

HIGH FIDELITY



John Cusack Jack Black

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by

**D.V. deVincentis,
Steve Pink
&
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**Adapted from the Novel
By
Nick Hornby**

January 20, 1998

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EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - AFTERNOON

So darkened by weather that it is almost night, raining torrents and big sheets. In the distance a man runs toward us. As he gets to us we move with him down the street. He is ROB, boyishly handsome and early thirties is in a drenched black suit and running for his life. We hear the rain, and his ragged breath. Headlights backlight him, getting brighter as the sound of an engine gets louder. Rob takes a look over his shoulder, looks desperately left and right, and vaults himself over a small brick wall and into a flowerbed, landing on his back in the black wet earth. The big drops of rain splash mud on his face, and he burrows deeper into the dirt and flowers with his back, panting and staring up at the sky. Off-camera the car engine catches up, and a door opens and shuts. He sighs and shuts his eyes...

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. ROB'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

STEREO

Not a minisystem, not a matching set, but coveted audiophile clutter of McIntosh and Nakamichi, each component from a different era, bought piece by piece in various nanoseconds of being flush.

RECORDS

Big thin LPs. Fields of them. We move across them, slowly... they seem to come to rest in an end of a few books... but then the CD's start, and go on, faster and faster, forever, then the singles, then the tapes... It seems the records, tapes, and CD's will never end until... a DEAD STOP into a group of bags huddled next to the door. Not the go-on-vacation set, but the clothes-to-coffee-maker moving out variety.

ROB V.O.

What came first? The music or the misery?
People worry about kids playing with guns
and watching violent videos, we are
scared that some sort of culture of
violence will take them over. Nobody
worries about kids listening to thousands
-- literally thousands -- of songs about
broken hearts and rejection and pain and
misery and loss. Did I listen to pop
music because I was miserable, or was I
miserable because I listened to pop
music?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

2.

ROB,

always a hair out of place, a face that grows on you. He sits in an oversized beanbag chair, his head gripped by a big pair Boudokan headphones. We hear what he is hearing, something foreboding and upbeat at the same time. He stares at the bags, his face unreadable.

LAURA, Rob's girlfriend, enters the room, and he immediately pulls the headphones off. She clocks him for a moment, catching him in what seems to be an old and repeated moment of nonpresence. She begins to heft the bags. Rob goes to her, a little tardy for his big goodbye. Laura begins to cry a bit.

LAURA

I don't really know what I'm doing.

He smiles, and she doesn't. He adjusts.

ROB (cont'd)

You don't have to go this second. You can stay until whenever.

LAURA

We've done the hard part now. I might as well, you know...

ROB

Well stay for tonight, then.

Laura shakes her head, lifts the last small bag, and backs out the door. A strap catches on a handle and the two of them wrestle with it a bit, while trying to keep the door open, until Laura awkwardly disappears from view and the door shuts behind Rob. He stays right there staring at the shut door for a long moment, listening to the fading sound of Laura and her dragging bags.

STEREO

Rob's left hand cranks the volume knob while his right switches the CD changer to something loud and adrenal.

ROB V.O.

My desert-island, all-time, top five most memorable break-ups, in chronological order are as follows: Alison Ashworth, Penny Hardwick, Jackie Allen, Charlie Nicholson, Sarah Kendrew.

Rob moves around the apartment, seeming to expand physically, looking for change.

(CONTINUED)

ROB V.O.

Those were the ones that really hurt. Can you see your name in that list, Laura? Maybe you'd sneak into the top ten, but there's no place for you in the top five. Those places are reserved for the kind of humiliations and heartbreaks that you're just not capable of delivering.

He adjusts the angle of the TV, stuffs a creepy family portrait into a drawer.

ROB V.O. (cont'd)

That probably sounds crueler than it is meant to, but the fact is, we're too old to make each other miserable. Unhappiness used to mean something. Now it's just a drag like a cold or having no money.

He moves through the living room to an open window facing the street. Looking down two stories, he sees Laura emerge from the building and drag her bags toward her car across the street.

ROB V.O. (CONT'D)

If you really wanted to mess me up, you should have got to me earlier.

CUT TO:

EXT. SUBURBAN PARK - AFTERNOON - 1980

A group of junior-high girls across the park, lazily dangling from swings and talking to each other.

ROB V.O.

One moment they weren't there, not in any form that interested us anyway, then the next you couldn't miss them, they were everywhere. They had grown breasts, and to accompany them, a new way of walking, arms folded over the chest, a posture that simultaneously disguised and drew attention to what had just happened. And then we wanted to... actually, we didn't know what we wanted next, but it was something, something interesting, disturbing even.

One of the girls, ALISON, looks back at us, breaks from the pack, and heads our way...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

4.

ROB V.O.
We were little animals, and
metaphorically speaking, we had begun to
sniff each other's bottoms, and we did
not find the odor entirely repellent.

As she reaches us we turn to see her loop an arm through a
very nervous YOUNG ROB'S arm, and lead him away from his crew
of young boys.

PARK BENCH - DUSK

Rob and Alison sit on the bench, kissing awkwardly.

ROB V.O. (cont'd)
Which brings us to number one. Alison
Ashworth.

PARK BENCH - DUSK

The same shot, the next night: new clothes, same clumsy make-
out session.

ROB V.O. (CONT'D)
My relationship with Alison Ashworth
lasted six hours.

PARK BENCH - DUSK

...Next night...

ROB V.O. (CONT'D)
The two hours after school and before
The Rockford Files, three days in a row.
On the fourth afternoon...

SAME PARK BENCH,

... And the fourth night...

ROB V.O. (cont'd)
Kevin Bannister.

Alison and another boy, KEVIN BANNISTER. Kissing. In the
background, Rob approaches and stops.

ROB V.O. (cont'd)
I stung and I blushed, I suddenly forgot
how to walk without being aware of every
single part of my body.

He affects a casual gait as he mopes away.

(CONTINUED)

ROB V.O. (CONT'D)

It would be nice to think that as I've gotten older, times have changed, relationships have become more sophisticated, females less cruel, skins thicker, but there still seems to be an element of that afternoon in everything that has happened to me since. All my other romantic stories seem to be a scrambled version of that first one.

CUT TO:

EXT. CLARK STREET - DAY

An old Chicago block of local merchants, on a busy street. Rob makes his way down the street, jangling a set of keys.

ROB V.O.

My store is called The Record Exchange. It's carefully placed to attract the bare minimum of window shoppers.

Rob arrives at a storefront, and begins unlocking a rusty gate and beaten-down door.

ROB V.O. (cont'd)

I get by because of the people who make a special effort to shop here on Saturday -- young men, always young men...

INT. RECORD STORE - DAY

In almost darkness. More light might penetrate the windows if there weren't so many record-release posters taped to them. A dusty narrow corridor clad in burlap and shag rug. On the walls are bagged 45's you will never hear unless you commit your life to the losing proposition of listening to every noodling of Jah Wobble and Glen Glenn and other people you've never heard of.

ROB V.O.

...who spend a disproportionate amount of their time looking for deleted Smiths singles and "original not rereleased" underline Frank Zappa albums. The fetish properties are not unlike porn. I would feel guilty taking their money if I wasn't, kind of, well, one of them.

But as Rob opens the door, enters, and flips a switch causing the fluorescents to sputter, we see in his eyes the reverence

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

6.

and earnestness of a football coach gazing across an empty field or a priest drawn at midnight to his empty church.

As Rob walks one of the two slim aisles toward the back, he stops on a dime, steps back and pulls a CD from the sea and replaces it almost the same position, but not quite -- meticulousness and pride in this gesture...

After a moment, the door creaks open behind Rob, admitting DICK, a nervous, forlorn but sweet and intelligent discophile with long greasy black hair, a Sonic Youth T-shirt, a monstrous pair of headphones, and a canvas record bag emblazoned with a label logo.

ROB
'Morning, Dick.

DICK
Oh, hi. Hi, Rob.

ROB
Good weekend?

DICK
Yeah, OK. I found the first Licorice Comfits album at Vintage Vinyl. The one on Testament of Youth. Never released here. Japanese import only.

ROB
Great.

DICK
I'll tape it for you.

ROB
No, that's okay. Really.

DICK
'Cause you liked their second one, you said, Pop, Girls. etc. The one with Cheryl Ladd on the cover. You didn't see the cover though. You just had the tape I made you.

ROB
Yeah, I haven't really absorbed that one.

DICK
Well. I'll just make it for you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

7.

ROB
(resigned)
Okay.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL LAWN - FLASHBACK - MOS

PENNY, 16, is walking across the grass toward us. She's the clean, sporty, nice wholesome girl-next-door. She waves to off-camera friends, smiling a winning smile.

ROB V.O.

Number two. Penny Hardwick. Penny was great-looking, and her top five recording artists were Carly Simon, Carole King, James Taylor, Cat Stevens, and Elton John. Everybody liked her. She was nice. Nice manners. Nice grades. Nice-looking. She was so nice, in fact, that she wouldn't let me put my hand underneath, or even on top of, her bra.

EXT. BEHIND THE GYM - DAY

Rob and Penny mash face. After a beat, Rob's hand levitates, and moves in on Penny's breast...

ROB V.O.

Attack and defense, invasion and repulsion: it was as if breasts were little pieces of property that had been unlawfully annexed by the opposite sex -- they were rightfully ours and we wanted them back.

... She pushes it gently away.

EXT. PORCH - NIGHT

A party goes on in the windows in the background. Rob and Penny mash face. After a beat, Rob's hand levitates, and moves in on Penny's breast...

ROB V.O.

Read any women's magazine and you'll see the complaint over and over again: men are not interested in foreplay. They are selfish, greedy, clumsy, unsophisticated. These complaints, I can't help feeling, are kind of ironic...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

8.

His hand contacts breast. Penny grabs Rob's hand and twists it painfully away.

ROB V.O.
... because back then, all we wanted was
foreplay and girls weren't interested. We
were told not to even think about it.

CUT TO:

INT. PENNY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Penny and Rob sit on the edge of the bed, kissing. Rob moves his hand up toward the breast, but the hand then seems to have a new idea, and dives south to follow the thigh into Penny's skirt...

ROB V.O.
Sometimes I got so bored of trying to
touch her breasts that I would try to
touch her between her legs -- it was like
trying to borrow a dollar, getting turned
down, and asking for fifty grand instead.

...when he contacts skin, Penny rolls like a gymnast away and off of the bed, out of frame. Rob looks away balefully.

ROB V.O. (cont'd)
Foreplay changes from something boys want
to do and girls don't to something that
women want and men can't be bothered
with. The perfect couple, if you ask me,
is the Cosmo woman and a fourteen-year-
old boy.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Rob walks Penny to her front door. She is smiling, he seems distant.

ROB V.O.
I wasn't interested in Penny's nice
qualities, just breasts, and therefore
she was no good to me. And so I was
finished with her.

She leans in to kiss him, and he shrugs her off.

ROB
What's the point? It never goes anywhere.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

9.

Without looking at her, Rob turns and walks down the street, getting smaller. Penny watches for a while.

ROB V.O.

She cried, and I hated her for it, because she made me feel bad. I started dating a girl who everyone said would give it up, and Penny went with this asshole Chris Thompson who told me that he had sex with Penny after something like three dates. How had Penny gone from a girl who wouldn't do anything to a girl who would do everything?

CUT TO:

INT. RECORD STORE - LATER

Dick is behind the counter, Rob in the aisles with a clipboard doing inventory.

ROB

(re:music)

What's this?

DICK

The new Belle and Sebastian. Like it?

The door flies open and BARRY, an acid-tongued post-punk rock misanthrope without quite enough intelligence to conceptualize his own rebellion, walks in. His teeth are clenched in air-guitar concentration and he's phonetically cranking a Clash riff:

BARRY

BAA! BA BA DANG!

Dick shrinks back from him instinctively. He stops mid-step and cocks his ear at the music playing in the store. His face adopts an exaggerated grimace.

BARRY (cont'd)

Holy Shiite! What the fuck's this?

DICK

It's the new --

ROB

It's the record we've been listening to and enjoying, Barry.

Barry moves in on the stereo behind the counter, and Dick gets out of his way.

(CONTINUED)

BARRY

Well that's problematic because it sucks
ass.

He pops the CD out and frisbees it to Dick.

BARRY (cont'd)

Yours, I assume...

Barry pulls a tape out of his jacket and jams it in. "Walking
On Sunshine" by Katrina and the Waves comes through at
through the red levels.

ROB

(over the blare)

TURN IT OFF, BARRY.

BARRY

IT WON'T GO ANY LOUDER.

Barry walks in rhythm toward the stockroom and disappears.
Rob goes behind the counter and stops the tape. Barry's head
pops out of the stockroom.

BARRY (cont'd)

What are you doing?

ROB

I don't want to hear "Walking On
Sunshine!"

BARRY

"Walking On Sunshine" rocks ass! All I'm
trying to do is cheer us up. Go ahead and
put on some old sad bastard music see if
I care.

ROB

I don't want old sad bastard music
either. I just want something I can
ignore.

BARRY

But it's my new tape. My Monday morning
tape. I made it last night just for
today.

ROB

Yeah, well it's fucking Monday afternoon.
You should get out of bed earlier.

BARRY

Don't you want to hear what's next?

(CONTINUED)

ROB
What's next.

BARRY
Play it.

ROB
Say it.

BARRY
(sighs)
"Little Latin Lupe Lu."

Rob groans.

DICK
Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels?

BARRY
(defensive)
No. The Righteous Brothers.

DICK
Oh well. Nevermind.

Barry bristles and moves slowly in on Dick.

BARRY
What?

DICK
Nothing.

BARRY
No, not nothing. What's wrong with the
Righteous Brothers?

DICK
Nothing. I just prefer the other one.

BARRY
Bullshit.

ROB
How can it be bullshit to state a
preference?

BARRY
Since when did this shop become a fascist
regime?

ROB
Since you brought that bullshit tape in.

(CONTINUED)

BARRY

(sarcastic)

Great. That's the fun of working in a record store. Playing crappy pap you don't want to listen to. I thought this tape was going to be, you know, a conversation stimulator. I was going to ask you for your top five records to play on a Monday morning and all that, and you just had to ruin it.

ROB

We'll do it next Monday.

BARRY

Well what's the point in that?

From outside, HEAR THE SOUND OF SKATEBOARD WHEELS CLACKING AND SCRAPING, GETTING LOUDER. Rob, Dick and Barry stop fighting to listen, then each moves purposefully to a spot in the store. Dick to the register, Barry to the back, Rob next to the door, as if bracing for a streetfight.

The SOUND gets closer, then stops. The door swings open to admit VINCE and JUSTIN, two fifteen-year-old skate punks. Vince's hair is post-apocolyptically hacked to different lengths, Justin's is uniformly shaven with leopard spots dyed in. They enter the store with poker faces, and begin to browse. Rob follows them, watching their every move. Dick counters from his perch, getting another angle. Barry cracks his knuckles threateningly. Vince and Justin do their best browser impersonations. Finally Justin plucks a CD, and the two move to the counter.

ROB

Hey. Didn't you steal that one already?

DICK

Can I help you?

JUSTIN

Just this.

DICK

That'll be fifteen-twenty-seven.

Vince reaches into his deep pocket and pulls out a paper cup, with piece of paper attached that says "Please help me. I'm retarded." He pours a mass of change and crumpled singles onto the counter. Dick begins counting it out.

VINCE

Isn't your name Dick?

(CONTINUED)

DICK

Yes.

VINCE

That sucks. Get it?

Dick cracks a sad smile for a second. He bags the CD and Vince and Justin are off. Rob walks back through the stock room door.

CUT TO:

INT. RECORD STORE - STOCK ROOM - LATER

Rob is on his knees, opening boxes with a razor knife.

ROB V.O.

I'm sick of the sight of this place, to be honest. Some days I'm afraid I'll go berserk, rip the Elvis Costello mobile from the ceiling, throw the "Country Artists (Male) A-K" rack out onto the street, go off to work in a Virgin Megastore and never come back --

He hears the bell on the front door RING, and he stops and listens, looks a bit worried.

CUSTOMER (O.S.)

I'm looking for a record for my daughter. For her birthday. "I Just Called To Say I Love You." Do you have it?

BARRY (O.S.)

Oh yeah. We got it.

Rob relaxes and goes back to work.

CUSTOMER (O.S.)

Great. Can I have it then?

BARRY (O.S.)

No, you can't.

Rob deflates, shaking his head.

STORE FLOOR

Barry leans back, elbows up on the counter behind him, talking to the CUSTOMER, a middle-aged graying man in a raincoat.

(CONTINUED)

CUSTOMER

Why not?

BARRY

Because it's sentimental tacky crap, that's why not. Do we look like the kind of store that sells "I Just Called To Say I Loved You?" Go to the mall and stop wasting our time.

CUSTOMER

What's your problem? What did I... Why are you --

BARRY

Do you even know your daughter? There is no way she likes that song. Or is she in a coma?

The Customer throws up his hands and starts out of the store.

CUSTOMER

Okay, okay, buddy. I didn't know it was Pick On the Middle-Aged Square Guy Day. My apologies. I'll be on my way.

He steps out of the door.

BARRY

B'Bye!

Outside, anger catches up to the Customer. He turns and throws up a middle finger --

CUSTOMER

FUCK YOU!

-- and bolts. Barry smiles and turns to see

ROB

standing in the doorway of the stock room. He feigns applause.

ROB

Nice, Barry.

BARRY

Rob. Top five musical crimes perpetrated by Stevie "Wonder" in the '80's and '90's. Subquestion -- is it in fact unfair to criticize a formerly great

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

BARRY (cont'd)
artist for his latter-day sins? "Is it better to burn out than to fade away?"

ROB
You just drove a fucking customer away, Barry.

BARRY
We didn't even really have it. I happen to know for a fact that the only Stevie Wonder single we have is "Don't Drive Drunk." I was just goofing on the straight, and it never cost you a penny.

ROB
Not the point.

BARRY
Oh, so what's the point then?

ROB
I don't want you talking to our customers like that again.

BARRY
"Our customers?" You think that Mr. L.L. Bean out there is going to be a regular?

Rob's face begins to redden with anger.

ROB
Barry, I'm fucking broke! I know we used to fuck with anyone who asked for anything we didn't like, but it's gotta stop.

BARRY
Bullshit. The guy was going to buy one record -- which we didn't even have -- and leave and never come back again anyway. Why not have a little fun? Big fucking deal.

ROB
What did he ever do to you?

BARRY
He offended me with his terrible taste.

ROB
It wasn't even his terrible taste. It was his daughter's.

(CONTINUED)

BARRY

Oh, now you're defending that motherfucker? You're going soft in your old age, Rob. There was a time when you would have chased him out of the store and up the street. Now all of a sudden I'm offending your golf buddy.

(sarcastic)

You're right, Rob. I am so sorry. How are we ever going to make enough money to get you and Laura into the country club?

Rob is red and seething.

BARRY (cont'd)

And by the way, I tell you this for your own good: That's the worst sweater I've ever seen. I have never seen a sweater that bad worn by anyone I'm on speaking terms with. It's a disgrace to the human race.

Rob springs on Barry, grabbing him by the lapels and jerking him up against the wall. Rob is so mad he can't say anything.

DICK

Hey, guys... Hey.

Rob runs out of steam and drops Barry, who backpedals fast.

BARRY

(extremely shaken)

What are you, some kind of fucking maniac? If this jacket's torn you're gonna pay big.

Barry stomps out of the store. Rob turns and goes back to the stockroom, and sits on the stepladder. Dick appears in the doorway, terrified.

DICK

Are you all right?

ROB

Yeah. I'm sorry... Look Dick, Laura and I broke up. She's gone. And if we ever see Barry again maybe you can tell him that.

DICK

'Course I will, Rob. No problem. No problem at all. I'll tell him next time I see him.

(CONTINUED)

Rob nods. Dick sets out into the uncharted conversational territory of interpersonal relationships.

DICK (cont'd)

I've ah... got some other stuff to tell him anyway, so it's no problem. I'll just tell him about, you know, Laura, when I tell him the other stuff.

ROB

Fine.

DICK

I'll start with your news before I tell him mine, obviously. Mine isn't much, really, just about Marie LaSalle (flashes CD of pretty woman) playing at Lounge Ax tonight. I like her, you know, she's kind of Sheryl Crowish... crossed with a post-Partridge Family, pre-LA Law Susan Dey. So I'll tell him before that. Good news and bad news kind of thing.

Dick laughs nervously.

DICK (cont'd)

Or rather, bad news and good news, because he likes this person playing tonight. I mean, he liked Laura too, I didn't mean that. And he likes you. It's just that --

ROB

I understand, Dick.

DICK

Sure. 'Course. Rob, look. Do you want to... talk about it, that kind of thing?

Rob looks up at Dick, who is so nervous that his brow is wet.

ROB

No. Thanks though, Dick.

Dick sighs with relief, and smiles his way out of the stock room.

DICK

I'm gonna make some coffee. Do you want some?

(CONTINUED)

ROB

Sure.

Rob rubs his face with his hands, and stares at the wall.

ROB V.O.

Number three in the top five break-ups was Charlie Nicholson, sophomore year of college. Some people never got over 'Nam, or the night their band opened for Nirvana. I guess I never really got over Charlie.

CUT TO:

EXT. COLLEGE QUAD - DAY - FLASHBACK

About twenty feet away we see a tall, thin beauty, bleach-blond hair cropped short in darling '80's new-wave asymmetry. She is speaking animatedly to a PAMPHLETEER, driving her points home with a forefinger.

ROB V.O.

She looked different. Dramatic. Exotic. She talked a lot, and when she talked she said remarkably interesting things about music, books, film, and politics...

INT. CAFE - DAY

A younger Rob sits amongst a group of STUDENTS who are engaged in a heated conversation. He is smiling, mouth closed, just happy to be there. Charlie sitting next to him, tousles his hair as she talks.

CHARLIE

...Well, Lance, I say it's a sad sad day when we succumb to the horrifying animal instinct to punish in order to satisfy our misguided sense of justice, to draw blood in order to right the wrong of shedding blood. Drawing is shedding, if you ask me, and shedding is damn fucking sure drawing.

ROB V.O.

And she talked a lot, so that you didn't have those terrible, strained silences, that seemed to characterized most of my relationships. And she liked me. She liked me. She liked me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

19.

ROB

(at her, glowingly)
I agree. It's like the military
industrial complex or something.

Charlie gives Rob a quick kiss and keeps talking....

EXT. STREET - AFTERNOON

Rob and Charlie walk arm in arm, Rob in cool clothes and sunglasses trying to look cool, Charlie making a point about something. Rob checks out how cool he looks with her as they walk by a store window REFLECTION.

ROB V.O.

We went out for two years, and I never got comfortable. I felt like a fraud. I was like all those people who suddenly shaved their heads and said they'd always been punks. I couldn't ever stretch out and relax. And I was depressed by the lack of flamboyance in my wardrobe.

INT. CHARLIE'S APARTMENT - DAY

The fabulous sophomore design student's studio apartment: White wood floor, white walls, overvarnished door, Doisneau print on the wall, futon on the floor. Rob lies back on his elbows, watching Charlie in uncomfortable, worried awe. She stands, her back to him, wearing only her underwear and pulling on a T-shirt -- a heartbreaking image to look back on.

ROB V.O.

I worried about my abilities as a lover. I was intimidated by the other men in her design department, and became convinced that she was going to leave me for one of them.

Charlie turns around and looks at Rob with naked ambivalence.

ROB V.O.

She left me for one of them. The dreaded Marco.

EXT. CHARLIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

It is RAINING like crazy, and Rob is shouting up at a lit window, maniacally gesturing. The curtains part and Charlie's figure appears, clad only in a sheet. Next to her is a tall, built, handsome man, MARCO, also in a sheet. Eventually he

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

20.

falls to his knees with a splash and buries his head in his hands. The light goes out.

ROB V.O.

And I lost it. I lost it all. Dignity,
faith, fifteen pounds...

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Rob wandering through the rain.

ROB V.O.

Any small idea of personal identity that
I had acquired up to that point.

INT. RECORD STORE - DAY

Rob sorts through a stack of records.

ROB V.O.

I came to three months later, and to my
surprise had flunked out of school and
started working in a record store.

INT. ROB'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Rob comes in the door, a grocery bag in one arm and a handful
of junk mail in the other.

ROB V.O.

What I really learned from the Charlie
Debacle is that you gotta punch your
weight. Charlie was out of my Class: too
pretty, too smart, too witty, too much.
After her I was determined to never get
out of my league again.

He kicks the door closed behind him, and moves into the
living room, pressing play on the answering machine. A
pleasant, older female voice is heard. It's JANET, Laura's
mother.

JANET

Hello, you two. Laura, it's your mother.
Your father's angina is a little rough
today and I thought he'd like to talk to
you. No big deal. I love you two. Bye.

He reaches the stereo, puts a disc in, and stands in front of
the two walls of record collection, some two thousand LP's
and CD's, with sense of purpose.

He pulls an LP from a shelf, puts it on the turntable and
sits back in his chair.

EXT. LAKE MICHIGAN WATERFRONT - MOS - THE PAST

Rob and SARAH, a thin, modestly attractive young woman, SARAH, walk and talk. They seem to be emphatically complaining together.

ROB V.O.

Charlie and I didn't match. Marco and Charlie matched. Me and Sarah, number four on the all time list, matched. She was sad, in the original sense of the word. She had been dumped by some asshole named Michael. He was her moment, Charlie was mine. Sarah had sworn off men. I had sworn off women. It made sense to pool our loathing of the opposite sex, swear them off together, and get to share a bed with someone at the same time.

INT. SARAH'S APARTMENT - MOS - NIGHT

Rob and SARAH sit up in bed, staring at the television...

ROB V.O.

We were frightened of being left alone for the rest of our lives. Only people of a certain disposition are frightened of being alone for the rest of their lives at twenty-six. We were of that disposition. Everything seemed much later than it was.

INT. SARAH'S KITCHEN - MOS - DAY ROB'S POV

of Sarah, sitting across the table, mid-confession.

ROB V.O.

When she told me that she met someone else it made no sense. Her meeting someone else was contrary to the whole spirit of our arrangement. All we really had in common was that we were dumped by people, and that we were against dumping. We were violently anti-dump. So how come I got dumped?

INT. ROB'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Rob stares off, listening to the music.

ROB V.O.

You run the risk of losing anyone who is worth spending time with. But I didn't

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ROB V.O. (cont'd)
know that at the time. All I saw was that I'd moved down a division and that it still hadn't worked out, and this seemed cause for a great deal of misery and self-pity. And that's when you came along, Laura.

The phone RINGS, snapping Rob out of it. He picks it up.

ROB
Hello?

DICK (O.S.)
Hello?

ROB
What is it, Dick?

DICK (O.S.)
We're going to Lounge Ax. Marie Lasalle's playing. Just thought you might like to come. Barry thought so too. Really.

ROB
Thanks but I'm reorganizing my records tonight.

DICK
(completely understands)
Ahh. Chronologically?

ROB
Nope.

DICK
Alphabetically?

ROB
Nope. Autobiographically. The order in which I got them. Pull them all off the shelves, look for Revolver and go from there.

DICK
Nice.

ROB
I'll be able to see how I got from Deep Purple to Howlin' Wolf in twenty-five moves. If I wanna find Landslide by Fleetwood Mac I have to remember that I bought it for someone in the fall of 1983 and then didn't give it to them for personal reasons.

(CONTINUED)

DICK
That sounds...

ROB
Comforting.

DICK
Yeah.

ROB
It is.

DICK
Okay. Well, see you tomorrow.

ROB
Bye.

Rob hangs up the phone, turns to the records, and the phone rings again.

ROB (cont'd)
Yeah?

MOM
Hi, Rob. It's your mother.

Rob deflates a bit.

ROB
Hi, Mom.

MOM
Everything all right?

ROB
Great. Super-fantastic.

MOM
How's the store?

ROB
So-so. Up and down.

MOM
Your dad and I are worried about the recession.

ROB
It's over, Mom. Look at the news.

(CONTINUED)

MOM

Your lucky Laura's doing so well. If it wasn't for her, I don't think either of us would ever sleep...

Rob HITS THE MUTE on the phone, so Mom can't hear the rant that he must unleash --

ROB

She's gone, Mom! My big fat meal ticket has thrown we to the wolves! How will you ever retire without her?!.....
(to himself)

No. No.

Rob UNMUTES the phone again.

MOM

...God knows she's got enough on her plate without having to worry about a record store. It's a wonder she's hung in there as long as she has.

Rob holds his lips together with thumb and forefinger, but succumbs --

ROB

She left. She's gone.

MOM

What do you mean? Where did she go?

ROB

How would I know? Gone. Girlfriend. Leave. Not say where gone. Laura move out.

MOM

Well call her mother.

ROB

She just called. She doesn't even know. It's probably the last time I'll ever hear her voice. That's weird, isn't it? You spend Christmas at somebody's house, you know, and you worry about their operations and you see them in their bathrobe, and... I dunno...

Silence

(CONTINUED)

ROB (cont'd)
There'll be another mom and another
Christmas. Right?

Silence... More silence.

ROB (cont'd)
Hello? Anybody there?

The sound of SOFT CRYING.

ROB (cont'd)
I'm all right, if that's what's upsetting
you.

MOM
You know that's not what's upsetting me.

ROB
Well it fucking should be, shouldn't it?

MOM
I knew this would happen. What are you
going to do Rob?

ROB
I'm going to drink this bottle of wine
watch TV and go to bed. Then tomorrow
I'll get up and go to work.

MOM
And after that?

ROB
Meet a nice girl and have children. I
promise the next time we talk I'll have
it all sorted out.

MOM
I knew this was going to happen.

ROB
Then what are you getting so upset about?

MOM
What did Laura say? Do you know why she
left?

ROB
It's got nothing to do with marriage, if
that's what you're getting at.

(CONTINUED)

MOM

So you say. I'd like to hear her side of it.

ROB

Mom! For the last fucking time, I'm telling you Laura didn't want to get married! She is not that kind of girl! To coin a phrase. That's not what happens now.

MOM

Well I don't know what happens now, apart from you meet someone, you move in, she goes. You meet someone, you move in, she goes.

Silence. Rob busted.

ROB

Shut up, Mom.

Rob hangs up the phone. He fills up his glass again, takes a swig, and slumps into a chair. If there was any wind left in Rob, it just got knocked out. After a moment, he gets to his feet, grabs his jacket and heads out the door.

CUT TO:

INT. LAURA'S OFFICE - NIGHT

After closing time. A law firm of more modern design, but still with the green glass and oak here and there. Laura sits at her desk reading a brief. LIZ, an early thirties Clydesdale of a woman, enters tentatively, knocking on the doorframe.

LAURA

Hi, Liz.

LIZ

Did you do it?

LAURA

Yeah, I did. It was ugly.

LIZ

How's Rob?

LAURA

Let's talk about it later.

Liz backs out.

(CONTINUED)

LIZ

Okay.

LAURA

But I want to talk to you about it.
(gestures to her desk)
I just got this...

Liz nods and exits.

EXT. LOUNGE AX CLUB - LINCOLN AVE. - NIGHT

Rob comes down the street and gets in the short line to enter the club. From inside he hears a GUITAR, playing a tune that becomes familiar not only to Rob, but to us. When a strong, lilting female VOICE begins to sing, we hear what it is: "Baby I Love Your Way," by Peter Frampton.

Rob smiles at first, but begins to darken as the verse continues. He steps out of line and leans against the outside wall, listening. Is he beginning to cry? Yes, he is... He looks around self-consciously, and paces a bit, deciding whether or not to stay. He takes a deep breath, and heads in the door.

INT. LOUNGE AX - NIGHT

As Rob enters he looks to the stage, where MARIE LASALLE is standing alone with her acoustic guitar, heading toward the song's finish. Rob's expression begins to shift from the melancholy to something else altogether. Marie is beautiful, and Marie has touched his heart.

ROB V.O.

I find myself in two apparently
contradictory states. A: I suddenly miss
Laura with a passion, and B: I fall in
love with Marie LaSalle.

Rob navigates toward her through the small crowd as if pulled by something unseen.

ROB V.O. (cont'd)

Sentimental music makes you nostalgic and
hopeful at the same time. Marie's the
hopeful part. Laura's the nostalgia part.
These things happen. They happen to men,
at any rate. This is why I shouldn't be
listening to pop music.

As he gets closer to the stage --

(CONTINUED)

DICK

ROB!

Rob looks over to see Dick sitting with Barry, a few feet away. He shakes it off and sits with them, extending a meaningful hand to Barry, who takes it. They turn back to the stage as Marie finishes the song.

ROB

I always hated this song.

DICK

Yeah.

BARRY

Yeah.

ROB

But now I kind of like it.

Dick and Barry nod, then keep watching. All three of them are in their own private fantasies with Marie.

DICK

She should've done it on "The Number Four With a Smile."

BARRY

Isn't her album called "Number Four With A Smile?"

DICK

That's what I said.

BARRY

No, no, no, you said "The Number Four With a Smile," and there's no "The" at the front of the title of the album.

DICK

It's a reference to a Chinese meal in Toronto and I think that there is a "The." But I could be wrong.

BARRY

You can be and are wrong.

They drop it, so that their eyes can drift back to Marie.

BARRY

I wanna date a musician...

(CONTINUED)

ROB

(nods in agreement)

I wanna live with a musician. She'd write songs at home, ask me what she thought of them, maybe even include one of our private jokes in the liner notes.

BARRY

...Maybe a picture of me in the liner notes...

DICK

Just in the background somewhere.

MARIE

as the song ends, and she smiles out over the room. The audience applauds.

MARIE

Thanks, you guys. I know I'm not supposed to like that song, but I do. I'm gonna take a break for a second. Anybody wants to buy one of my tapes, they're five bucks up here. One of my other personalities will be selling them.

ROB, DICK, AND BARRY

BARRY

Let's go get one.

ROB

Let's not.

DICK

I want a tape.

Barry and Dick stand and begin to move off...

ROB

I don't need to go up there right now.

... and they're gone. After a beat, Rob gets up and follows them.

FOOT OF THE STAGE

Dick and Barry wait nervously to buy a tape, Rob just behind them. Marie processes sales with polite monosyllables, until the three get up front.

(CONTINUED)

MARIE
Enjoying yourselves?

They dart eyes to each other, then nod.

MARIE (cont'd)
Good. 'Cause I'm enjoying myself.

ROB
Good.

Rob hands her a ten and she roots around in a duffel bag for change...

ROB (cont'd)
So you live in Chicago now?

MARIE
Yup. Not far from here, actually.

BARRY
You like it?

MARIE
It's okay. Hey. You guys might be the sort to know. Are there any good record stores around here or do I have to go downtown?

Barry and Dick do not try to control themselves. They point to Rob.

DICK
He's got one!

BARRY
On Clark Street!

DICK
A couple blocks! About six!

BARRY
We work there!

DICK
You'd love it!

Marie laughs.

MARIE
What do you sell?

(CONTINUED)

BARRY

A little of anything that matters. Rock, soul, R&B, punk rock, hip-hop, ska, new wave...

MARIE

Sounds great.

The line behind them is moving in, and Marie smiles at them and turns to someone else. They scurry back toward their table.

ROB

What did you tell her about the shop for?

BARRY

I didn't know it was classified information. I mean, I know we don't have any customers, but I thought that was a bad thing, not, like, a business strategy.

Rob looks over Barry at Marie. She catches his eye as she looks over the room. His eyes shoot to the floor.

CUT TO:

INT. ROB'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Rob shuts the door behind him, seemingly relieved to be home. His usual first stop at the stereo, where he puts on Marie's tape. He kind of bops through the room to the sound of her voice, over to the answering machine: Flashing "2". He hits "play" as he unfolds the insert in Marie's tape and looks at various pictures of her.

MACHINE

Rob, it's Liz. Just calling to see, well, if you're okay. Give me a ring. I'm not taking sides. Yet. Lot's of love. Bye.

BEEP. Then a new voice. We've heard it before, and it's Laura.

MACHINE (cont'd)

Hi. It's me. There are a couple of things I need. Can you try calling me at work tonight? I'll be here late. Thanks.

BEEP. Rob paces, looking at the phone. At his watch. At the phone. He picks it up and dials...

(CONTINUED)

LAURA
Hello?

ROB
Hi.

Silence.

LAURA
Hi.

INT. LAURA'S OFFICE - INTERCUT

Laura's tone changes, Rob gets red.

LAURA
So, you got my message?

ROB
Yup.

LAURA
I was thinking I could come by while
you're at work tomorrow.

ROB
While I'm at work. Why while I'm at work.

He absently looks at the tape pullout in his hand.

LAURA
C'mon, Rob.

ROB
It just seems childish, is all.

LAURA
I think it's actually more adult.
(cocks her head)
What is that you're listening to?

Rob's eyes widen to for the expression of One Who Is Busted.
He takes two long steps to the "stop" button on the tape deck
and presses it.

ROB
I don't know.

LAURA
You don't know.

(CONTINUED)

ROB

Weren't we talking about how you're
ruining my life?

LAURA

No. We were --

ROB

Let's go over this again, Laura. What did
I do that was so wrong? Did I beat you?
Did I tell you every day that you were a
bad person?

LAURA

Oh boy...

ROB

That's what you have to say? "Oh boy?"
Bravo.

She seems about to cry.

LAURA

You think that because this was my idea
it's easy for me and it's not and you
keep banging on me... Shit, Rob... I
gotta go...

Rob softens.

ROB (cont'd)

Laura, I just don't get this, this is so
dumb. You should just be here.

LAURA

I gotta go. Goodbye.

Click. She's hung up.

ROB

Damn.

He looks at what he's holding in his hand -- the pullout of
Marie's -- and he wings it toward the stereo.

CUT TO:

INT. ROB'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Rob sits in his chair, still in his pajamas. He is watching
the knob on the door turn. The door opens and Laura enters.
She sees him and stops in her tracks.

(CONTINUED)

LAURA

What are you doing here.

ROB

I'm having a late morning.

LAURA

Rob...

ROB

Laura, What did I do that was so wrong?
What should I be doing to make you happy?

LAURA

Something more than waiting for your life
to change and keeping your options open.
And all the time you're keeping your
options open you're closing them off.
You'll be lying on your deathbed, dying
of some smoking-related disease and
you'll be thinking, "well at least I kept
my options open."

ROB

Laura--

LAURA

-- No. You've lived half your life and
for all you've got to show for it you
might as well be nineteen.

ROB

I'm happy.

LAURA

No, you're not.

ROB

I'm not happy. Why am I not happy?

LAURA

Because you haven't changed so much as a
pair of socks in the years I've known
you. If we've grown apart, then I'm the
one who's done the growing, and all I've
done is changed jobs.

ROB

And hairstyles and clothes and attitude
and friends and...

(CONTINUED)

LAURA

I can't go to work with my hair dyed pink. And I can afford to go shopping more now, and I've met a couple people I like over the last year or so.

ROB

You're tougher.

LAURA

More confident, maybe.

ROB

Harder.

LAURA

Less neurotic. Are you intending to stay the same for the rest of your life?

ROB

I'm alright.

LAURA

Yeah, you're alright. But you're certainly not happy. So what happens if you get happy? And yes I know that's the title of an Elvis Costello album, I use the reference deliberately to catch your attention. What happens if you, I don't know, start your own record label, and it's a success? Are you going to end up with new clothes and new friends, you know, a bad person like me?

ROB

You're being stupid.

LAURA

How? All I'm saying is that if you believe in long-term, monogamous relationships, then you have to allow for things to happen to people, most of all to yourself. And you don't, Rob. So what's the use?

Rob says nothing.

LAURA (cont'd)

I'll come back later.

She leaves.

INT. RECORD STORE - STOCK ROOM - LATER

Rob is going through a huge stack of used CD's, sorting them off into different bins, bouncing his head absently to the music -- the same song of Marie's that Rob had on when Laura called last night.

BARRY (O.S.)

ROB! PHONE!

Rob reaches over and hits the SPEAKER button on the phone, still in the groove of sorting.

ROB

Rob here.

LIZ (O.S.)

Hey. It's Liz.

ROB

What's happenin'.

LIZ

You called this morning?

ROB

Yeah. I just wanted to thank you for that message last night. It made me feel like... like less of an asshole.

LIZ

How're you holding up?

ROB

Actually, I'm fine. I'm great. I talked to her last night, and I saw her this morning and I got to thinking, "you know what? Maybe it is time to move on. Maybe we're just not right for each other. Or maybe we are. But time will tell and at this point I'm going to be fine with whatever's meant to be." You know?

LIZ

Yeah. Like I said, I don't want to take sides. And I like Laura with you. She's more fun, more open. You guys are good together. I just wish you two could, I don't know. I don't think much of this Ian guy --

-- Dick bursts in, huge-faced --

(CONTINUED)

DICK

Rob.

ROB

Liz, hold on a second --
(turns to Dick)
What?

DICK

Marie Lasalle is in the store! Here,
she's here, and now!

Rob freezes, he and Dick turn to the speaker, which cranks Marie's voice. Rob goes to the phone and picks up the handset.

ROB

Liz, can you hold for a second?

He hits hold.

ROB

(to Dick)

I'll be out there! Go!

(picks up the phone)

Hey, Liz, I gotta go... Bye.

He hangs up fast, spins around to look in a cracked one-foot-square cracked mirror bearing the logo of Aerosmith that is mounted on the wall, and moves out into the

FRONT ROOM

and up the aisle fast toward the stereo where he turns Marie's music off. He takes a deep breath and looks up, meeting her eyes.

ROB (cont'd)

Oh. Hi.

Marie smiles.

MARIE

(re:music)

Don't you like that?

ROB

No, no, I love, it's just, thinking
you're, you must be so sick of it...
Well.

(CONTINUED)

He reaches back and puts it back on. He cracks his face into a smile, then walks fast back to the stock room door. Marie watches him go.

STOCK ROOM

where as soon as he crosses the threshold his fist clench and he grimaces:

ROB (cont'd)
WHAT FUCKING IAN GUY?!!

Dick comes in --

DICK
Rob --!

ROB
-- FUCK OFF!

Dick backs out fast. Rob leans on a wall. Barry enters --

BARRY
We're only on the fucking list for Marie's gig at the Pulaski Pub, that's all! All three of us.

ROB
That's fucking great, Barry. We can spent fifteen bucks on a cab to save five each. Fantastic, Barry!

BARRY
We can take your car.

ROB
It's not my car, now is it? It's Laura's car, and thus Laura has it. So it's an ass-bumping double-transferring bus ride through bumblefuck or a fat wad on a cab. Wow. Fucking great.

Barry sighs, throws up his hands and heads out the door.

BARRY
Jaggoff...

Barry exits. Rob seems to be having trouble staying on his feet.

(CONTINUED)

ROB
Who the fuck is Ian?!

CUT TO:

INT. ROB'S BUILDING'S LOBBY - NIGHT

Rob stands at the mail table, looking like shit, sifting through it for his.

ROB V.O.
Laura doesn't know anybody called Ian.
There's no Ian at her office. She has no
friends named Ian. She has never met
anyone called Ian in her whole life.
Although there may have been one in
college -- but I am almost certain that
since 1989 she has lived in an Ian-less
universe.

He slows... and stops. His face gets a little paler as he
lifts a letter up to his face.

CLOSE-UP: LETTER

A cable service bill to a Mr. I. Raymond.

ROB

as he looks at it, divining.

ROB
"I. Raymond." Ray. "I." IAN.

INT. ROB'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Darkness. We move silently through the rooms, and enter the
bedroom... closer to the bed, we see Rob on his back, sheets
held clenched up to his chin. He stares at the ceiling,
sadly.

JUMP CUT

to almost the same shot, but it's Rob and Laura in the bed,
semi-tangled. Laura has a book in her lap. A CREAKING is
heard. Laura's eyes go to the ceiling, and Rob sits up at
attention. They look up at the light fixture, which shakes a
little faster, with the rhythm of the creaking. Someone is
definitely having sex upstairs, and they are going for it.

ROB
Jeez. He goes on long enough.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

40.

LAURA
I should be so lucky.

They turn to each other and laugh.

JUMP CUT BACK

to Rob lying still in bed, staring at the ceiling,

ROB'S IAN-LAURA SEX NIGHTMARE

Ian mercilessly savages Laura in quick cuts from behind, below, and above, champagne showers, toe-sucking, and animal screams --

ROB V.O.
You are as abandoned and as noisy as any character in a porn film, Laura. You are Ian's plaything, responding to his touch with shrieks of orgasmic delight. No woman in the history of the world is having better sex than the sex you are having with Ian in my head.

BACK TO ROB IN BED,

imploding with disgust and sorrow. Tears run down his cheeks into his ears.

ROB V.O.
Number five -- Jackie Allen. My break up with Jackie Allen had no effect on my life whatsoever. I just slotted her in to bump you out of position, Laura. Yes, you do in fact make it into the top five. And just to remind you, the list is in chronological order, not in the order of pain and suffering.

CUT TO:

INT. RECORD STORE - DAY

Dick and Barry are stocking the racks. Rob stands at the register, rocking back and forth sort of like an idiot, to "Always And Forever" by the Commodores. He is a mess.

FEMALE VOICE
Hey.

Rob looks up to see a nineteen or twenty-year-old GIRL standing in front of him.

(CONTINUED)

GIRL

Do you have soul?

Rob smiles bitterly at her, clearly having a different meaning in mind.

ROB

That all depends.

She kind of backs away and goes back to browsing. He goes back to staring. After a beat, we hear the DOOR SLAM off camera, and Rob looks up with a bit of fear.

LIZ

stands in front of him, and she is mad as hell.

ROB

Hi, Liz!

LIZ

Motherfucker!

Rob reflexively shrinks. Barry and Dick look up. Liz moves in on Rob, punctuating with a finger in his chest.

LIZ

To think I defended you to Laura! Poor Rob! Laura left him out of nowhere for the schmuck upstairs. You let me believe that!

ROB

It's true!

LIZ

Rob! Rob! She told me everything! Two years ago you got her pregnant --

ROB

I didn't know she was pregnant, of course I didn't. I found out months later! She didn't tell me --

LIZ

-- because she found out you were cheating on her--!

ROB

-- One slip, a long time ago, and we worked that out --

(CONTINUED)

LIZ

Then you borrowed money from her and never paid a dime back!

ROB

She had it, I didn't and if she hadn't lent it to me I would have gone under. I haven't paid her back because I haven't had it, and just because she split and moved in with some Supertramp fan doesn't make me five grand richer --!

LIZ

Just a few weeks ago you told her you were unhappy with her and were "kind of looking around for somebody else!" And you wonder why she left?!

ROB

She tricked me into saying it. She asked me if I was looking around, I said no, she said come on, it's only natural, she thinks about it, so I admitted that, okay, okay, I have the occasional daydream about happiness elsewhere. Who doesn't? Later I saw that what we were really talking about was her and Ian and she suckered me into absolving her. It was a sneaky lawyer's trick and I fell for it because she's much smarter than me.

LIZ

Okay, fucker, sounds like you've got it all figured out.

(softens into psycho-maternal mode)

Rob. I really hope you find peace. Really. Deep and lasting peace.

Liz storms out. Rob looks up to see Barry and Dick and two CUSTOMERS pulling their jaws off the floor. Rob turns to them.

ROB

So. Let's talk mitigating circumstances? Are there any? Not really. Liz's right. I am a fucking asshole. I did and said those things. But before you judge, although you've probably already done so, lemme give you a top five. What are the top five worst things that you have done

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ROB (cont'd)
to your partner, even if -- especially if
-- your partner doesn't know about them?

Blank stares from everyone else in the room. Except Barry,
who smiles.

ROB
Don't dress things up or try to explain
them. Just list them in your head in the
plainest language possible...

A LONG BEAT, even five or ten seconds.

ROB
Time's up.

INT. GREEN MILL - NIGHT

Rob sits alone, nursing a scotch.

ROB V.O.
Okay, so who's the asshole now?

Rob looks up into the mirror behind the bar and sees an older
woman, MRS. ASHWORTH, sitting alone a few stools down.

ROB
Do I know you?

ALISON'S MOM
I don't know.

Rob remembers, and his gaze has a new found seriousness.

ROB
Mrs Ashworth! I'm Rob. An old boyfriend
of Alison's. Long time ago. I was just
thinking about her.

Alison's Mom's brow furrows and her face darkens.

ALISON'S MOM
Really?

ROB
Yeah, puppy love, my first heartbreak. I
was her first boyfriend.

She looks like she wants to get out of there.

ALISON'S MOM
What did you say your name was?

(CONTINUED)

ROB

Rob. Bobby. Robert. Robert...Gordon.
Circa junior high...

ALISON'S MOM

Hate to squabble with you Robert, but she
married her first boyfriend.

ROB

You gotta be kidding me. Kevin Bannister?

ALISON'S MOM

That's right. Kevin. She's Kevin
Bannister. She lives in Australia.

She doesn't seem to happy that Alison lives in Australia. Rob
is thrilled.

ROB

Really? Married Kevin? Her junior high
sweetheart... What chance would I have
had against that? None, no chance. That's
just fate.

ALISON'S MOM

I beg your pardon?

ROB

Technically, I'm number one. I went out
with her a week before Kevin did. Her
first boyfriend. Me.

ALISON'S MOM

Well Robert, I just wanted to stop in for
a quick spritzer, so I'm gonna hit the
road. But I'll tell her you said hello.
If she remembers you.

Alison's Mom strolls out.

ROB

(calling after her)

I think she will. But it's okay if she
doesn't. I'm fine now.

Rob turns to the bartender, smiling giddily.

ROB

Check please.

ROB V.O.

And I am fine now. For the moment there
is not one extra pound on my chest. There

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ROB V.O. (cont'd)
is an almost embarrassing bounce in my step. *Deus ex Machina*. Nothing to be done. Alison married Kevin. That's got nothing to do with me, that is beyond my control, beyond my fault...

CUT TO:

INT. ROB'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rob sits on the floor in the doorway of his closet, digging through a box, fishing through pictures and letters, concert tickets and other mementos.

ROB V.O. (cont'd)
This could be great! I want more. I want to see the others. Penny, who wouldn't let me touch her and then went and had sex with that bastard Chris Thompson. Sarah, my partner in rejection who rejected me, and Charlie.

He begins to assemble a small pile of pictures of women.

ROB V.O. (CONT'D)
Especially Charlie, because I have her to thank for everything: my great job, my sexual self-confidence, the works. I don't know. Just talk. Ask them how they are and whether they have forgiven me, and tell them that I have forgiven them. If I saw all of them in turn and there were no hard feelings left, just soft, downy feelings, Brie rather than Parmesan, I'd feel clean, and calm, and ready to start again.

Rob pulls an old crumpled address book from the box and begins flipping through.

ROB V.O. (cont'd)
That'd be good. Great even.

Rob reaches for the phone and dials... someone answers and he speaks.

ROB
Penny Hardwick? This is Rob Gordon...
From High school.

EXT. MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT

Rob and Penny walk out of the theater mid-conversation. They look happy as they walk down the street.

ROB V.O.

Penny is as beautiful as she was in high school. Even more beautiful. And really grown into herself. She's writes for a free paper and we go to this movie that nobody knows about but we both wanted to see, and we laugh at the same parts and we hate the same actors. And we even both want to get something to eat together afterwards. It's great.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A mid-scale trattoria. Rob and Penny sit a table laughing and talking. If we didn't know better we might think there is chemistry.

ROB V.O. (cont'd)

She tells me about her life, and I get it. And I tell about mine, and she's interested.

CLOSE-UP -- ROB

ROB V.O. (CONT'D)

And then, with no real explanation, I just launch into it: I tell her about Laura and Ian, and Charlie and Marco, and about Alison Ashworth and Kevin Bannister...

ROB

...and you wanted to sleep with Chris Thomson instead of me, and I thought you could help me understand why it keeps happening, why apparently I am doomed to be left and...

He slows to a stop. We see Penny, and she is livid.

PENNY

I was crazy about you. And I wanted to sleep with you, one day, but not when I was sixteen, and when you broke up with me -- when you broke up with me -- because I was, to use your charming expression, tight, I cried and cried and I hated you. And then that little shitbag
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

47.

PENNY (cont'd)
asked me out, and I was too tired to
fight him off, and it wasn't rape,
because I said okay, but it wasn't far
off. And I didn't have sex with anyone
else until after college because I hated
it so much. And now you want have a chat
about rejection? Well, fuck you, Rob.

Penny stands and leaves. Rob just sits.

ROB
So that's another one I don't have to
worry about. I should have done this
years ago.

Rob indicates to an off-screen waiter.

ROB
Check...

INT. ROB'S APARTMENT - DAY

Rob sits again on the floor in the doorway of the closet,
digging through the box of memorabilia.

ROB V.O.
Sarah still sends me Christmas cards with
her address and phone number on them.

He finds what he is looking for: a Christmas card. He
examines it.

ROB V.O. (cont'd)
They never say anything else, except for
"Merry Christmas, Love Sarah." I send her
equally blank ones back.

Rob leans back and plucks the phone from his bed, dials.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING HALLWAY - NIGHT - ROB'S POV

of a door opening, revealing Sarah, a few years older but
still pretty in her mousey way. She looks at Rob with a bit
too much in her eyes.

INT. CARMEN'S PIZZA - NIGHT

Rob and Sarah face each other over a half-eaten pizza.

SARAH
I can't believe I left you for him...
Crazy.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

48.

Sarah looks down at her plate, shaking her head, blushing. Rob looks uncomfortable. This is more than he was looking for.

ROB
Well... probably seemed like a good idea at the time.

She looks up again...

SARAH
Probably. I can't remember why, though.

...and back down again.

ROB V.O.
I haven't got the heart for the rejection conversation. There are no hard feelings here, and I am glad that she ditched me, and not the other way around.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING HALLWAY - NIGHT - ROB'S POV - MOS

Sarah is in the doorway, nodding shyly through the last bit of good-bye conversation.

ROB V.O.
I could end up having sex here. And what better way to exorcize rejection demons than to screw the person who rejected you? But you wouldn't be sleeping with a person. You'd be sleeping with a whole sad single-person culture. It'd be like sleeping with Talia Shire in "Rocky" if you weren't Rocky.

Sarah smiles meekly and shuts the door to us.

ROB V.O. (cont'd)
I feel guilty enough as it is. There's only Charlie left now.

INT. ROB'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

CLOSE-UP: PHONE BOOK

as Rob's finger moves down the column, then stops.

ROB V.O.
She's in the fucking phone book. It's incredible, really, to think that over the last decade I could have done this: she has come to assume such an

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

49.

ROB V.O. (cont'd)
importance, I feel she should be living
on Neptune. She's an extraterrestrial, a
ghost, a myth, not a person in the phone
book.

Rob's hands place the phone on the page, picks up the
receiver and dials. Rob pulls the phone into the bathroom and
shuts the door.

BATHROOM

Rob curls up with the phone...

INT. CHARLIE'S HOUSE - INTERCUT

Charlie looks even better than when we saw her in college.
She efficiently unpacks a set of three matching designer
suitcases that lie on her bed. The phone rings and she picks
it up.

CHARLIE
Bon Nuit?

ROB
Uh... Is Charlie Nicholson there?

CHARLIE
Speaking.

ROB
Hi. This is Rob. Rob Gordon. Remember me?

CHARLIE
Wow! Rob Gordon! The Rob Gordon. Seems
like a 100 million years ago now.

ROB
Yeah. A billion. Right... So. Do you have
kids and stuff?

CHARLIE
No. I'm too young, too single. I don't
know, kids are... time consuming is the
expression I'm looking for. I'm real
busy.

Rob smiles.

ROB
Yeah.

CHARLIE
Real busy too?

(CONTINUED)

He looks around at his surroundings.

ROB

Yeah, sure. Got the store. Lotsa projects.

CHARLIE

That's great... so anyway, are you in or out, Rob?

ROB

I'm sorry.

CHARLIE

No, I'm sorry. It's just... I find these long-lost boyfriend calls a little unnerving. There's been a rash of them, recently.

ROB

Is that right?

CHARLIE

Well, do you remember that guy Marco I went out with after you?

ROB

Kinda.

CHARLIE

Well, he called a few months back and I think he was going through some kind of "what-does-it-all-mean" thing, and he wanted to see me, and rehash the past as they say, and I wasn't really up for it. Do all men go through this?

ROB

I've never heard of it before.

CHARLIE

It's just the ones I pick maybe. I didn't mean...

ROB

No, no, that's okay. It must seem funny, me calling you out of the blue, but I'll get to that in a minute. What does "are you in or out" mean?

CHARLIE

It means, I don't know, are we friends or aren't we. Because if we are, fine, and
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CHARLIE (cont'd)
if we're not, I don't want to play catch-
up on the phone for no reason.
So are you in or out?

ROB
I'm in. I'm in.

CHARLIE
Good. Do you want to come to dinner
tomorrow night? I'm having some friends
over and I need a spare man. Are you a
spare man?

ROB
Uh...yes, at the moment.

CHARLIE
My friend Clara is coming, and she
doesn't have a boyfriend, okay,
Jellybean? She's right for you... 222
Chestnut. Eight o'clockish?

ROB
Sure.

CHARLIE
Great, see you then.

INT. CHARLIE'S HALLWAY - NIGHT

A high and open corridor in a designer-renovated loft building. Rob comes from around a corner with a bottle of wine in hand, checking apartment numbers as he smooths his hair. He finds Charlie's and rings the bell... We hear the muffled sound of pricey heels getting louder, then the door opens to reveal Charlie. She looks stunning.

CHARLIE
Hey, Jellybean.

ROB
Bon Nuit.

She gives him a polite hug, steps back from the door and gestures him in.

INT. CHARLIE'S LIVING ROOM - ROB'S POV

of a sexy version of a hip wine commercial: a small mid-thirties crowd of successful, beautiful people, talking animatedly over acid-jazzy music and picking at Chinese hors d'ouvres. They look this way, not uninvitingly.

(CONTINUED)

Charlie puts a hand on Rob's shoulder and introduces him around the room.

CHARLIE

(to Rob)

Have a seat. We were just talking about what we'd call a dog if we had one. Sue's got a dog named Dizzy, after Dizzy Gillespie.

MICHAEL

X-Ray. For a Jack Russell.

CHRIS

(to Rob)

Or Underdog.

ROB

Yeah. I'm not really into dogs.

The room cools a bit with the lack of possible responses to Rob.

SUE

(to Rob)

Is that size of apartment, or childhood fear, or allergies, or...?

Charlie hands Rob a glass of white wine.

ROB

I dunno. I'm just... not really into them.

They smile politely. Rob feels the heat, and tries to cover.

ROB (cont'd)

But if I was going to name a dog I think I'd wait until I met the dog itself. Let it show it's personality and go from there. As far as naming goes.

Rob drains the glass of wine.

INT. CHARLIE'S DINING ROOM - SERIES OF SHOTS OVER THE COURSE OF DINNER

Rob sits at the table silently as the other guests talk and eat. Rob's central activities are working his way through maybe a few too many wines making sure his cigarette smoke doesn't get in anyone's face.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

53.

ROB V.O.

The difference between these people and me is that they finished college and I didn't. Which of course I blame on Charlie herself. As a result, they have great jobs and I have a shit job, they are rich and I am poor, they are self-confident and I am incontinent, they don't smoke and I do, they have opinions and I have lists.

INT. CHARLIE'S LIVING ROOM - LATER

Charlie is seeing people out the door. Rob is a little too settled into the couch, somewhat bleary.

ROB V.O.

It doesn't help that Charlie talks shit all night. The not listening I once mistook for strength of character, the obtuseness I misread as mystery, the improbable accents I saw as glamour and drama. How had I managed to edit all of this out? How did I turn her into the answer to all of the world's problems?

Everyone gone but the two of them, Charlie plops down into a chair across from Rob.

CHARLIE

I'm right, aren't I? Clara's just your type.

ROB

She's everybody's type.

CHARLIE

And what do you mean by that?

Rob reaches for a coffee from table.

ROB

She's beautiful and drunk, what's not to like. Hey Charlie.

CHARLIE

Hey Rob.

ROB

Why did you break up with me for Marco?

(CONTINUED)

CHARLIE

(on her feet)

Fuck! I knew it! Fuck, fuck, fuck!

ROB

What? Easy now.

CHARLIE

You are going through one of those what-does-it-all-mean things.

ROB

I can't lie when I drink. I am, actually, yes. Yes, indeed. Very much so.

She laughs at him.

ROB (cont'd)

C'mon answer the question You can say what you like. What the hell?

Charlie looks off at a corner of the ceiling, musters a look of "contemplation."

CHARLIE

It's all kind of lost in the...

(sudden Irish accent)

in the dense mists of time now.

(back to America)

It wasn't that I really liked Marco more. In fact I thought you were more, shall we say, attractive than him. It was just that he knew he was good-looking and you didn't, and that made a difference somehow. You used to act as if I was weird for wanting to spend time with you, and that got kind of beat, if you know what I mean. Your self-image started to rub off on me and I ended up thinking that I was strange. And I knew that you were kind and thoughtful...you made me laugh, and I dug the way you got consumed by things you loved... and Marco seemed a bit more, I don't know, glamorous? More sure of himself?

Pause.

CHARLIE (cont'd)

Less hard work, because I felt like I was dragging you around, sort of.

Pause.

(CONTINUED)

CHARLIE (cont'd)
A little sunnier. Sparkier.

Pause.

CHARLIE (cont'd)
I don't know. You know what people are like at that age. They make very superficial judgements. Do you think that's superficial?

ROB
On the contrary. Those are the first un-superficial words that have crossed your lips all night.

CHARLIE
Aww. Did that hurt? He was a clown, if it's any consolation.

ROB
Did you tell that to Marco when he did his what-does-it-all-mean thing with you?

CHARLIE
Oh God, no. I didn't want to hurt his feelings.

INT. RECORD STORE - DAY

Saturday. For the first time we see the place kind of busy. Rob watches the room. Barry is toward the back, talking to a CUSTOMER.

BARRY
It's almost impossible to find, especially on CD. Yet another cruel trick on all of the dumbasses who got rid of their turntables. But every other Echo and the Bunnymen album --

CUSTOMER
I have all of the others.

BARRY
Oh really. Well what about the first Jesus and Mary Chain?

CUSTOMER
They always seemed...

(CONTINUED)

BARRY

They always seemed what? They always seemed really great, is what they always seemed. They picked up where your precious Echo left off, and you're sitting here complaining about no more Echo albums. I can't believe that you don't own that record. That's insane.

He plucks it from the rack, and sticks it in the Customer's hand, who regards it with a bit a of shame.

CUSTOMER

Well what about the new Echo --

BARRY

Do not get ahead of yourself.

DICK

is listening to a female customer, but he doesn't hear her voice.

CUSTOMER - DICK'S POV

The army bag with a red cross on it. The ring-of-ivy tattoo around the wrist. The monkey boots. The eye shadow.

DICK

thinking, calculating...

DICK

The interesting thing about Green Day is that so much of their music is in truth directly influenced by two bands.

FEMALE CUSTOMER

The Clash.

DICK

Correct. The Clash. But also the Stranglers.

FEMALE CUSTOMER

Who?

DICK

I think you would love the Stranglers...

Dick pulls a Stranglers record and puts it on the stereo. Her brow furrows, and then she smiles.

(CONTINUED)

FEMALE CUSTOMER
This sounds great.

Dick smiles humbly. Two people in the store turn and approach.

CUSTOMER
Is this the new Green Day?

BARRY

still talking to his customer, who now has several CD's in his hand. He looks at Barry with a mixture of hate and adoration.

BARRY
That is perverse. Do not tell anyone you don't own fucking *Blonde On Blonde*.

Barry adds more records to the Customer's stack.

A FEW MINUTES LATER - ROB AND DICK

stand behind the counter. Rob holds a CD in his hand, and surveys the roaming customers with a semi-serious air of authority.

ROB
I will now sell four copies of *Sweet Sixteen* by the Royal Trux.

DICK
Do it. Do it.

Rob pops the CD in and it begins to play... He stands there with his arms folded, waiting. After a moment, a Customer approaches.

CUSTOMER
(re: music)
What is this?

ROB
It's the Royal Trux.

CUSTOMER
It's great.

ROB
I know.

ROB'S POV

(CONTINUED)

of the room. Something has caught his eye: a cropped head with a leopard skin pattern surfaces and disappears, like Nessie.

Rob's face gets hot and mad. He jumps out from behind the counter.

ROB (cont'd)
Dick, ring the man up...

He moves like a cat through the crowd. Justin sees him coming and counters around the middle island and heads for the door. Vince appears next to him, fiddling with his belt. He sees Rob now, and he and Justin bolt for the door. Rob doubles back.

ROB (cont'd)
DICK! THE DOOR!

Dick sees Vince and Justin too late. Rob is right behind them and as they get out the door, he reaches... and comes up with the back half of a skateboard.

EXT. RECORD STORE - DAY

Rob emerges behind them, Vince's skateboard in hand. They have enough distance to bolt, but they can't leave that board behind.

ROB
Okay, fuckos. How much is this deck worth to you, and how many CD's did you rip off? Can you do the math?

Justin pulls two CD's out and slides them over to Rob.

ROB (cont'd)
(to Vince)
And what about you, dork?

Vince pulls about six, and puts them down in a neutral spot. Rob picks all of them up and starts looking through them. Dick pokes his head out of the door.

ROB (cont'd)
Dick, call the police, please.

Vince and Justin look at each other.

ROB (cont'd)
(looking through the CD's)
Eno import. Sigue Sigue Sputnik. Break
beats. Serge Gainsbourg. Ryuchi
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

59.

ROB (cont'd)

Sakamoto... What's going on here? Are you guys stealing for other people now?

VINCE

Naw. Those are for us.

ROB

Oh really. You two are slamming to Joni Mitchell now?

JUSTIN

You're, like, so bigoted to look at us and, like, think you know what we listen to.

VINCE

You got the CD's so can I have my board back?

ROB

I think you have more.

VINCE

Well we don't.

ROB

I can't frisk you but the cops can.

Justin reaches down again into his baggy shorts and comes up with a tattered old book, "How To Make A Record." He tosses it over.

ROB (cont'd)

Jesus. That thing's been in the bargain bin for six months! Was it just your criminal nature or what? Hell, I would've given it to you for free.

VINCE

No, we...

JUSTIN

We don't know how it works. Nobody even knows, so we wanted to check it out in that mag.

Rob snorts.

JUSTIN

Like, do you know how to actually make a CD?

Rob can't resist edifying them -- the curse of the underappreciated expert.

(CONTINUED)

ROB

Uh, yes I, like, do... It's simple. You make the tracks -- recording studio -- deliver then to the pressing plant where a master is cut, meanwhile you've got your cover art being printed. The master is then dubbed to submasters, which are the "mothers," as they're called, for each press in the plant. You press the CD's or records and that's it.

VINCE

Records are those big round black things, right?

ROB

Fuck off.

Rob turns to go back in the store.

VINCE

Hey, can I have my board?

Rob drops it and enters the store.

CUT TO:

INT. RECORD STORE - NIGHT - QUICK CUTS:

Barry emerges from the back with three opened bottles of beer... Rob sees the last customer out the door... The three lean against the bins laughing about something...

ROB V.O.

At the end of Saturday, I have a little glow on, maybe because this is after all my line of work, and it's going okay, maybe because I'm proud of us, of the way that, though our talents are small and peculiar, we use them to their best advantage.

EXT. RECORD STORE - NIGHT

Laura stands across the street, watching Rob through the window. She looks lonely. After a beat she begins across the street to the store, reaching the door just as Rob is turning the sign from "open" to "closed." He sees her.

ROB V.O.

But when I'm locking up, Laura shows and I remember that it's not supposed to be a feel-good period of my life.

EXT. RECORD STORE - NIGHT

Rob and Laura.

LAURA
Hi.

ROB
Hi.

LAURA
I thought I could give you a lift back.

ROB
Are you coming home?

LAURA
Yes. Well, I'm coming over to your house
to get some things.

ROB
My house?

Laura turns and begins walking.

LAURA
Jesus...

Rob follows after her.

CUT TO:

INT. LAURA'S CAR - NIGHT

They move down the street, and it's a little tense. Laura pushes a tape into the stereo. Art Garfunkel's "Bright Eyes" begins to play. Rob turns away from her and makes a face, but she knows he's making it.

LAURA
I don't care. You can make all the faces
you want. My car. My car stereo. My
compilation tape.

Rob tries not to speak, but --

ROB
How can you like Art Garfunkel and
Solomon Burke? It's like saying you
support the Israelis and the
Palestinians.

(CONTINUED)

LAURA

It's not like saying that at all, actually, Rob. Art Garfunkel and Solomon Burke make pop records, the Israelis and the Palestinians don't. Art Garfunkel and Solomon Burke are not engaged in a bitter territorial dispute, and the Israelis and the Palestinians are. Art Garfunkel and Solomon Burke --

ROB

-- Alright, alright but --

LAURA

-- and who says I like Solomon Burke, anyway?

He reels on her.

ROB

Solomon Burke! "Got to Get You Off My Mind!" That's our song! Solomon Burke is responsible for our entire relationship!

LAURA

Is that right? Do you have his phone number? I'd like a word with him.

ROB

But don't you remember?

LAURA

I remember the song. I just couldn't remember who sang it.

Rob shakes his head in disbelief.

ROB

Can you really not see the difference between "Bright Eyes" and "Got to Get You Off My Mind?"

LAURA

Yes. One's about rabbits and the other has a brass band in it.

ROB

(outraged)

A brass band! A brass band! It's a horn section.

(CONTINUED)

LAURA

Whatever. I can see why you prefer Solomon to Art. I understand, really. I'd go for Solomon every time. He's authentic, and black, and legendary, and all that. But I like "Bright Eyes." I think it's got a nice melody and beyond that I don't care. There are so many other things to worry about. They're only pop records, and if one is better than the other, well, who cares, besides you and Barry and Dick? I mean really, who gives a flying fuck?

Silence.

ROB

You used to care more about things like Solomon Burke than you do now. When I first met you, and I made you that tape, you were really enthused. You said -- and I quote -- "It was so good it made you ashamed of your record collection."

LAURA

(smiles)

Shameless, wasn't I?

ROB

What does that mean?

LAURA

Well, I liked you. You were a DJ, and I thought you were hot, and I didn't have a boyfriend, and I wanted one.

ROB

So you weren't interested in music at all?

LAURA

Yeah, sure. More so then than I am now. That's life though, isn't it?

The car slows, and Laura parks.

ROB

But Laura... that's me. That's all there is of me. There isn't anything else. If you've lost interest in that, you've lost interest in everything.

(CONTINUED)

LAURA

You really believe that?

Laura turns the engine off and unbuckles her seat belt.

ROB

Yes. Look at me. Look at our -- the apartment. What else do I have, other than records and CD's?

LAURA

And do you like it that way?

ROB

Not really.

She half smiles.

LAURA

Let's go in.

She gets out of the car. Rob takes a second, then follows.

INT. ROB'S BUILDING'S LOBBY - NIGHT

Rob and Laura come in from outside and head for the stairs. Laura pauses at the mail table and goes through the envelopes. Rob watches as she reaches Ian's envelope. She hesitates, and keeps going.

ROB

You can take it with you if you want.

She flinches imperceptibly, and he turns up the stairs. Laura collects herself for a second...

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

The lock turns and Rob enters, holding the door for Laura who slips by, her coat in her hands. She surveys the room as she walks across it, finds a spot and turns to Rob. He stands facing her for a moment, then crosses to her, takes her coat and tosses it on a chair. She turns from the proximity and walks toward the wall of records.

LAURA

Have you done them yet?

ROB

What?

He knows, of course.

(CONTINUED)

LAURA
Your records. The Great Reorganization.

ROB
Yeah. The other night.

She smiles sideways.

ROB (cont'd)
What?

LAURA
Nothing. Just, you know, didn't take you long.

ROB
Don't you think there are more important things to talk about than my record collection?

LAURA
You bet. I've been saying that for years.

Rob has no comeback, and so goes for the moral high ground.

ROB
Where have you been staying for the last week?

LAURA
I think you know that.

ROB
Had to work it out for myself, though, didn't I?

Laura looks suddenly tired and sad, and looks away.

LAURA
I'm sorry. I made some bad decisions. I haven't been very fair to you. That's why I came here to the store this evening. I feel terrible, Rob. This is really hard, you know.

ROB
Good.
(beat)
Is it my job?

LAURA
What? Gimme a fucking break. Is that what you think? That you're not big enough a
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

LAURA (cont'd)
deal for me? Jesus, gimme a little credit, Rob.

ROB
I don't know. It's one of the things I thought of.

LAURA
What were the others?

ROB
Just the obvious stuff.

LAURA
What's the obvious stuff?

ROB
I don't know.

LAURA
I guess it's not that obvious, then.

ROB
No.

Rob fiddles with something.

ROB (cont'd)
So is it working out with Ian?

LAURA
Rob. Don't be childish.

ROB
Why is that childish? You're living with the guy! I'm just asking how it's going.

LAURA
I am not living with him. I've just been staying with him for a few days until I work out what I'm doing. Look, this has nothing to do with anyone else. You know that, don't you? I left because we weren't exactly getting along, and we weren't talking about it, and I'm getting to a point where I want to get my shit together and I can't really see that ever happening with you, and yeah, yeah, I sort of get interested in someone else, and that went further than it should have, so it seemed like a good time to go. But I have no idea what will happen with Ian in the long run. Probably nothing.

(CONTINUED)

ROB

Good, 'cause the guy looks like Leo
Sayer --

LAURA

-- Maybe you'll grow up and we'll get it
together, you and me. Maybe I'll never
see either of you again. I don't know.
All I know is that it's not a good time
to be living here.

ROB

So you haven't definitely decide to dump
me? There's still a chance we'll get back
together?

LAURA

I don't know.

ROB

Well, if you don't know, there's a
chance, right? It's like, if someone was
in the hospital, and he was seriously
ill, and the doctor said, I don't know if
he's got a chance of survival or not,
then that doesn't mean the patient's
definitely going to die, does it? It
means he might live. Even if it's only a
remote possibility.

LAURA

I suppose so.

ROB

So we have a chance of getting back
together again.

LAURA

Oh, Rob, shut up.

ROB

Hey, I just want to know where I stand.
What chance --

LAURA

-- I don't fucking know what chance you
fucking have!

ROB

Well if you could tell me roughly it
would help.

(CONTINUED)

LAURA

Okay, okay, we have a nine percent chance of getting back together. Does that clarify the situation?

ROB

Yeah. Great.

LAURA

Nothing's great. I'm confused and I haven't been happy for ages and I'm seeing someone else and it's a fucking mess. No, Rob, not great. Everything's shit.

ROB

But it won't be. We'll figure this thing out.

LAURA

(shaking her head)

I'm too tired for this now. I know I'm asking a lot, but will you take off for a while so I can get my stuff packed up? I need to be able to think while I do it and I can't think while you're here.

ROB

No problem. If I can ask one question.

LAURA

Fine. One.

ROB

It sounds stupid.

LAURA

Nevermind.

ROB

You won't like it.

LAURA

Just ask it!

ROB

Is it better?

LAURA

Is what better? Better than what?

(CONTINUED)

ROB

Well. Sex, I guess. Is sex with him better?

LAURA

Jesus Christ, Rob. Is that really what's bothering you?

ROB

Of course it is.

LAURA

You really think it would make a difference either way?

ROB

I don't know.

LAURA

Well the answer is that I don't know either. We haven't done it yet.

ROB

Never?

LAURA

No. I haven't felt like it.

ROB

But not even before, when he was living upstairs?

LAURA

No. I was living with you, remember? We've slept together but we haven't made love. Not yet. But I'll tell you one thing. The sleeping together is better.

ROB

(trying not to smile)

The sleeping together is better but not the sex because you haven't done it with him yet.

LAURA

Will you please just go?

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - NIGHT

Rob shuts the door behind him and does a crazy Charleston/Cabbage-Patch/Boxstep/Touchdown dance of pure elation, then bounces down the stairs.

CUT TO:

WXT. STREET - NIGHT

Rob bounces along, a smile wider than we have seen yet. Maybe even jumping to touch an awning. HAPPY MUSIC, BIG BAND stuff as we hear:

ROB V.O.

I feel good. I feel great. I feel like a new man. I feel so much better, in fact, that I go straight out and sleep with Marie.

INT. WEEDS BAR - NIGHT

Rob enters, still grinning a bit like a proud new father. He scans the room and sees the table where Barry, Dick, Marie and T-Bone sit. He goes to them and sits in the empty seat, next to Marie. The boys nod his way, but go back to a story T-Bone is telling. Marie turns to him.

MARIE

Everything go alright?

Rob glances at Barry, who averts his gaze.

ROB

She just wanted to pick up some stuff. No big thing.

MARIE

God, I hate that time. That pick up stuff time. I just went through that before I came here. You know that song "Patsy Cline Times Two" I play? That's about me and my ex dividing up our record collections.

ROB

It's a great song.

MARIE

Thank you.

Rob glances at T-Bone, his mind calculating the new info.

(CONTINUED)

ROB

And you wrote it just before you moved here?

MARIE

I wrote it on the way here. The words, anyway. I'd had the tune for a while, but I didn't know what to do with it until I thought of the title.

ROB

Is that why you came to Chicago in the first place? Because of, you know, dividing up your record collection and stuff?

MARIE

Yup.

Marie slides closer, turning her back on the others. The loop is closed.

ROB

You share a place with T-Bone?

MARIE

No way! I'd cramp his style. And I wouldn't want to listen to all that stuff happening on the other side of the bedroom wall. I'm way too unattached for that.

ROB

I understand completely.

SERIES OF CUTS - ELAPSED TIME

Rob and Marie lean in to each other, everyone else out of focus.

ROB V.O.

Awhile back, Dick and Barry and I agreed that what really matters is what you like, not what you are like. Books, records, films -- these things matter. Call me shallow but it's the damn truth, and by this measure I was having one of the best dates of my life. References, titles, lyrics, flew and met each other in mid-air embraces. The evening goes with breathtaking precision.

INT. MARIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Rob and Marie are kissing standing up.

MARIE
Are you okay?

ROB
(nodding)
Yes. You?

MARIE
For now. But I wouldn't be if I thought
this was the end of the evening.

ROB
I'm sure it isn't.

MARIE
Good. In that case, I'll fix us something
else to drink. You sticking to the
whiskey or you want coffee?

ROB
Whiskey.

Marie goes into the kitchen, and they keep talking around the corner.

MARIE

Tops off two whiskeys and starts into the other room where
she sees Rob, standing and holding his jacket.

ROB (cont'd)
I'd better go. I gotta get up early. Go
over to my parents'.

MARIE
When I said before that I hoped it wasn't
the end of the evening, I was, you
know... talking about breakfast and
stuff.

She plants the whiskeys firmly on the coffee table.

MARIE (cont'd)
I'd like it if you could stay the night.

ROB
(as if it is dawning on him)
Oh, right. Alright.

(CONTINUED)

MARIE

Jesus, so much for delicacy. I pegged you for a master of understatement, beating around the bush and all that jazz.

ROB

I use it but I don't understand it when other people use it.

MARIE

So you'll stay?

ROB

Yeah.

MARIE

Good.

Marie picks up the drinks again and exits to the bedroom. Rob just stands there for a second... then follows.

INT. MARIE'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Rob stares at the ceiling as Marie sleeps on next to him.

ROB V.O.

But in the morning we were just two people, slightly hung-over, who were not in love, sharing the same space.

EXT. MARIE'S APARTMENT - MORNING

The two of them come out of the building and into the street.

ROB

Which way are you going?

MARIE

(points left)

That way. You?

ROB

(points right)

That way.

MARIE

And so it is. I'll talk to you later.

ROB

I'll call you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

74.

MARIE
(smiles)
Right.

EXT. CLARK STREET - DAY

Rob moves down the street, still in last night's rumpled clothes. His hands are stuffed in his jacket pockets and his eyes show the strain of having a hangover and no sunglasses.

ROB V.O.
I told Marie I was going to my parents
which was a lie but somehow I decided to
actually go to my parents.

He slows at a corner, looks down the cross street, and makes a left, walking away from us.

EXT. ROB'S PARENT'S HOUSE - DAY

A low-slung Rogers Park brick bungalow, with a cement porch that Rob stands on. He peers in the door's window, looking for signs of life. Nothing.

ROB V.O.
I wish I wanted to see them more, but I
don't, and when I've got nothing else to
feel bad about, I feel bad about that.

He trods down the steps to the sidewalk and begins his way up the street when a shrill voice peals from across the street --

ROB'S MOM

ROB!

He turns to see MOM hanging out a window of a house across the street, waving and smiling. She's about sixty-five and her eyes are a little too wide.

ROB
Hi mom.

ROB'S MOM (cont'd)
Robert! Come in!

INT. NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE - ROB'S POV

A collection of folks about the same demographic as his parents: lower middle class and about to retire. They all smile his way and return to conversations. Everybody's drunk.

ROB'S DAD

(CONTINUED)

wears a defeated sweater from the sixties and space-age running shoes from the future. He seems to have another MAN cornered, jabbing his points home with an invasive index finger. He spots Rob, mimes shock, and goes back to his "conversation."

ROB'S MOM

is at a table full of almost-gone wines, pouring another. She smiles across the room at Rob, not appearing smashed at first but building toward it.

ROB'S MOM

Rob! Do you want a chardonnay?!
(calling across the room,
pointing at Rob)

SULIE. SULIE. It's ROB. Rob, this is the woman I've been telling you about. The one whose son has a guitar.

A cut-rate Martha Stewart weaves her way through the drinkers.

SULIE

I'm Sulie. Your host. Hostess.

Sulie laughs insanely, for no discernible reason.

SULIE (cont'd)

You're the one who works in the music industry, aren't you?

Rob looks at Mom and she looks away.

ROB

Not really, no. I own a record store.

SULIE

Oh well, same thing more or less.

She laughs again.

ROB

I guess so. And the woman at Blockbuster works in the movies.

Mom steps in.

ROB'S MOM

Here's my keys Rob. Why don't you go home and we'll be right over.

Rob's dad appears.

(CONTINUED)

ROB'S DAD

Look at the time. We gotta get to the movie.

ROB

You hate going to the movies, Dad.

ROB'S DAD

Well it's a good thing you came around or I might have forgot that and done something horrible like enjoyed myself for once.

ROB

What are you seeing?

ROB'S MOM

Winter In Spring. It's a follow-up to *Jameson's Afternoon*.

Rob rolls his eyes.

ROB'S DAD

Right. Let's get a move on. We got a half hour. You're coming with us. My treat.

He takes Rob's Mom's arm and starts walking out. Rob looks around one last time and follows behind them, much like, well, a child.

ROB

It's not the money, Dad. It's Merchant-fucking-Ivory --

ROB'S MOM

-- Rob --!

ROB'S DAD

Goddammit! C'mon. It'll do you good. Buck you up. Take your mind off things. Like Laura leaving you.

ROB

I gotta go to the store.

INT. RECORD STORE - DAY

Empty. Dick prices records out on the floor. Rob leans against the register. Barry sits on a stool next to him. They're top-fiving it. Rob's heart isn't in it.

(CONTINUED)

ROB

Okay. Top five side one track ones.
Number one... "Janie Jones," the Clash,
from *The Clash*.

BARRY

Ehh.

ROB

"Thunder Road," Bruce Springsteen, from
Born to Run. "Smells Like Teen Spirit,"
Nirvana, *Nevermind*.

BARRY

Oh no, Rob, that's not obvious enough.
Not at all. Dick, did you hear that?

ROB

Shut up. "Let's Get It On," Marvin Gaye,
from *Let's Get It On*. "Airbag,"
Radiohead, from *OK Computer*.

BARRY

(sarcastic)

Ooh! A kind of recent record! Rob's sly
declaration of new classic status slipped
into a list of old classics! Nice! "Let's
Get It On?" Couldn't you make it more
obvious than that?

DICK

Rob. Phone.
(whispers)
It's Laura.

Rob springs to his feet, takes the phone and walks to the end
of the cord. Deep breath.

ROB

Hi.

LAURA - INTERCUT

LAURA

Hi. I've been looking for an envelope of
my receipts from last month and I'm
thinking I didn't take them with me. Have
you seen them around?

ROB

I'll look for 'em. How you doing?

(CONTINUED)

LAURA

I'm sorry to call, but I need that stuff...

ROB

Fine, I'm sure it's in the file at home. I'll call you when I find it, and then we'll talk.

LAURA

We'll talk some other time.

ROB

Great... That's great.

Rob comes back to the counter and hangs up the phone.

BARRY

Rob! What about the Beatles? What about the fucking Rolling Stones? What about fucking... fucking... Beethoven? Track one side one of the Fifth Symphony? You shouldn't be allowed to run a record shop. You shouldn't be allowed to --

SFX: BARRY'S VOICE FADES OUT. Rob's mouth slacks and he stares off.

ROB V.O.

There's something different about the sound of her voice... And what did she mean last night, she hasn't slept with him yet. Yet. What does "yet" mean, anyway? "I haven't seen... Evil Dead II yet." What does that mean? It means you're going to go, doesn't it?

SFX: BACK TO THE ROOM.

BARRY

-- You're like a little squirrel of music, storing away dead little nuts of old garbage music, musical lint, old shit, shit, shit --

ROB

-- Barry, if I were to say to you that I haven't seen Evil Dead II yet, what would that mean?

Barry just looks at Rob. He pulls out a Game Boy and begins playing.

(CONTINUED)

ROB (cont'd)

Just... come on, what would it mean to you? That sentence? "I haven't seen *Evil Dead II* yet?"

BARRY

To me, it would mean that you're a liar. You saw it twice. Once with Laura -- oops -- once with me and Dick. We had that conversation about the possibilities of the guy making ammo off-screen in the Fourteenth Century.

ROB

Yeah, yeah, I know. But say I hadn't seen it and I said to you, "I haven't seen *Evil Dead II*" yet," what would you think?

Barry shuts off the Game Boy.

BARRY

I'd think you were a cinematic idiot. And I'd feel sorry for you.

ROB

No, but would you think, from that one sentence. That I was going to see it?

BARRY

I'm sorry, Rob, but I'm struggling here. I don't understand any part of this conversation. You're asking me what I would think if you told me that you hadn't seen a film that you've seen. What am I supposed to say?

ROB

Just listen to me. If I said to you --

BARRY

"-- I haven't seen *Evil Dead II* yet," yeah, yeah, I hear you. --

ROB

"Would you... would you get the impression that I wanted to see it?"

BARRY

Well... you couldn't have been desperate to see it, otherwise you'd have already gone.

Rob brightens.

(CONTINUED)

ROB

Exactly. If you want to see a movie you go the first night.

Barry finally considers.

BARRY

But the word "yet..." Yeah, you know what, I'd get the impression that you wanted to see it. Otherwise you'd say you didn't really want to.

ROB

But in your opinion, would I definitely go?

BARRY

How the fuck am I supposed to know that? You might get run over by a bus, go blind, or something. You might be broke. You might just get sick of people telling you you've really gotta go see the movie.

Rob darkens.

ROB

Why would they care?

BARRY

Because it's a brilliant film. It's funny, violent, and the soundtrack kicks fucking ass.

They look at each other for a strange moment.

BARRY (cont'd)

I never thought I would say this, but can I go work now?

ROB

Let's pack it up. We haven't had a customer in four hours.

Barry stands.

BARRY

Fine by me. I still want pay to 7 O'clock.

ROB

Ha.

(CONTINUED)

DICK
I can't go to the club tonight, guys.

BARRY
Why?

Dick smiles sheepishly.

BARRY
Who are you going to see?

DICK
Nobody.

Barry's eyes widen.

BARRY
Rob, looky looky. Dick! Are you getting
some?!

Silence.

BARRY (cont'd)
Un-fucking-believable. Dick's out on a
hot date, Rob's boning Marie LaSalle, and
the best-looking and most intelligent of
all of us isn't getting anything at all.

ROB
How do you know about that?

BARRY
Oh come on, Rob. What am I, an idiot? I'm
more bothered by Dick's thing. How did
this happen, Dick? What rational
explanation can there possibly be? What's
her name?

Barry is going a little hard. Dick shrinks back.

DICK
Anna.

BARRY
Anna who? Anna Green Gables? Anna Conda?

DICK
Anna Moss.

BARRY
Anna Moss. Mossy. The Mossy Thing. Is she
all green and furry?

(CONTINUED)

ROB
Shut the fuck up, Barry.

BARRY
Yeah, you would say that, wouldn't you?
You two have to stick together now.
Boners United. United in getting some.

Barry picks up his bag and heads for the door.

ROB
Don't be sad, Barry. You'll find true
love someday.

BARRY
Suck my ass.

ROB
Terrific.

Rob looks to Dick, who looks guilty.

ROB
Don't worry about it, Dick. Barry's an
asshole.

DICK
Yeah... Well... I'll see you tomorrow,
Rob.

Dick exits. Rob watches the door close behind him, and looks
out over the empty store.

ROB V.O.
Why does it bother Barry that much that
Dick is seeing someone?

He goes to the light switches and begins shutting them off,
one by one...

ROB V.O.
He's worried about how his life is
turning out, and he's lonely, and lonely
people are the bitterest of them all.

...until all the lights are out. Rob's silhouette slips out
the door.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

A downpour is on. Rob has himself wedged into a phone booth,
the little kind.

(CONTINUED)

ROB

(into phone)

Hi. It's me... I'm right outside... I know... I know... I figured I could just walk you to the train and you could go... home. Or whatever it is... No! Of course not -- okay. I'll be right here.

INT. LAURA'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Laura hangs up the phone and begins packing a few things into her briefcase. Liz sits on the sofa with her feet up.

LIZ

Why does he keep bothering you?

LAURA

Because I'm with someone else first.

LIZ

He even said he was sniffing around for something else.

LAURA

He was. But I pulled the trigger first and he got shot. That's it. If I went back it would be at best great for two weeks and then back to hell, and at worst back to hell from day one.

LIZ

And then he'd pull the trigger and you'd get shot.

LAURA

Precisely. Maybe it's worth going back for two weeks and let him do the breaking up.

Laura pulls her coat off of a hook and puts it on.

LIZ

That's sad.

LAURA

He makes me feel like the enemy for wanting him to have a better life.

LIZ

Mmm. Well. How's Ian?

LAURA

I'm giving him the chance to grow on me.

(CONTINUED)

LIZ

He looks like he could grow on something.

LIZ

I'll be in the library researching right to privacy for you.

Laura heads out the door.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING -

Rob stands under the overhang, watching Laura walk the long hallway from the elevators to the door.

ROB V.O.

Laura looks different. Less stressed-out, more in control. Something has happened, maybe something real, or maybe something in her head. Whatever it is, you can see that she thinks she's started out on some new stage in her life. She hasn't. I'm not going to let her.

She emerges from doors, says something to him and they start walking, sharing her umbrella.

INT. OLDE TOWNE ALE HOUSE - NIGHT

Rob and Laura have just sat down in a booth.

LAURA

So, how are you?

ROB

Have you slept with him yet?

LAURA

Is that why you wanted to see me?

ROB

I guess.

LAURA

Oh, Rob. What do you want me to say?

ROB

I want you to say that you haven't, and I want it to be the truth.

She looks past him.

LAURA

I can't do that.

(CONTINUED)

She starts to say something else but Rob is up and out.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Rob pushes through the rush hour raincoats, seeming to be the only one going his way.

INT. ROB'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

He comes through the door soaking, and slumps into his chair. He picks up the phone and puts it back down. It immediately rings. He picks it up but says nothing.

LAURA O.S.

You must have known it would happen. You couldn't have been entirely unprepared. Like you said, I've been living with the guy. We were bound to get around to it sometime.

She laughs a bit nervously.

LAURA O.S. (cont'd)

And anyway, I keep trying to tell you, that's not really the point, is it? The point is we got ourselves into an awful mess, Rob... Are you there? What are you thinking?

ROB

(barely a whisper)

Nothing.

LAURA O.S.

We can meet for another drink if you want. So I can explain it better. I owe you that much.

ROB

How much would be too much?

LAURA O.S.

What?

ROB

Nothing. Look, I gotta go. I work too, you know.

LAURA O.S.

Will you call me?

ROB

I don't have your number.

(CONTINUED)

LAURA O.S.

Call me at work. We can arrange to meet properly.

ROB

Okay.

LAURA O.S.

Promise?

ROB

Yeah.

LAURA O.S.

Because I don't want this to be the last conversation we have. I know what you're like.

ROB

You do, huh.

He hangs up and stares at the wall for awhile. He stands and walks out of frame. We hear the fridge open, then close, then he enters frame again, sitting back down with a beer in hand. He picks up the phone and dials.

ROB (cont'd)

Yes, a residence, a Mr. Ian Raymond, North Side... thank you.

He hits flash and dials... a muffled male "hello?" is heard and Rob hangs up. He does it again. And again. And again. Until --

INT. IAN'S APARTMENT -

Still an unpacked box or two, but Ian is set up: a framed "Woodstock - The Movie" poster, stacks of new fiction, a breadmaker -- you get the idea. Ian is shorter than Laura, scruffier than Rob, and looks not unlike Leo Sayer/Steve Guttenberg. He stares at Laura with amused exasperation. She picks up the phone --

LAURA

Hello.

ROB O.S.

It's me.

LAURA

I figured it was.

(CONTINUED)

ROB O.S.

Maybe you're in love with two people at the same time. It happens. But the thing is, you're running from a point that everyone hits in any relationship, and you're just going to hit it again with Ian but it's going to be with a World Music bunny-rabbit-looking earth-shoe-wearing "Doctor-Who"-watching twit who doesn't really understand you, not the way that I do and will more in the future, and you'll have just wasted more time and arrive in the exact same place that you're in now, only later.

LAURA

I'm not -- hold on...

She walks into another room, shutting the door behind her. On a bookshelf is a picture of a younger Ian in a tunic, emoting on some college stage. She turns it face down.

LAURA

I'm not in love with Ian.

ROB O.S.

Are you saying you're still in love with me?

LAURA

Jesus. I do not know. I'll talk to you later.

ROB O.S.

Think about what I said. I mean, if you want to experiment, or whatever --

LAURA

(indignant)

I'm not experimenting. Why don't you go experiment.

ROB O.S.

I don't want to. Don't need to. I love you.

LAURA

You don't ever think about other people?

ROB O.S.

No... not really... I mean, I think about it... but no. I don't really think about it.

(CONTINUED)

IAN O.S.
(through the door)
Laura? Are you okay?

LAURA
(covering the mouthpiece, to
Ian)
I am fine...
(to Rob)
I gotta go. Goodbye.

She clicks the phone off. The door cracks and Ian sticks his head in.

IAN
Are you sure you're okay?

She moves past him back into the apartment.

LAURA
Yeah, I'm fine. I'm off the phone.

IAN
You look upset.

LAURA
I'm upset, but I'm fine.

IAN
Maybe I should talk to him.

LAURA
Mmmm, no. Not a good idea.

IAN
Conflict resolution is my job, Laura.

LAURA
Nothing to resolve, Ian. Let's get a drink.

She grabs her coat and opens the door. The phone begins to ring.

LAURA (cont'd)
(waving toward the door)
C'mon, c'mon.

INT. RECORD STORE - DAY

Barry is going on to Dick, who's too scared not listen. Rob hangs back.

(CONTINUED)

BARRY

... and that big, FAT, pig, Sally Struthers. Whining in the middle of all of these Somalian stick figures prostrating themselves around her for a bag of Similac. They should chop her up into jerky and drop her meat from choppers.

From Dick's look, he can tell that someone's behind him. It's Ian. Rob reacts, gunfighter eyes.

ROB

Can I help you?

IAN

I thought maybe we should talk. Sort a few things out?

He looks around, disorientation on the way to anger. Dick and Barry's ears perk up.

ROB

What needs sorting out?

IAN

Come on, Rob. My relationship with Laura has obviously disturbed you a great deal.

ROB

Funnily enough I haven't been too thrilled about it.

IAN

We are not talking jokey understatement here, Rob. We're talking harassment. Ten phone calls a night, hanging around outside my house...

Rob looks panicky-guilty.

ROB

Yeah, well, I've stopped all that now.

IAN O.S.

We've noticed and we're glad. But, you know... how are we going to make peace here? We want to make things easier for you. What can we do? Obviously I know how special Laura is, and I know things can't be good for you at the moment. I'd hate it if I lost her. But I'd like to think that if she decided she didn't want to

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

IAN O.S. (cont'd)
see me anymore, I'd respect that
decision. Do you see what I'm saying?

ROB
Yeah.

IAN O.S.
Good. So shall we leave it at that then?

ROB
I dunno.

IAN
Think about it, Rob.

Ian walks out.

CUT TO FANTASY #1:

Rob looking sure of himself, righteous.

IAN (cont'd)
Good. So shall we leave it at that then?

ROB
I've already left it, you pathetic
rebound fuck! Now get the hell out of my
shop.

Ian leaves, rattled.

CUT TO FANTASY #2

Same thing.

IAN
Good. So shall we leave it at that then?

ROB
We won't leave it, Ian. Not ever.

Robs springs toward Ian, but Barry blocks his way. Dick helps
hold Rob back.

DICK
Don't do it, Rob.

BARRY
He's not worth it!

ROB
Leave town. Leave the country, you little
bitch, because you're gonna look back on
walks by the house and ten phone calls a
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ROB (cont'd)
night as a golden age. So get ready,
punk.

Ian trips backward and scurries out the door.

CUT TO FANTASY #3

Rob, Dick, and Barry beating the living shit out of Ian Rodney King style. Ian lies on the floor trying to cover himself. Dick already out of breath, breaks from the pack and jerks an air conditioner from the wall, and hefts it over his head, preparing for the death blow.

CUT BACK TO REALITY

ROB
Yeah.

IAN O.S.
Good. So shall we leave it at that then?

ROB
I dunno.

IAN
Think about it, Rob.

Ian walks out. Rob looks spent.

INT. ROB'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Rob opens the door to find Laura filling two duffel bags in the living room.

LAURA
I called and called but you were out. I thought I'd be gone before you got back.

ROB
Is that the last of it?

LAURA
Yep. I might have missed some stuff. I'm so used to some things being here that don't even notice them.

ROB O.S.
Those look heavy. Where's Ian?

LAURA
He's at home. Listen, I can't believe he went to the store. I'm mortified, actually. I'm really sorry.

(CONTINUED)

ROB O.S.
Forget it.

LAURA
He had no right to do that, and I told him so.

ROB
It was kind of funny.

They smile.

LAURA
I'm sure.

ROB
You still together?

Laura mock-grimaces.

ROB (cont'd)
Going all right?

LAURA
I don't really want to talk about it, to be honest.

ROB
That bad, eh?

LAURA
You know what I mean.

Rob flops onto the couch and surveys the room.

ROB
It's a dump, isn't it?

Laura sits down, on the other side of the couch.

LAURA
Fix it up, Rob. It'll make you feel better.

ROB
I'll bet you can't remember what you were doing here, can you?

LAURA
Yes I can. I was here because I wanted to be with you.

(CONTINUED)

ROB

No, I meant, you know... how much are you making now? Sixty? Seventy? And you were living in this shitty place.

LAURA

You know I didn't mind. And it's not as if Ray's place is any better.

ROB

I'm sorry, but can we get this straight? What is his fucking name, Ian or Ray? What do you call him?

LAURA

Ray. I hate Ian.

ROB

I hate him too. So I just call him "Mavis." Or "Sissyboy." Or "Mavis the Sissyboy."

Laura starts laughing, laying on the couch on her back, very close to Rob. Rob leans in, sort of looking down into her eyes.

ROB

This is where you're supposed to say that you haven't laughed this much in ages, and then you see the error of your ways.

LAURA

You make me laugh much more than Ray does, if that's what you're getting at. But I already knew you could make me laugh. It's everything else I don't know about.

ROB

You know I'm a good person.

LAURA

Mmm hmm.

ROB

You know that I can cook my ass off when I feel like it.

LAURA

Oh ho, so very infrequently.

He moves a little closer.

(CONTINUED)

ROB

You know my favorite beverage is your bathwater.

LAURA

Oh my God. Listen to you. When did you learn to channel Bobby White.

ROB

Barry White.

LAURA

Did you know who I meant or not?

ROB

Yes. Do you mind if I help you get it right?

LAURA

Time to go.

She gets off the couch and goes to her bags.

ROB

Why? what's wrong?

LAURA

-- Barry White. Bobby White. Who gives a shit? You. That's it. You just reminded me why I left. Jeez. Thank God you made a fucking shitty comment about a meaningless pop culture factoid. I almost kissed you.

ROB

I'm sorry. You're right. You're right.

She hefts the bags and heads for the door.

LAURA

And I'm sorry to go on about it. But, I don't know, there's a lesson here somewhere, and I want to make sure you get it.

ROB

I got it. I got it. So just come back here and let's... talk.

She opens the door --

LAURA

Nah. I'll see you later.

(CONTINUED)

-- and she's gone.

ROB

Fuck.

EXT. STREET - MORNING

Rob walks toward the record store, and looks into a Starbuck's window he passes. He stops for a second, seeing Ian at the counter, chatting merrily with the espresso jockey. Rob keeps walking.

INT. RECORD STORE - DAY

Rob enters the already open store to find Barry putting up a poster. It reads:

BARRYTOWN

appearing Saturday night

Bucktown Pub

Barry turns to him.

BARRY

Hey.

ROB

What the fuck is that?

BARRY

My band.

ROB

What band?

BARRY

The band that found me and asked me to join, Rob.

ROB

You are not in a band, Barry. You are not a musician. And no posters.

BARRY

Thanks for your support, Rob. Really appreciate it.

ROB

Barrytown. Barrytown? Is there no end to your arrogance?

(CONTINUED)

BARRY

I didn't make up the name. It's the Steely Dan song. And it was in The Commitments.

ROB

Yeah, but Barry, you can't be called Barry and sing in a group called Barrytown.

BARRY

They were fucking called that before I was in it, okay? It wasn't my idea.

ROB

That's why you got the gig, isn't it?

Barry says nothing.

ROB (cont'd)

Isn't it?

BARRY

That was one of the reasons they asked me to join originally, yes. But --

ROB

Great! That's fucking great! They only asked you to sing because of your name! You can stick it above the browser racks over there.

BARRY

How many tickets can I put you down for?

ROB

None. Christ!

BARRY

You're not even coming?

ROB

Of course I'm not coming. Do I look like I'd want to listen to some terrible experimental racket played in some hideous cave? Where is it?

(looks at the poster)

The fucking Bucktown Pub? Ha!

BARRY

So much for friends, then. You're a bitter bastard, Rob, you know that?

(CONTINUED)

ROB

Bitter? Because I'm not in Barrytown? You should be shot like a lame horse, you jerk.

(re: the poster)

Just keep that out of my window.

Rob heads into

THE BACK ROOM

where he tosses his coat down and picks up the phone and dials...

LAURA O.S.

(muffled, almost a whisper)

Hello.

ROB

Hey, how ya doin'?

No answer.

ROB (cont'd)

Guess who I just saw, right by my store? Ian. In Starbuck's. Neat, huh?

LAURA O.S.

I can't talk right now.

ROB

God, that's a cold and a half. Maybe you should bet back in bed.

No response.

ROB (cont'd)

Are you alright?

LAURA O.S.

Pigsty.

ROB

Don't worry about it. Just get into bed. Worry about that when you're better.

LAURA O.S.

Pig died.

ROB

Who the fuck's Pig?

(CONTINUED)

LAURA O.S.

(louder)

My dad died. My dad, my dad.

She hangs up.

FRONT ROOM

Rob comes out of the back, headed quickly for the front door.

BARRY

What's up?

ROB

Laura. Her dad died.

BARRY

Ooh. Bad one.

Rob pushes out the door.

INT. IAN'S APARTMENT -

Laura opens the door to find Rob.

ROB

I'm sorry.

She turns away from him, crying, and walks back into the living room. Rob follows her into the apartment, closing the door behind him. His eyes take in the room: a nice couch, a minisystem with the expected few CDs. Laura curls up on the couch.

ROB (cont'd)

When are you going home?

LAURA

In a minute. When I get it together.

ROB

Can I do anything?

LAURA

No. No.-- Mom wants you to come to the funeral.

ROB

Me?

LAURA

My dad liked you. And Mom never told him we'd split, because he wasn't up to it

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

LAURA (cont'd)
and... oh, I don't know. I don't really understand it. I think she thinks he'll be able to see what's going on. It's like...

(small giggle)
He's been through so much, what with dying and everything, that she doesn't want to upset him any more than she has to.

ROB
Do you want me to be there?

LAURA
I don't care. As long as you don't expect me to hold your hand.

Rob is silent.

LAURA (cont'd)
Look, are you coming or not?

ROB
Yes, of course.

LAURA
Liz'll give you a lift. She knows where to go and everything.

Rob sits on the couch next to her.

LAURA (cont'd)
I don't have time to talk, Rob. I've got too much to do.

He stands again.

ROB
Sure. Do you want me to stay with you?

She shakes her head. He walks to the door, opens it, and turns to her again.

ROB (cont'd)
Call me if you need me.

LAURA
I will. Thanks. Bye.

He leaves.

INT. LIZ'S CAR - DAY

THUNDERCLAPS and RAIN. Rob is in a somber suit, looking through the windshield wipers as Liz drives.

ROB

So the minister says nice things, and then, what, we all troop outside and they bury him?

LIZ

It's a crematorium.

ROB

You're kidding. A crematorium? Jesus.

LIZ

What difference does it make?

ROB

Is Ray going?

LIZ

No. They don't know him. And Ken liked you.

ROB

Nothing more than that?

LIZ

Ken didn't die for your benefit, you know. It's like everybody's a supporting actor in the film of your life story.

ROB

Isn't that how it is for everybody?

INT. CREMATORIUM CHAPEL LOBBY - DAY

A three-chapel multiplex. Mourners arrive through the front door and proceed to a sign, telling them what chapel for what cremation. Liz and Rob look at the sign: Chapel 1: Mr. E. Baker. Chapel 2: Mr. K. Lydon. Chapel 3 is unscheduled.

ROB

Good news in chapel three, at least.

Liz elbows him.

LIZ

C'mon. Chapel two.

INT. CHAPEL TWO

Liz and Rob sit in the back of the dark, smallish nondenominational room. At the front is a coffin, resting on a stand. Laura, her younger sister JO, and her mother sit in the front row, listening to the MINISTER.

MINISTER

...Now and forever, Amen.

He nods "offstage," and a muffled mechanical noise is heard. The coffin begins to lower through a trap door beneath it. A low, baleful human HOWL is heard, starting quietly but gaining in volume.

ROB V.O.

I hear something in Laura's voice, but I know that it is, and at that moment I want to go to her and offer to become a different person, to remove all trace of what is me, as long as she will let me look after her and try to make her feel better...

INT. CHAPEL PARLOR

Rob stays back, watching mourners approach Laura and her mother, hugging them. After awhile, Laura sees Rob through the throng, hanging back. She breaks through and to him, holding him close for a long time...

INT. LAURA'S PARENTS' HOUSE - AFTERNOON

A cozy old Victorian house, full of things -- furniture, paintings, ornaments, plants -- which don't go together but which have obviously been chosen with care and taste. Rob and Liz stand, drinking wine. Jo approaches them.

LIZ

(to Jo)

How are you?

JO

I'm all right, I suppose. And Mom's not too bad. But Laura... I dunno.

LIZ

She's had a pretty rough few weeks already, without this. It's hard when you're putting all of your efforts into one part of your life and it doesn't work out.

(CONTINUED)

She glances at Rob, embarrassed.

ROB
(sincere)
Don't mind me. No problem. Just pretend
you're talking about somebody else.

Jo smiles, Liz gives him a look.

LIZ
We are talking about somebody else.
Laura. Laura and Ray, actually.

Rob begins to turn red. Anger, sorrow, everything else
building.

ROB
Enough, Liz.

LIZ
Enough of what?

ROB
(getting louder)
I know I can't speak now because Laura's
father died, and I just have to take it
because otherwise I'm a bad guy, with the
emphasis on guy, self-centered. Blind and
stupid. Well, I'm fucking not, not all
the time, anyway, I'm really sorry Jo.
(lowering his voice)
But you know, Liz... I can either stick
up for myself or believe everything you
say about me and end up hating myself.
And maybe you think I should, but it's
not much of a life, you know?

LIZ
Maybe I've been a little unfair. But is
this really the time?

ROB
Only because it's never the time. We
can't go on apologizing all our lives,
you know?

LIZ
If by "we" you are referring to men, then
I have to say that just the once would
do.

Rob looks around the room, beginning to hyperventilate and
near tears. He sees Laura in a corner of the room surrounded

(CONTINUED)

by four or five mourners. He crosses to them and breaks through to her.

ROB
I'm sorry.

He breaks away from her and slips out the front door.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - AFTERNOON

So darkened by weather that it is almost night, raining torrents and big sheets. Rob emerges from the front door of Laura's parents' house and begins walking down the street, hands thrust into his pockets. The rain almost immediately soaks him. As he walks and thinks, we also see IMAGES pass through his mind's eye.

ROB V.O.
I saw, for the first time, how scared I am of dying, and of other people dying, and how this fear has prevented me from doing a lot of things, like thinking about my life, in a way that contains a concept of the future --

CHURCH STAIRS

at the moment six pallbearers lose control of their casket --

ROB V.O.
That's too scary, because the future ends in death.

THE RECORD STORE

Super-speed TIME ELAPSE of the storefront, five days passing in five seconds --

ROB V.O.
The way I live right now is suicide by tiny, tiny increments. I guess a lot of people live that way.

BACK TO ROB

moving through the suburban streets in the rain.

ROB V.O. (cont'd)
It has prevented me from sticking with a relationship, because if you stick with a relationship and your life becomes dependent on that person's life, and then they die, as they are bound to do...
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

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ROB V.O. (cont'd)
well, you're up the creek without a
paddle, aren't you?

BATHROOM DOOR

open just enough to see the knees of an older woman on a
toilet.

ROB V.O.
I'd rather not come home one day in ten
or twenty years to be faced with a pale
frightened woman saying she'd been
shitting blood -- I'm sorry, I'm sorry,
but this is what happens to people -- and
then we go to the doctor --

CLOSE-UP - AN X-RAY

of a pair of lungs with a big black splotch in the middle
where a heart should be --

ROB V.O.
-- and he says it's inoperable and
then... I wouldn't have the guts, you
know? I'd probably just

PICTURESQUE MEXICAN BEACH

deserted and calm --

ROB V.O.
Take off, and Laura would check into the
hospital to die and they'd say "Isn't
your partner coming to visit" and she'd
say "no, when he found out about the
cancer he left me." That's the way he is!

HOSPITAL ROOM

An old woman lies on her side, facing away from us, hooked up
to all kinds of machines. A TV bleats out an old sitcom.

ROB V.O.
"Cancer? Sorry, that's not for me! I
don't like it!" Best not to put yourself
in that position.

SUPERFAST MONTAGE

of Charlie, Alison, Penny, Sarah, Marie, Laura...

ROB V.O.
It makes more sense to hop from woman to
woman until I'm too old to do it anymore.

(CONTINUED)

BACK TO ROB,

making his way through the rain, shivering. Behind him about a block down, headlights appear and start heading his way. He turns around, then starts running...

ROB V.O.

And then I'll live alone and die alone
and what's so terrible about that when
you look at the alternatives?

The car comes nearer, and Rob veers off the sidewalk into a front yard, leaps a small stone wall and comes to rest on his back in a pool of mud that was a flowerbed very recently. He lies there, breathing heavily and looking up at the rain.

ROB V.O.

Oh, right! He sleeps with other women
because he has a fear of death! Well, I'm
sorry, but that's the way things are.

The sound of the CAR ENGINE catches up, and a door opens and shuts. He sighs and shuts his eyes...

ROB V.O.

Will I explain this to whomever I'm
seeing? Maybe. It's fairer and less
emotional somehow than the usual mess
that ends relationships. "You're going to
die so there's not much point in us
carrying on, is there?"

He opens his eyes again, to see Laura's face, wet as well, staring down at him. It is difficult to distinguish rain from tears.

LAURA

Are you going to lie in that flower bed
all night?

ROB

Uh... No.

But Rob keeps lying there. Laura pulls herself to a sitting position on the wall just above him.

LAURA

You're soaking.

ROB

Mmmn.

(CONTINUED)

LAURA

You're also an idiot.

Rob pulls his muddy self to his feet and sits on the wall next to her.

ROB

I can see why you say that. Look, I'm sorry. I really am. The last thing I wanted was... that's why I left, because... I lost it, and I didn't want to blow my top in there, and... look, Laura, the reason I fucked everything up was because I was scared. Of the future. That you'd die.

LAURA

Well, I will die. Nothing much has changed about that.

ROB

No, I understand completely, and I'm not expecting you to tell me anything different. I just wanted you to know, that's all.

LAURA

Thank you. I appreciate it. I can't reciprocate.

ROB

What do you mean?

LAURA

I didn't mess things up because I was scared of you dying. I slept with Ray because I was sick of you. And I needed something to snap me out of it.

ROB

Sure, I understand. Look, I don't want to take up any more of your time. You get back, and I'll wait here for a bus.

LAURA

I don't want to go back.

ROB

Whatever you want.

LAURA

Let's go.

(CONTINUED)

They swing their legs over the wall and walk to the Laura's VW.

INT. LAURA'S CAR - NIGHT

They drive sort of aimlessly through Laura's old neighborhood.

LAURA

I'll tell you something, Rob. Walking out of that funeral is the worst thing I've ever done, and also the most exhilarating.

ROB

It's not like you walked out of the funeral. You walked out of the party thing. That's different.

LAURA

But my mom, and Jo, and... They'll never forget it. I don't care, though.

ROB

He'd understand.

LAURA

D'you think? I'm not sure I would. I'd want people to stay to the bitter end. That'd be the least they could do.

ROB

You're dad was nicer than you, though.

LAURA

He was, wasn't he?.

ROB

That's how it always works. Mean dad, nice daughter. Nice dad, mean daughter.

LAURA

Fuck off.

Laura sees something on her left, and makes a sudden turn up a narrow road through some overgrown trees. They come to a stop in a formerly paved clearing, looking out on a field with an old school on the other side. Laura shuts down the engine.

LAURA (cont'd)

Dad used to bring us here when we were kids. It used to be a little private prep

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

LAURA (cont'd)
school, but they went bust years ago.
It's sat empty ever since.

ROB
It's pretty. When are you going back?

LAURA
I don't know. Sometime. Later. Listen,
Rob, would you have sex with me?

ROB
What?

LAURA
I want to feel something else than this.
It's either that or I go home and put my
hand in the fire. Unless you want to stub
cigarettes out on my arm.

ROB
I've only got a couple left. I'm saving
them for later.

LAURA
It'll have to be sex, then.

ROB
Well, can we go somewhere else? You used
to take sex -- I mean, walks with your
Dad here... It's kind of weird, don't you
think?

LAURA
No.

She pulls herself over him, straddling him in the passenger
seat and kissing his neck.

ROB
Okay, maybe not so weird...

She pauses and regards him from above.

LAURA
Hello. It doesn't seem so long ago that I
looked at you from here.

ROB
Hi.

LAURA
I knew there was a reason I wore a skirt
today.

They begin to make love.

INT. LAURA'S CAR - LATER

Rob and Laura stare straight ahead as she drives, a little dazed from what must have been really good sex.

LAURA

Rob.

ROB

Yeah.

They come to a stop in front of Rob's apartment building.

LAURA

Do you wanna get together at some point in the near future?

ROB

I'm single.

Rob gets out of the car. Laura drives away.

INT. RECORD STORE - DAY

Rob comes out of the stock room and walks toward the counter where Dick and Barry stare at the tape deck like two concerned doctors, listening to a song that is raw and moody and lyrical -- Minor Threat meets Brian Eno. Rob joins them in contemplation.

ROB

What is this.

DICK

It's Vince and Justin.

ROB

Who's that.

BARRY

The little skate-fuckers.

ROB

No way.

BARRY

Yes way. It's really...

Rob and Dick look at him, ready to pounce --

(CONTINUED)

BARRY (cont'd)
(pained to say it)
It's really fucking good.

Dick and Barry look to Rob, who continues to just listen. What Dick has proposed hangs in the air... The song ends. Rob takes a deep breath and walks to the front door and out.

EXT. RECORD STORE - DAY

Rob comes out the door, seemingly with a mission. Vince and Justin are doing skate tricks against the curb across the street. When they see Rob they stop. He walks across to them. Dick comes out and hovers in the background.

ROB
Your tape. It's good.

They mumble thanks.

ROB (cont'd)
It's rough. But it shows promise. We record a couple of songs right, in a studio. I'll take care of the rest. We'll put out your record.

Barry sticks his head out the door --

BARRY
Rob! Phone!

ROB
(to Barry)
Tell 'em to hold.
(to Vince and Justin)
Any profits after recouping expenses get split down the middle, between us and you guys.

VINCE
Wait a minute. Island Records charged U2 a million five against their overhead for one plane ride.

ROB
We're not there yet, Justin.

VINCE
I'm Vince.

ROB
Whatever.

(CONTINUED)

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111.

He motions to Dick and begins to move toward the store.

BARRY
It's Laura.

Rob reacts.

ROB
Dick. C'mere.

JUSTIN
Who's he? The A&R man?

ROB (cont'd)
No, he's your A&P man. Dick, get the kids
some cereal.

Dick blushes with contained glee.

ROB (cont'd)
(to Vince and Justin)
You do what he says. And you quit fucking
stealing from me.

Vince and Justin look at each other. Rob gets to the door but
stops and turns.

ROB (cont'd)
Hey. What's the name of your band?

JUSTIN
Uh, Free Beer.

VINCE
We figure if we gig and the sign says
"Free Beer" then more people will come.

ROB
Nice.

VINCE
What's the name of your label?

Rob looks at them. Then at Dick. Then through the window at
Barry, inside looking out. Then at his own reflection in the
window. Then back at them.

ROB
Gay Pride Records.

INT. RECORD STORE - DAY

Rob enters and steps up behind the counter, taking the phone from Barry. He rolls his shoulders.

ROB

'Lo?

LAURA - INTERCUT

LAURA

I'm going to dinner at Paul and Miranda's tomorrow night. Paul from work. Do you want to come?

INT. PAUL AND MIRANDA'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Two couples, laughing and talking over the remnants of dinner -- Rob and Laura, and PAUL and MIRANDA. They are about the same age as Rob and Laura, and appear to be very relaxed and pleasant people. It looks almost like Charlie's dinner scene, but with no pretense.

ROB V.O.

I sort of fall in love with Paul and Miranda -- with what they have, and the way they treat each other, and the way they make me feel as if I'm the new center of their world. I think they're great, and I want to see them twice a week, every week, for the rest of my life.

INT. PAUL AND MIRANDA'S KITCHEN - LATER

Rob and Laura dry dishes. Paul exits the room, leaving them alone for a moment

ROB V.O.

Only right at the end of the evening do I realize I've been set up.

LAURA

Go look at their records.

ROB

I don't have to. I am capable of surviving without turning my nose up at other people's record collections, you know.

LAURA

Please. I want you to.

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Rob puts down the dishrag and moves into the
LIVING ROOM,

Laura close behind. He looks through the bookshelves until he
finds a meager little grouping of CDs. He moves up to them
and scans the titles: Tina Turner. Billy Joel. Kate Bush.
Pink Floyd. Simply Red. The Beatles. The Windham Hill
Sampler...

PAUL
Lame, right?

Rob turns around to see Paul behind him.

ROB
Oh, I don't know. The Beatles were a good
band.

Paul laughs.

PAUL
We're kinda out of date. Maybe we can
come by your store and you can hook us
up.

ROB
Hey, to each his own, I say.

Off of Laura's look --

CUT TO:

INT. LAURA'S CAR - NIGHT

As they drive, at peace with each other. All is quiet except
for a great song on the radio.

She pulls the car over in front of the apartment building.
Rob looks at the building and then at her.

ROB
You wanna come upstairs for a few years?

INT. ROB AND LAURA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

as they come in the door.

LAURA
..."To each his own!" Unbelievable! You!
Rob Gordon said that. You even sounded
like you meant it.

(CONTINUED)

They throw their jackets over a chair. Rob hits "play" on the CD player and a song begins.

ROB

(smiling)

You did that deliberately. You knew all along I'd like them. It was a trick.

LAURA

I tricked you into meeting some people you'd think were great. I thought it would be fun to introduce you to someone with a Tina Turner album and then see whether you still felt the same way. Everybody's faith needs a little testing from time to time.

She moves to Rob and wraps her arms around him.

ROB V.O.

I hear something in Laura's voice, I don't know what it is, but at that moment I want to become a different person...

Rob kisses her.

ROB V.O. (cont'd)

...I would remove all trace of what is me, to look after her and try to make her happy...

They look deeply at each other. She breaks away from him and walks into the bedroom.

ROB

...And when she let's go of me, I feel I don't need to become a different person. It's happened already.

Rob looks at the stereo in front of him.

STEREO

with its buttons and red lights.

ROB V.O.

I start to compile a tape in my head for Laura, full of stuff she'd like. Full of stuff that'd make her happy. Tonight, for the first time, I can sort of see how it's done.

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Rob's hand reaches into frame and hits the power button. All the lights go off, the music stops, and the SCREEN GOES DARK.