDROOM - DAY

38

Repeat action as before but sans voice over.

Richard enters. Notes the sweats on the floor, an abandoned pair of panties.

Sits down at the desk and starts looking through her papers.

He finds an accounting ledger with boy's names and dates and an arcane system of notation. "Brad" is the most recent entry. Smiles. Leaves the room. Returns with legal pad in hand and starts taking notes.

He hears the front door open.

KRISTIN (O.S.)

Hi.

Panicked, he sees that the computer is turned off. He reaches forward to turn it on.

Kristin appears in the doorway.

RICHARD

Just checking my email.

KRISTIN

I thought you were a Mac guy.

RICHARD

I'm trying to open myself up to new experiences.

KRISTIN

Where's Jacks?

RICHARD

Don't know.

KRISTIN

Did you just get back?

RICHARD

No, I've been here all day.

KRISTIN

All day?

RICHARD

Writing.

KRISTIN

Don't you need some fresh air?

RICHARD

That's all Malibu was -- fresh air. I've OD'd on fresh air.

Kristin disappears from the doorway. Richard restores the accounting ledger to its "secret" place. He hears the toilet flush.

39

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

39

Richard steps into the hallway, legal pad in hand, just as Kristin steps out of the bathroom.

She gives him a weird look -- were you standing in the hallway listening to me pee?

40

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

40

They stand around -- an awkward moment.

KRISTIN

So...

His cell phone RINGS. Richard walks over to the couch, finds the phone on the floor.

RICHARD

Hello? Oh. Hi...

(surprised)

That was fast. No, I...appreciate it.

Thanks...

(angry)

Fine, let her keep the god damn thing.

No...I said no! Good-bye.

KRISTIN

You seem upset.

RICHARD

No -- good news, sort of. Lawyer stuff.

He looks at Kristin -- looks around the room -- looks uncertain.

KRISTIN

What?

RICHARD

I got my money back. Such as it is.

KRISTIN

And the book -- what's the title?

RICHARD

The morning I left it was -- honestly -- "Doom for Breakfast." Maybe because I never knew what it was, I never knew what to call it. But it's hers now. She really thinks she's putting the screws to me, keeping it.

KRISTIN

Well, great...at least you've got your credit -- credit cards -- back. You're free. I guess our deal is off.

RICHARD

Deal?

KRISTIN

The writing lessons.

He looks around the room.

RICHARD

I hope this doesn't sound or seem too weird, but I'd like to stay.

She looks surprised.

RICHARD

I'm writing again -- I'm superstitious, so I'm afraid to leave and break the streak -- it wasn't like I was blocked, I can always spin out pages, but I didn't like any of it -- it's boring to talk about--

KRISTIN

No --

RICHARD (V.O.)

Like everyone else on the planet I'm talking and I'm thinking and the thinking doesn't always overlap with the talking. That's the subtext and--

CUT TO:

41

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

41

A MAN and a WOMAN stand in place of Richard and Kristin.

SUBTEXT MAN

I'd like to stay here because I'm writing about you. So this is a vacation and a research trip and a spy game -- all rolled into one.

SUBTEXT WOMAN

You're old but you're still cute and you're an incredible writer and I think you find me interesting but I bet it's Jacks you really like.

SUBTEXT MAN

Amazing to think that there's a sequence of words I could say that wind up with us in bed together.

SUBTEXT WOMAN

You can kiss me if you like.

SUBTEXT MAN

Your subtext is just what I'd dream you'd say.

SUBTEXT WOMAN

Because you're dreaming it up.

SUBTEXT MAN

Then why aren't you--

JUMP CUT TO:

Kristin, half-undressed (as in a George Grosz painting), now stands across from the man.

CUT BACK TO:

42

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

42

Richard seems to have no awareness of the blatant subtext that has just intervened.

RICHARD

...so I'd like to stay, not forever,
but...

KRISTIN

Of course, sure, I need to talk to Jacks,
but I'm sure she's into it--

RICHARD

On one condition. I pay the rent.

KRISTIN

Hey, we pay the rent anyway.

RICHARD

But I'm not here "anyway" and I'm sure
you could use a little extra money.

KRISTIN

So no "writing lessons?"

RICHARD

Yes, writing lessons. I'd still love to
read your stuff.

KRISTIN

Really? I mean, what if you think it's
terrible?

RICHARD

You want to see terrible, I'll show you
terrible.

KRISTIN

Okay. Show me.

She playfully plucks the legal pad from his hand -- he quickly grabs it back -- tries to act less flustered than he actually is.

RICHARD

The really terrible stuff is back in
Malibu. Show me something, a story.

She smiles back. As if deciding to kiss him.

CUT TO:

A43

BARTON MONTAGE (HOUSE, BOWLING ALLEY)

A43

BARTON rolls a joint, watches a DVD with his BUDDIES,
they go bowling.

KRISTIN (V.O.)

Barton's idea of a good time was to roll a fat one, watch "The Big Lebowski" with his buds, then truck on down to the local lanes and roll a few lines.

43 INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT (**KRISTIN'S FICTION**)

43

BARTON and CHARLIZE are in bed. He sleeps. She doesn't.

KRISTIN (V.O.)

My idea of a good time was Barton before his idea of a good time was a bowling ball. Every sad story is the same, right? In the end, we're all dead.

Charlize climbs out of bed, not bothering to be quiet, but nothing can disturb the post-cannabis, post-coital slumber of Barton.

She picks up the bowling ball and holds it like a trophy or a blunt weapon above her head.

44 EXT. ARROYO - DAWN

44

Wearing baggy pants and shapeless coat, Charlize walks alone in the crepuscular gray light.

KRISTIN (V.O.)

Dawn...the same sad light as the railroad dawn in "Sullivan's Travels"...another same shade of gray day. Felt less alone out in the world...tried to imagine the hills as empty as the dawn of Edendale...

She looks like Charlie Chaplin's Tramp, a ragged figure in black.

45 EXT. SILVERLAKE - DAWN

45

Charlize climbs a steep set of steps up the hillside, albatross of an embossed bowling ball in hand.

KRISTIN (V.O.)

The silence of Babylon...walking with Charlie's ghost...in a silent movie do you get lonely for words? I heard an inner-ear honky-tonk piano that perfectly mirrored my mood, each dragging footstep, up to the top of the morning mountain. A bowling ball is an evolved form of complex carbon. Just like people.

(MORE)

RICHARD

The sentences are all good, but...what's the most important thing in the story for you?

KRISTIN

Important how?

RICHARD

Image, action, moment -- what's the little thing that's the biggest deal for you?

KRISTIN

Walking off alone. At the end.

RICHARD

So why write about the guy?

KRISTIN

I figured she needed to get the bowling ball from somewhere.

RICHARD

The guy...

KRISTIN

Barton.

RICHARD

Okay. Start there. Why Barton?

KRISTIN

"Barton Fink" was a Coen Brothers film that predates "The Big Lebowski."

RICHARD

And it's about a writer. So it's a referential echo, it's clever, I'm all for clever. But the Barton details feel generic. The way you write, the rhythm of your sentences, those give me a sense of you, of the contours of your mind, how things bounce around in your head. It's like a foot step, it's distinctive. Let's just say I like to watch you walk.

KRISTIN

I've got a nice ass. So to speak.

RICHARD

Barton's a drip, but there's a fresh way of showing that.

KRISTIN

Draw from "real" life?

RICHARD

Draw something from *you*. Your experience, your imagination, your experience of your imagination. The inescapable fact is that you can't escape being you.

KRISTIN

But you wrote sci-fi.

RICHARD

I wrote about a guy who wanted to write science fiction. He was trying to squeeze himself into a different landscape as a way of coping with his problems -- and I was doing the same thing writing that first book. I didn't know that then. Not overtly. And we were smoking a lot of pot, it wasn't much of a stretch. Your stuff's good. Compared to you, I was an idiot when I was twenty.

KRISTIN

Nineteen.

RICHARD

But who's counting?

KRISTIN

What are you writing now, post-Malibu?

The question catches him by surprise.

KRISTIN

Are you writing from experience?
Practicing what you preach?

RICHARD

I don't preach. Not usually. Only by invitation.

KRISTIN

So what are you writing?

RICHARD

Just notes.

KRISTIN

Notes from underground?

RICHARD

If I tell myself it's just notes, it keeps me looser.

KRISTIN

Notes from the couch?

RICHARD

So the Barton character, is there a template?

KRISTIN

A high school flame. Or should I say flicker. And I did notice you changed the subject.

RICHARD

(ignores remark)

Give me a Barton detail. Something disgusting or weird or disgustingly weird.

She thinks for a moment.

KRISTIN

There was this water bottle rolling around in Barton's Honda and he got very weird when I reached down for it -- I snuck back later and it was filled with pee.

RICHARD

A piss bottle. Not that uncommon.

KRISTIN

Well, it was a first for me.

RICHARD

That's a start. If you picked the piss bottle up while he was driving -- that's a good scene.

Richard and Kristin walk back to the apartment. Kristin stays close to Richard -- close enough for him to put his arm around her, should he so desire. From a distance they look like a couple.

49A

INSERT - INT. BARTON'S CAR - NIGHT

49A

Charlize discovers piss bottle, Barton swerves, wrecks car.

50 INT. APARTMENT - AFTERNOON 50

As they step back inside, Richard's cell phone RINGS. He exchanges a look with her and picks it up. Kristin gets herself a drink from the fridge.

RICHARD

Hello? Oh...Hi, Marty...She's got the book -- how can I "deliver" it?

(annoyed)

Are you threatening me?

(angry)

Are *they* threatening me? They should sue the Princess of Malibu for their advance.

Richard is aware of Kristin listening -- he goes outside.

51 EXT. APARTMENT HOUSE - AFTERNOON 51

Richard glances in through the window, something of a voyeur, then steps away from the window as he talks.

RICHARD

(into cell phone)

Marty, I *hate* the book. I don't want it published.

(beat)

What if I gave them another book?

(beat)

Listen to your fucking language! I'm not "in breach" -- I'm a writer!

(calmer)

Yeah...Okay...Yeah...Bye.

He hangs up. Thinks for a second. Then lets the cell phone drop from his hand onto the concrete.

He stomps on the phone. It cracks a bit, but not enough.

Richard sees a brick. He gets down on his knees and smashes the cell phone with the rock. He smiles with satisfaction as he pulverizes the phone.

52 INT. APARTMENT - AFTERNOON 52

As Richard comes in, cupping the metal and plastic shards in his hands, Kristin comes out of her room, backpack slung over her shoulder. She sees the detritus in his hands.

KRISTIN

Are you okay?

RICHARD

Great -- now I really feel free.

KRISTIN

Should I smash my cell? Is that part of the tutorial?

RICHARD

Wait until you get a book agent.

KRISTIN

I'm meeting some friends -- want to come along?

RICHARD

(tempted)

Well...are you sure?

KRISTIN

Sure.

RICHARD (V.O.)

I wanted to stay "home" but there was a lot to be learned from seeing Kristin in a social context -- that could be a boon. It was all about the work. That's what I told myself, that everything I was doing was about the work.

This narration carries them out the door and into:

53

INT. COFFEE BAR - NIGHT

53

Richard sits with Kristin, TWO OTHER GIRLS, and a GUY. Everyone seems pleasant enough -- there are some laughs -- but Richard is older, a bit out of it, and also held in some high, distant regard as "The Writer."

RICHARD (V.O.)

But it wasn't intimate or surprising or insightful -- *I* wasn't insightful. The Heisenberg Principle -- the observer affecting the observed. Within a minute of sitting down I was wondering when I could politely leave. I couldn't wait to get back to the apartment. All the artifacts, all the evidence of them. A gold mine. Better to exercise the imagination with that.

Under the narration, Richard says good-bye, makes excuses. Kristin and the others are surprised that he is leaving so soon after sitting down.

He is already out the door when Kristin hurries over and gives him her key.

Richard leaves. Camera stays.

RICHARD (V.O.)

After I left I imagined that...

GIRL

Is he okay? I mean, he just gulped down his latte and...

KRISTIN

Richard's been going through a lot.

GIRL

And he's really sleeping on your couch?

GUY

He's got to have bucks.

KRISTIN

He wants to sleep on my couch.

GIRL

And that's the only thing he wants to sleep on?

The girl and guy laugh and Kristin joins in.

54

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

54

Richard is lost in thought as he walks.

RICHARD (V.O.)

But what I imagined was, well, so unimaginative. Meeting her friends was a bad idea. The apartment was more than enough world -- it was too much. That one corner of existence was, for me, inexhaustible.

55

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

55

Richard steps inside, closes the door, and leans against it, relieved, as if he has just come in from a raging storm.

Richard smiles -- alone -- in the one place on earth that he most wants to be alone.

He reaches under the couch where he has secreted his legal pad, then makes a beeline for the bedrooms.

Peeks into Jacqueline's room, just to confirm that she isn't there.

Goes into:

56 INT. KRISTIN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 56

Turns on the light -- touches her keyboard -- the iMac powers up from sleep.

He types in "PANDORA" -- and gets "PASSWORD INVALID."

He leans back -- lets the fact sink in that Kristin has changed her password.

He tries a series of passwords -- none of them work.

He puts the computer back to sleep and looks through the desk drawers. He finds some letters -- gives them a quick scan -- carefully puts them back where he found them.

He goes to the closet. Takes a quick look, then closer. Feels the fabric of a dress. He takes notes, inventories the contents.

He sits down on the bed. Leafs through her address book, an archeology of names and numbers.

He opens the night stand drawer. Trojan condoms. A copy of "The Story of O." Surprised, he smiles. A body-piercing magazine. He smiles again.

He slips off his shoes and lies down on top of the bedspread. Unbuckles his pants. Starts stroking himself.

CUT TO:

57 CLOSE-UP -- TYPESCRIPT (PAPERBACK) 57

Pages are flipped, a blur of words, a new page found.

KRISTIN/JACQUELINE (V.O.)

(reads)

...and in that bed there was neither dream nor sleep, just a dream of sleep, until another voice spoke...

58-62 OMITTED 58-62

62A INT. DICK'S BEDROOM - DAY ("THE TROUBLE WITH DICK") 62A

Looking feverish and out of it, DICK KENDRED lies in bed.

DIANA appears in the doorway. She helps Dick out of bed and into a chair.

*
*

DIANA
Okay, Dick. What is wrong?
(beat)
What's wrong with you?

DICK
Don't know.

DIANA
This house is a bad environment for you.
I think that's a big part of the problem.
And I feel responsible.

DICK
It's not this house, not this house, not
this house...

DIANA
Dick. Talk to me. Tell me what's wrong.

DICK
Pressure. Everything is pressure.

DIANA
Such as...? Name something.

Dick looks around, feverish, frantic. His eyes alight on Diana's flower-print skirt.

DICK
Okay. Flower. There's a bag on the
shelf -- a bag of flour. It's real, it's
tangible, it exists. Somebody drew the
label, really drew it, built the can,
grew the wheat -- made bread, it gets
eaten, it tastes good, it does something,
it tastes good, it does something...
"What do you do?" asks the bag of flour.
What do I say to that, huh? I mean...
it's better than me...it's...*real*...
it's...

He stops speaking, looks panicked by the thoughts racing in his mind.

DIANA
What are you saying? What's wrong?

DICK
 (panic rising)
 I...don't...

He runs out of the room.

CUT TO:

63 CLOSE-UP - A PAGE OF "THE TROUBLE WITH DICK" 63

The passage that we have just seen is in prose, with key lines of description underlined in red ink.

KRISTIN/JACQUELINE (V.O.)
 (reads)
 --he ran out of the room, out of his head, like running across the bottom of a dead dry ocean. And it felt like drowning. Drowning in air.

64 INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY 64

Richard sits on the couch, his bedding folded away. Jacqueline reads from her well-thumbed copy of "The Trouble With Dick." Kristin sits cross-legged on the floor with her own copy of Richard's first novel.

JACQUELINE
 Professor Freed must have been flattered by literary immortality.

RICHARD
 Not quite.

KRISTIN
 So how much was based on experience?

RICHARD
 Why is that relevant?

KRISTIN
 Isn't that what you asked me?

RICHARD
 I thought I said something like write from yourself. It's not like I'm working from lecture notes here.

JACQUELINE
 But the issue is transposing experience. You're the guy who had the experience, I'm holding the transposition in hand.

RICHARD

Fair enough. But let me just ask, have you considered a legal career?

JACQUELINE

I've considered writing legal novels.

RICHARD

Yes, I lived in a house with Diane. But not with a divorcee and her wayward daughter.

JACQUELINE

So you imagined your own seduction?

RICHARD

Beats imagining your own death. And it's not strictly fair to equate me with Dick.

JACQUELINE

(smiles)

Come on -- Richard -- Rick -- Dick?

RICHARD

(shrugs)

The Dick thing was supposed to be a nod to Philip K. Dick.

JACQUELINE

(smiles)

Oh, *that* Dick. You had to know that naming your hero Dick would provoke a double entendré or two.

KRISTIN

How much rewriting did you do?

RICHARD

Not enough.

KRISTIN

Of the seduction scene.

RICHARD

That's one of the few scenes that's pretty much intact from the first draft. That happens sometimes -- it comes out right the first time.

JACQUELINE

So, without putting too fine a spin on it, you write your experience?

RICHARD

Yes. Either me or my unconscious.

JACQUELINE

So this new thing...?

He looks questioning.

KRISTIN

"Notes From A Couch."

JACQUELINE

What experience is that from?

RICHARD

From where I'm at now.

KRISTIN

Here?

RICHARD

(worried, back-pedals)
My head space.

KRISTIN

Here.

RICHARD

And the cosmos.

KRISTIN

You're back to turning science fiction
writers into heroes?

RICHARD

Don't take me so literally.

JACQUELINE

(teasing)

No?

JUMP CUT TO:

65

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

65

Richard is alone on the couch, legal pad on knee, writing feverishly.

Kristin, in her pajamas, comes and sits down beside him. She's got her notebook.

He looks up -- smiles briefly -- finishes what he is writing, and turns the legal pad face down.

RICHARD

Hi.

(nods at her notebook)

Have something for me?

KRISTIN

I wonder if this house isn't a bad environment too.

RICHARD

(confused)

What?

KRISTIN

And I feel responsible.

RICHARD

Oh. Are we reciting?

KRISTIN

Life imitating art?

RICHARD

Isn't that a cliché?

KRISTIN

Doesn't irony rescue us from cliché?

She kisses him.

KRISTIN

I'm not just imitating your book.

RICHARD

Is Jacqueline here...?

KRISTIN

Why? To avoid her? Or include her?
Don't look so shocked.

RICHARD

Surprised, allow me that.

KRISTIN

Yes, Mr. Malibu.

She kisses him again. And he kisses her back. She takes him by the hand and pulls him up from the couch.

CAMERA FOLLOWS as they go into:

66

INT. KRISTIN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

66

She leads him inside and closes the door.

RICHARD (V.O.)

The oracle was inviting me into her bed. Pure gold. Or, these days, would you call it "pure download?" And didn't that say everything about the world, where gold had become download? Sleeping with her would help the book -- but there was also the danger it could ruin everything...

She regards him fondly. And with a glint of being a woman of the world, or wanting to be. She unbuttons his shirt.

RICHARD

We can still stop.

She smiles -- nods -- unbuttons her pajama top.

They stand chest to chest, looking into each other's eyes.

KRISTIN (V.O.)

I'll make it his choice--

RICHARD (V.O.)

--I imagined her thinking.

KRISTIN (V.O.)

What's your point of view? What's your voice for this? Third person? Limited omniscient? Free indirect? What am I thinking? What are your thoughts about what I'm thinking? Amaze me. Amaze me with something true.

The sound of Richard's breath -- and Kristin's breath -- and Richard's heartbeat -- get very loud, drowning out her words. Someone's got to move. Someone's got to blink. But--

CUT TO:

67 RICHARD'S POV (INT. KRISTIN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT)

67

Her screen-saver (an undulating wave) -- the papers on her desk -- the torn condom packet on her night stand -- a bedside light draped with a pink scarf -- the camera pans, bringing Kristin into ECU, framed against her bedroom ceiling. Behind her, an upside down parasol hangs from the ceiling.

Kristin stares into the camera, then closes her eyes, moving to a sexual rhythm.

CUT TO:

68 INT. KRISTIN'S BEDROOM - LATER

68

Kristin and Richard lie in each other's arms.

KRISTIN

Sorry. I've never done that before.

He gives her a questioning look.

KRISTIN

Been so...relentless. No, that's not true. I was determined not to leave high school a virgin. And when it didn't happen before graduation I stretched the point -- the vow -- not to set foot on campus a virgin. So I used Barton -- Bill was his name, but even his name felt too plain for the story -- I used him to de-virginize me. But that was different than this because he was using me too.

RICHARD

Hey, I'm not all that innocent. Or high-minded.

KRISTIN

That sounds like something you'd say. To make me feel less guilty.

RICHARD

Believe me, you haven't got a monopoly on guilt.

KRISTIN

Can guilt be the basis for a relationship?

RICHARD
Guilt's just the foreplay. Now
recreation -- and regret -- those take
real commitment.

KRISTIN
(snuggles closer)
So does this count as a confession?

RICHARD
Oh, you could make it read that way.

KRISTIN
Too bad you can't copyright experience.

RICHARD
Not yet. I'm sure some lawyer somewhere
is working on that.

They hear the front door close.

KRISTIN
Jacks is back. Fuck.

RICHARD
Fuck?

KRISTIN
(turns off lamp, whispers)
Sssh.

They hear the shower start.

KRISTIN
She's alone.

RICHARD
(whispers back)
Why don't you want her to know?

KRISTIN
She's very competitive.

He starts to get up. She grabs his wrist.

KRISTIN
What are you doing?

RICHARD
Sneaking out.

KRISTIN

No, if you're out on the couch when she gets out of the shower, she'll know you were in here.

RICHARD

Then I'll go out for a drink.

KRISTIN

I could come with you.

The shower stops.

KRISTIN

Shit. You just have to stay here until she goes to sleep.

Richard just shrugs. There are worse places to be.

CUT TO:

69 INT. KRISTIN'S BEDROOM - LATER

69

They lie sleepless in bed, both staring at the ceiling. Kristin gets up.

She quietly opens the door, peeks out -- then quietly retreats to bed.

KRISTIN

(whispers)

Her light's still on. It'll be a while.

Richard shrugs. He starts fooling around with Kristin. She's amenable. Until the bed creaks. She grabs his wrist and shakes her head *no*.

CUT TO:

70 INT. KRISTIN'S BEDROOM - LATER

70

Kristin holds a *New Yorker* and Richard holds a flashlight to illuminate a page.

KRISTIN

(whispers)

Done.

RICHARD

(whispers back)

One more paragraph...

KRISTIN

You're slow...

RICHARD

You're making me slower. Done.

Kristin turns the page.

CUT TO:

71 INT. KRISTIN'S BEDROOM - LATER 71

They make love again, side to side, creaking be damned.

CUT TO:

72 INT. KRISTIN'S BEDROOM - LATER 72

Kristin peeks out the door again.

KRISTIN

She's asleep.

She stands at the door, waiting for him. Richard pulls on his boxers. He starts to put on his pants, but sees that Kristin is impatient for him to leave. Holding his clothes in a ball, he steps toward the door.

RICHARD

Well...see you in the morning.

Suddenly, standing next to each other, they both seem too shy to kiss. Finally, a peck on the lips and a tentative hug.

KRISTIN

See you.

She closes the door.

73 INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT 73

Richard stands alone in the hallway, buzzed and jangled by the sojourn in Kristin's room. He goes into the bathroom.

74 INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT 74

He turns on the light -- winces at the brightness -- goes over to the toilet -- lifts the seat with his foot -- takes a whizz -- sighs with blessed relief.

75 INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT 75

Richard opens the bathroom door and is startled by:

Jacqueline, wearing her silk robe and a smile.

Before Richard can speak, Jacqueline goes into Kristin's room without knocking. He hears muffled voices from behind the closed door.

Richard goes back into:

76 INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT 76

He closes and locks the door, presses his ear against the shower stall. Their voices are a bit louder, but still indistinct. The only thing that is incontrovertible is their LAUGHTER.

And then the laughter stops.

The door handle RATTLES and there is a LOUD KNOCK on the bathroom door.

JACQUELINE (O.S.)

Hey -- I need to pee.

Richard opens the bathroom door.

With a smile, Jacqueline pushes past him.

77 INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT 77

She defiantly leaves the bathroom door open as she sits down on the toilet.

Richard closes the bathroom door. He sees that a light now spills from under Kristin's doorway. Richard retreats to the couch. He takes a legal pad out from under the couch and writes feverishly.

77A INT. KRISTIN'S ROOM - NIGHT 77A

IMRPOV: Jacqueline and Kristin sit on the bed and have some girl talk about Richard.

CUT TO:

78 INT LIVING ROOM - MORNING 78

Richard manages to crack his eyes open. He's lying on the couch, tangled in the sheets.

He hears sounds from the kitchen -- a spoon clattering, cereal and milk being poured. With Herculean effort, Richard pulls himself up and peeks over the top of the couch:

Kristin, dressed for class, is making a filter drip cup of coffee while she eats a bowl of Frosted Flakes. She glances at Richard then shyly looks away.

Richard manages to sit up. And then stand.

RICHARD

Hi.

KRISTIN

Oh. Hi.

He walks over to the kitchen. There is an awkwardness between them -- should they touch or not?

RICHARD

Is that coffee?

KRISTIN

Sorry, I meant to make an extra cup.

RICHARD

That's okay.

While he fixes himself a bowl of cereal, she hurriedly finishes hers. When their eyes connect, she looks away.

RICHARD

So...how are you?

KRISTIN

Late for class.

RICHARD

Oh. So...

KRISTIN

I stayed up too late.

RICHARD

Yeah...

KRISTIN

Writing a story.

RICHARD

Oh. Good for you.

She hurries to finish her breakfast.

KRISTIN

Well...see you.

She finally looks at him. He starts to say something.
But stops.

RICHARD

See you.

He watches her leave. Eating cereal, Richard retrieves the legal pad hidden under the couch and heads toward the bedrooms.

79 INT. HALLWAY - MORNING 79

He stops when he sees: Jacqueline, sitting on her bed, laptop on her lap, typing away.

Richard starts to back away but Jacqueline sees him. He goes into the bathroom *

80 INT. BATHROOM - DAY 80 *

Richard closes the door -- waits -- flushes the toilet -- opens the door, revealing: *

Jacqueline on her way out the front door, book bag slung over her shoulder. *

JACQUELINE

Wish me luck. I'm reading a new piece in workshop.

RICHARD

Good luck.

And she's out the door. Richard listens to her footsteps recede.

81 INT. KRISTIN'S BEDROOM - DAY 81

Like MacArthur retaking the Philippines, Richard walks into the bedroom, surveys the field of battle, and sits down at Kristin's desk.

He types a slew of passwords -- no luck. Then he notices a half-covered piece of paper. He uncovers a handwritten poem, with cross-outs and erasures.

As Richard reads, struggling to make out the handwriting, we hear KRISTIN'S VOICE:

KRISTIN (V.O.)

Who fucked who?
 Who fucked whom?
 Why did I let you
 Spend the night in my *tomb*? Womb.
 Spend the night in my womb.
 It's better when you're gone and I can
 imagine you all night wrong.
 Think of your face on the other side of
 the door.
 Do you snore?
 I'm sore in all the wrong places
 Have I become another one of the
 conquistador's faces?
 School girl poetry
 A scorned genre
 Meant for me
 Jejune
 Zoomed
 In my room.

He sits at her desk. Very still. Very thoughtful.

RICHARD (V.O.)

Fucked up. But fucked can be good. For
 my work. Fucked up can....resonate.

CUT TO:

82 INT. KRISTIN'S BEDROOM - LATER 82

Richard sits on Kristin's bed writing.

CUT TO:

83 INT. JAQUELINE'S BEDROOM - DAY 83

Richard sits on Jacqueline's bed writing.

CUT TO:

84 INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY 84

Richard sits on the couch writing.

Jacqueline comes in.

RICHARD

How did your story go over?

JACQUELINE

Fine. But I don't care what they think.
 They all have agendas.

RICHARD

Yeah?

JACQUELINE

Do you want to hear it?

RICHARD

Don't I have an agenda?

JACQUELINE

But you have talent.

She takes some typed pages out of her book bag and sits cross-legged on the couch. She puts on her reading glasses.

JACQUELINE

Wow.

RICHARD

Wow what?

JACQUELINE

I feel so naked. Nervous. Now remember, this is just a first draft.

(with mock coquetry)

Be gentle with me. The title is--

CUT TO:

85

CLOSE-UP - JACQUELINE (INT. JACQUELINE'S BEDROOM - DAY)

85

Jacqueline sits in bed, in her underwear, smiling.

RICHARD (V.O.)

How did I get here? It's not exactly a narrative surprise that the twenty feet from couch to bed were traversed and our clothes dispersed.

JACQUELINE

So you really, really liked the story?

RICHARD

A single really's worth.

(voice over)

Her story was well-written. It was about sex. Rather, it was about college students who were interested in sex and who acted upon that interest. It was realistically detailed. It was credible. It was sporadically poetic.

86

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

86

Richard reclines with eyes closed as Jacqueline reads out loud to him. She is watching Richard more than her page.

JACQUELINE

"No, he said, there's nothing wrong with a story that ends with a kiss. She held him at arms length, the Luxembourg Gardens a greensward stretching languorously behind him, and said yes, a kiss is a kiss is a kiss."

Jacqueline leans forward and kisses Richard. His eyes pop open.

RICHARD

You don't have to play the part with me.

JACQUELINE

What part?

RICHARD

She asked innocently.

JACQUELINE

With feigned innocence.

RICHARD

The part of a reckless, experienced woman.

She kisses him again.

JACQUELINE

I know what I'm doing and--

RICHARD

Do you?

JACQUELINE

And you know what I'm doing so...let's do it.

They start necking in earnest.

RICHARD

Shouldn't you do something just for it's own sake?

JACQUELINE

Is there such a thing? Wait -- no -- yes -- I am -- doing it for it's own sake.

He thinks about this. Then he reaches for his legal pad and scribbles furiously.

JACQUELINE

Quoting me?

RICHARD

(caught short)

No -- of course not -- just had an idea...

She grabs the legal pad from him and can barely make out his scribbles.

JACQUELINE

(reads with difficulty)

He searched for...a way to...describe the act...that didn't sound like second-hand porn.

(tosses pad aside)

Jumping ahead a bit?

RICHARD

It's fiction.

JACQUELINE

It doesn't have to be.

RICHARD

Now that sounds like cheap dialogue.

JACQUELINE

Cheap can be a turn on. Don't over-intellectualize the aesthetic experience.

CUT BACK TO:

87 INT. JACQUELINE'S BEDROOM - DAY

87

Jacqueline takes off her reading glasses.

JACQUELINE

You know, we can do anything.

RICHARD

Yeah?

She leans over and shows him the restraints fastened to each corner of the bed.

JACQUELINE

You can tie me up. You can spank me -- I've got this really cute whip.

(MORE)

JACQUELINE (CONT'D)

Or we can shoot a movie -- I've got a camcorder.

Richard takes a moment to ponder her menu.

JACQUELINE

Is this like you imagined it?

RICHARD

You're presuming that I imagined it.

JACQUELINE

You never thought about fucking me? Not once?

RICHARD

(shrugs)

How did you imagine it?

JACQUELINE

With me on top.

CUT TO:

88 RICHARD'S POV (INT. JACQUELINE'S BEDROOM - DAY)

88

Camera pans across: the clutter of Jacqueline's desk -- a black leather whip on the night stand -- the open door -- a fish net filled with psychedelic troll dolls hanging from the ceiling -- Jacqueline's eyes wide shut, smiling as she moves in a sexual rhythm.

CUT TO:

89 INT. JACQUELINE'S BEDROOM - DAY

89

The deed done, they lie unsentimentally side by side.

Richard gets up -- finds his pants -- starts pulling them on.

JACQUELINE

Where are you going?

RICHARD

Felt like we were done.

JACQUELINE

Only if you want us to be. I told you, we can do anything.

Richard thinks about this. He lets his pants drop and lies back down.

JACQUELINE
I know what you really want.

RICHARD
Yeah?

JACQUELINE
A mind fuck.

RICHARD
No.

JACQUELINE
You want to get in my head.

RICHARD
You've got a healthy ego.

JACQUELINE
So do you. Are you going to write about me?

RICHARD
No.

JACQUELINE
Never?

RICHARD
I don't know.

JACQUELINE
I'm going to write about you.
(off his reaction)
Ooh, that scared you.

RICHARD
No...

JACQUELINE
Don't worry, I won't call you Richard or Rick or Dick. Mick? Nick? Care to pick your pseudonym?

RICHARD
That would make me a collaborator.

JACQUELINE
Isn't this collaborating?

RICHARD
That's a fresh word for it.

JACQUELINE

You're inspiring me to rise above cliché,
teach.

(beat)

I could help you write a blockbuster.

RICHARD

I bet you could. But if that's your
thing, you can do it on your own, without
me.

JACQUELINE

But since we're together...

RICHARD

In bed.

JACQUELINE

What better place to spin a fantasy.
(sees that his thoughts are
elsewhere)

Hello?

CUT TO:

90 CLOSE-UP - LEGAL PAD

90

Richard writes: *I was trying to remember what she said
word for word. I was desperate for pen and paper but
that would break the mood...*

CUT TO:

91 INT. JACQUELINE'S BEDROOM - DAY

91

Jacqueline hovers over him, starts kissing her way down
his chest.

JACQUELINE

Hello?

He stirs.

The front door opens.

KRISTIN (O.S.)

Hello?

JACQUELINE

In here.

Richard makes a move to cover himself. Jacqueline
doesn't. Kristin appears in the doorway.

She seems only mildly surprised at the sight of Richard and Jacqueline in bed together.

KRISTIN

Did you buy milk?

JACQUELINE

No.

KRISTIN

Then don't touch what's left. There's just enough for my coffee.

Richard is thrown off by their domestic banality.

Kristin starts taking off her clothes.

RICHARD

What are you doing?

KRISTIN

What does it look like I'm doing?

RICHARD

You know what I mean.

KRISTIN

Oh, no, meaning is so subjective and evanescent -- so don't assume.

RICHARD

(with a shy glance to J)

Last night you wanted to keep it a secret that...

KRISTIN

But we obviously didn't.

JACQUELINE

Look, we've both slept with you. No big deal.

Kristin finishes getting her clothes off and climbs into bed.

KRISTIN

And this is a basic male fantasy, right?

RICHARD

Are you fucking with me?

KRISTIN

Define fucking.

JACQUELINE

And that's such a subjective word, so charged, so evanescent...

RICHARD

I've got a technical question.

JACQUELINE

About ménage-à-trois?

RICHARD

No, about dream sequences. Would you feel cheated if you read a sex scene and then found out it was just a fantasy?

KRISTIN

Not if it gave me insight into character.

JACQUELINE

Not if it was hot.

CUT TO:

92 CLOSE-UP - LEGAL PAD

92

Richard writes: *not if it was hot, J said.*

He crosses out the words.

CUT BACK TO:

93 INT. JACQUELINE'S BEDROOM - DAY

93

Jacqueline hovers over him, starts kissing her way down his chest.

JACQUELINE

Hello...

He stirs.

The front door opens.

KRISTIN (O.S.)

Hello?

JACQUELINE

In here.

Richard makes a move to cover himself. Jacqueline doesn't. Kristin appears in the doorway. She frowns at what she sees.

KRISTIN
That didn't take long.

JACQUELINE
I thought you had class.

KRISTIN
I thought you had scruples. Wait. Why
am I acting jealous?

JACQUELINE
Yeah, why are you?

KRISTIN
(thinks about it, smiles)
I'm not. How's that? I'm not.

Richard is an amazed and embarrassed prone bystander to
their conversation.

JACQUELINE
So how was class?

KRISTIN
Professor Freed read my story. You'd
think she'd be sophisticated about a
piece of fiction.

JACQUELINE
You'd think.

CUT TO:

94 EXT. UCLA CAMPUS - DAY (**KRISTIN'S FICTION**) 94

A MAN ("WRITER") and a WOMAN ("COED") walk across the
quad.

They go into:

95 INT. CAMPUS BUILDING - DAY 95

A relic from the Sixties, unrestored. It's an off-hour
and the long corridor is deserted.

COED
You really think you could help me with
my fiction?

WRITER
Why are you acting naive? You're far too
accomplished.

COED

I am?

WRITER

The way you shift points of view in mid-scene -- you're clearly willing to take risks.

COED

You can tell that from my piece?

WRITER

Oh, yes. I could see you writing something very dark. Something that steps outside of the unexpected, something that turns the ordinary world of a college girl upside down, that eroticizes the mundane, the quotidian. Are you up for that?

COED

As a piece of short or long fiction?

He stops walking and turns to face her.

WRITER

As an experience.

COED

Yes. Absolutely.

WRITER

Good. Can you be ruthlessly honest with yourself? About what you want?

COED

Can you?

WRITER

Absolutely.

He opens the door to the men's room and starts through the door.

WRITER

Well?

She's surprised.

COED

You mean...?

WRITER

Christine, the forbidden is the forbidden. You either cross the threshold or you don't.

He steps through the door. She stands alone in the hallway. Steals herself. Steps through the door.

96 INT. MEN'S ROOM - DAY

96

A MALE STUDENT stands at the urinal. He gives the coed a knowing smile.

She hurries into the stall to join the writer.

97 INT. STALL - DAY

97

They listen to the urinal flush, the male student leave.

COED

Why here?

WRITER

Because it stinks of the body. Because it transcends romantic illusion.

He presses against her back and starts undressing her from behind.

WRITER

And why should gays have the monopoly on bathroom sex? Read your story to me again.

COED

Here?

WRITER

Don't be shy.

She clears her throat and starts to read.

COED

One morning Sara Samsa awoke to find that she had been transformed into a giant cockroach...

CUT TO:

98 INT. KITCHEN - DAY

98

Richard sits alone at the table, reading Kristin's short story.

He lowers the pages, takes a breath.

99

INT. KRISTIN'S BEDROOM - DAY

99

Kristin underlines passages in a textbook. Richard appears in the doorway, story in hand.

RICHARD

Can I borrow your phone?

KRISTIN

Sure.

She hands him the cordless phone. He hands back her short story.

RICHARD

(starts to leave)

Thanks.

KRISTIN

(waves the pages)

What did you think?

RICHARD

What did you expect me to think?

KRISTIN

I don't have an expectation.

RICHARD

Oh, I think you do. I think you have very finely calibrated expectations.

KRISTIN

You said to write from myself.

RICHARD

Do you take all my advice to heart?

KRISTIN

Try me.

RICHARD

Don't.

KRISTIN

Don't what?

RICHARD

Take my advice.

KRISTIN

That's your advice?

RICHARD

That's an antidote. An inoculation.
Everybody needs an antibody.

He leaves with the cordless phone. Camera follows as he walks through the apartment, past the couch, dialing a number.

CAMERA FOLLOWS him outside:

100 EXT. APARTMENT HOUSE - DAY (TWILIGHT) (CONTINUOUS) 100

Phone pressed to his ear, he steps out into the light of day.

RICHARD

Diane?

101-105 OMITTED 101-105

106 EXT. ART DEPT. COURTYARD - DAY 106

Richard again sits opposite Diane.

DIANE

I didn't like Kristin's story.

RICHARD

She's young, she's still finding her voice.

DIANE

The content.

RICHARD

You think I fucked her in a men's room?!
It's fiction. Fucking fiction.

DIANE

Forget the men's room. Did you?

RICHARD

That's none of your business.

DIANE

You did.

RICHARD

Is that what you want to talk about, who fucked who?

DIANE

Whom.

RICHARD

It's been, what, ten years since we made those kind of claims on each other.

DIANE

Claims?

RICHARD

Pick your word.

DIANE

You hurt me.

RICHARD

You ended the relationship.

DIANE

The book.

RICHARD

That came well after. And it wasn't you, it was a character.

DIANE

Based on me.

RICHARD

Only in part.

DIANE

But your attitude about "Diana" -- it hurt me that that was what you thought of me.

RICHARD

No, it was what I thought of the character.

DIANE

It's not so simple.

RICHARD

No. It's not. Funny, to be talking about that old book now.

DIANE

Because we couldn't talk about it then.

They take a moment to regard each other.

DIANE

It's ridiculous that you're with those girls and not with me.

RICHARD

Just following my muse.

Finally, she smiles.

DIANE

Is that what you call it?

And he smiles back.

CUT TO:

107 EXT. APARTMENT HOUSE - NIGHT 107

CAMERA FOLLOWS as Richard walks into the apartment.

108 INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT 108

Kristin and Jacqueline sit on the couch. His legal pad has been pulled out from under the couch and they are both reading.

Kristin and Jacqueline look up at Richard -- they don't look happy.

KRISTIN

How did you know my sister's name was Kelly?

RICHARD

That's a typo -- Nelly.

KRISTIN

(waves legal pad)

Typo? It's *handwritten*. You've been spying on us -- you broke into my computer and read my email and god knows what else --

JACQUELINE

My ledger!

KRISTIN

-- you've been invasive.

JACQUELINE

You wrote about my ledger!

RICHARD
I'm sorry.

KRISTIN
Are you?

RICHARD
Sort of.

KRISTIN
That's pretty non-committal.

RICHARD
Committal in art, non-committal in life.

JACQUELINE
Don't clever your way out of this. You
used us.

RICHARD
I wrote about you. It's what I do. I
write about wherever I am. Or I should.
Because when I don't, it's shit.

JACQUELINE
This is shit. It's unflattering.

RICHARD
It's a first draft.

KRISTIN
You can't just say "it's what I do."

JACQUELINE
Jasmine? -- you called me Jasmine -- like
I'm some shampoo.

RICHARD
Not you. Your character. Look, I'm
leaving. I just wish that we could find
some way to...

KRISTIN
"Just be friends?"

RICHARD
I'd settle for you thinking I'm not an
asshole.

KRISTIN
You or your character?

JACQUELINE

Here's what *I'd* settle for.

Jacqueline grabs the legal pad -- picks up a cigarette lighter -- clicks it on. Richard stares at the flame.

JACQUELINE

Try and talk your way out of this.

RICHARD

No. Burn it. It'll hurt, but I know that I can walk out of here and sit down and write something else.

Jacqueline calls his bluff and SETS FIRE TO A LEGAL PAD.

RICHARD

So long, literary immortality.

Jacqueline looks unmoved -- Kristin snatches the legal pad away from her and snuffs out the flame.

KRISTIN

You're burning my character too.

JACQUELINE

Write your own character.

KRISTIN

But I can't write it from his point of view.

Kristin offers Richard the legal pad. He nods, grateful, and takes it.

RICHARD

Thanks.

(beat)

Look, I am sorry about the spying and...I'll be on my way.

KRISTIN

Right this second?

RICHARD

What -- I sit down, start on the next chapter?

KRISTIN

Well...

RICHARD

No. It's time to go.

A moment of reluctance. No one moves. Then he picks up his suitcase.

RICHARD

Being here meant a lot to me.

KRISTIN

Think kindly of me in the rewrites.

A beat as he looks at them.

RICHARD

I think you guys are both great.

KRISTIN

That isn't how it reads.

RICHARD

Sometimes I dwell too much on the negative. In my writing.

KRISTIN

If you're aware of a flaw can't you correct it?

RICHARD

(smiles)

I can try.

JACQUELINE

So is this where we hug and you lay on some big moral truth?

RICHARD

Let's leave it at a hug.

But no one makes a move. Until Kristin hugs Richard.

Richard turns to Jacqueline. She frowns. He shrugs, starts to step away.

JACQUELINE

Oh, hell...

She shrugs and hugs him.

They all look at each other, a complicated burble of feelings -- affection, attraction, wistfulness, regret. Not an easy good-bye for anyone.

CUT TO:

109

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (**JACQUELINE'S FICTION**)

109

Jacqueline sits alone on the couch reading Richard's legal pad. She looks up and sees:

Richard stands in the doorway, shocked to see her with the legal pad. She just stares at him.

JACQUELINE

This just rambles.

RICHARD

It's only a beginning.

JACQUELINE

A bad beginning. There's no sexual tension.

RICHARD

It's not about sexual tension.

JACQUELINE

That's where you're wrong.

(points)

And this dialogue...

Richard leans over her shoulder to look at the lines in question.

JACQUELINE

A girl would never say that, not in that context.

RICHARD

So I'll cut the line. Just have her be quiet.

JACQUELINE

No, that's wrong too.

She writes something. He reads it. He looks at Jacqueline, impressed.

RICHARD

(shy)

I've got a crazy idea...

JACQUELINE

Tell me. I won't bite.

RICHARD

The crazy idea is...that you and me...do you want to try writing together?

JACQUELINE

(smiles)

I thought you'd never ask.

110 INT. STUDY - DAY 110

Filled with books, untidy in a perfectly cozy way. Two desks have been pushed together, and Richard and Jacqueline face each other as they both write.

Richard pauses -- smiles admiringly at Jacqueline. But she doesn't notice as she types at a furious pace.

Richard comes around to stand behind her. He tenderly massages her shoulders. She smiles affectionately but keeps typing.

111 INT. JACQUELINE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 111

Jacqueline sits alone at the edge of her bed, typing.

112 CLOSE-UP - COMPUTER SCREEN 112

"...his words were my words and vice versa, but there was no vice and no versa, just the alternating verse of our voices..."

CUT TO:

113 INT. CHARLIZE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (KRISTIN'S FICTION) 113

In this version, Charlize is in bed with Richard. He sleeps, dead to the world, a bong on his bedside table. She sits up in bed, reading a legal pad filled with scrawl.

KRISTIN (V.O.)

The manuscript I found secreted with his stash was about a bratty girl whose only redeeming qualities were a flair for flamenco guitar and fellatio -- it was sickening and sobering to realize that this was what he thought of me.

Charlize climbs out of bed, not bothering to be quiet, but nothing can disturb the post-cannabis, post-coital slumber of Richard.

114 EXT. ARROYO - DAWN 114

Legal pad in hand, Charlize walks alone in the crepuscular gray light. She looks like The Tramp, a ragged figure in black.

KRISTIN (V.O.)

Dawn was crowded with the usual ghosts...
and the walking me carrying his written
version of me -- words and flesh -- and
which was stronger, realer? -- they -- we
-- didn't add up but cancelled each other
out.

She kneels among the rocks -- tears off page after page
of manuscript -- crumples them into balls -- then sets
fire to the pyre.

KRISTIN (V.O.)

If you burn words, are they gone? Or do
they linger behind the eyelids like scar
tissue?

115 INT. KRISTIN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 115

Kristin sits at her desk, typing.

116 CLOSE-UP - COMPUTER SCREEN 116

*"...could the flames take something flawed from the world
that still clawed at my head?"*

117 EXT. ARROYO - DAWN 117

She turns her back on the flames. With a sad smile, the
waif-like Charlize ambles away.

IRIS OUT.

CUT TO:

118 INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (**RICHARD'S FICTION**) 118

Richard sits on the couch between Jacqueline and Kristin.

RICHARD

What about the age difference?

KRISTIN

Irrelevant.

JACQUELINE

That's a stupid reason not to.

RICHARD

And...I love you both.

JACQUELINE

That's easy. We alternate nights.

Jacqueline looks to Kristin who nods in agreement.

RICHARD

A threesome would never last.

KRISTIN

But think of all the fun we'd have failing.

RICHARD

I already had a ménage-à-trois fantasy. So this is repetitive.

KRISTIN

The ménage-à-trois? Or the fantasy?

RICHARD

I just can't imagine it--

119 CLOSE-UP - LEGAL PAD

119

Richard writes: "--*imagine it.*" He crosses out the phrase -- then he crosses out the entire paragraph about ménage-à-trois.

120 INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

120

Richard and Jacqueline and Kristin VANISH from the couch.

RICHARD (V.O.)

Instead...instead...I can imagine myself gone...

A ROVING CAMERA GLIDES INTO THE HALLWAY and catches a glimpse of Kristin at her computer, completely focused on her writing.

CAMERA GLIDES DOWN THE HALLWAY, catches a glimpse of Jacqueline sitting in bed, writing in a notebook with her pink feather-topped pen.

RICHARD (V.O.)

The question is -- how do I imagine them? Writing? Writing about *me*?

CAMERA RETREATS BACK INTO THE LIVING ROOM -- the couch is empty, all trace of Richard gone.

RICHARD (V.O.)

Which raises the question of *me* writing about *them* writing about *me*. Just a complicated question to avoid the painful question of a lost love -- or two?

(MORE)

RICHARD (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The one future you pick excludes the
others -- except in fiction? Or--

THE CAMERA GLIDES ELEGIACALLY OUT OF THE APARTMENT.

CUT TO:

121 CLOSE-UP - RICHARD 121

He sits on a couch, in his pajamas, writing feverishly on
a legal pad.

PULLBACK TO REVEAL:

INT. STRANGE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Richard finishes the sentence -- stands -- stretches --
wanders down a strange hallway.

He pushes a doorway open and goes into:

122 INT. STRANGE BEDROOM - NIGHT 122

A woman sleeps with her back to the door. Richard climbs
into bed. She rolls over to face him. It's Diane.

DIANE
(without opening her eyes)
What time is it...?

RICHARD
Late. I've got a title. "Crashing on
the Couch."

DIANE
Mmmm...drop the couch.

CUT TO:

123 CLOSE-UP - LEGAL PAD 123

Richard's pen crosses out "on the couch" leaving a single
scrawled word: CRASHING.

FADE OUT.