

Michael Bettencourt

Screenplays: Volume 2

Block & Tackle Productions Press



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Michael Bettencourt

**Shea Man • Georgia's Miss Baby
The Nun Drops Her Veil**

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Block & Tackle Productions Press



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To María Beatriz - always in all ways

Shea Man

FADE IN

EXT. NEW ENGLAND - EARLY 1900S

Rugged upstate New York farm, landscape beautiful and severe, spring.

JOHNSON SHEA, 40s, craggy as the landscape, guides two oxen plowing the stony soil. THOMAS SHEA, 16, tall and gangly, trails behind, piling stones to be carted away.

Suddenly, Johnson calls to Thomas. Thomas unhooks a wire mesh from the traces. Johnson shovels in soil, and they sieve until two perfect Indian arrowheads appear. With smiles on their dirty faces, they inspect the artifacts carefully.

THOMAS' VISION

In an instant, Thomas in his mind sees the whole arrow nocked into the sinew tied to a bow drawn by the lean hands of an aboriginal sighting along the arrow's length and ready to release it. Which he does.

FIELD

JOHNSON

Keepers.

THOMAS

For sure.

INT. BARN - EVENING

Johnson hammers four brads into a wall lined with arrowheads of all shapes, each resting on two brass brads and labeled by a strip of stiff white paper perfectly lettered with date and location.

To the side are shelves lined with fossils, also dated and located: trilobites, mastodon bones, etc.

Thomas, at the workbench, prints in perfect miniscule letters.

ENTRANCE TO BARN

SARAH SHEA, 40s, rough exterior but with laughlines around her eyes, stands drying her hands.

SARAH

You two will have more arrowheads than all the Indians ever had.

THOMAS

Mom, that is a logical impossibility.

Thomas hands a label to Johnson, who holds it with tweezers while Thomas applies a thin line of glue. Together, they press the label home under the new arrowheads.

SARAH

I wonder how many mothers get insulted like that in a day.

JOHNSON

He wasn't insulting you.

They put up the second label.

JOHNSON

Come see.

Sarah joins them, and the three look at the admittedly impressive, if amateur, scientific display.

SARAH

(tousling Thomas' hair)

My little scientist.

(snaps Johnson's suspenders)

My big scientist.

Johnson grabs her towel and playfully snaps it at Sarah's behind.

JOHNSON

And the woman who keeps 'em fit.

Johnson and Sarah LAUGH as she tries to get the towel away from him. Suddenly he turns and faces her.

JOHNSON

Come dance with me, Sarah Shea.

They dance a jaggedy reel over the rough floorboards. Thomas can't conceal a smile at his foolish parents.

JOHNSON

C'mon, Thomas -- give the belle of the ball a whirl!

Johnson pulls in his son, and Thomas and Sarah high-step around the barn as Johnson claps time and LAUGHS.

INT. THOMAS' BEDROOM - AFTER DINNER

Thomas, schoolbooks open, studying. He overhears the arguing VOICES of his parents in the dining room.

INT. STAIRCASE

Thomas, on the stairs, can see into the dining room. The VOICES now are distinct, sharp. Between them is what looks like a new book. Also two mugs of tea and a ledger.

JOHNSON

He is going to go to state university after next year, and I don't care what it costs.

SARAH

Not if you keep buying books --

Johnson lays his hand on the book, strokes the spine.

JOHNSON

We will find the means.

SARAH

Not if you keep buying books the cost of which would feed us for a month.

INT. DINING ROOM

Through the open door of the dining room can just be seen the pale face of Thomas peering through the balusters.

JOHNSON

This book -- He is not going to turn into a dirt farmer.

SARAH

You're not just a "dirt farmer."

Johnson opens the big accounting ledger to a page of figures in red and black ink.

JOHNSON

Look at this, Sarah.

SARAH

I know what it says.

JOHNSON

Look at it.

SARAH

I know what it says.

JOHNSON

And all our hard work has gotten us what?

(tapping page)

That's it. That's all. And will it get any easier? Everything in this town is drying up -- us included. But not for him. Not for him.

INT. STAIRCASE

Thomas, head leaning against the baluster, picks at the varnish, his face pained and troubled.

THOMAS

(whispering)

Not for him.

INT. DINING ROOM

Johnson lets the ledger close with a THUD.

JOHNSON

We'll make it fine for this year, and probably the next couple of, as long as the crews keep digging the gravel for the roads and the cows milk clean.

A moment of SILENCE -- a clock TICKS, the house CREAKS.

SARAH

I want him to go, too, you know.

JOHNSON

He's got the head for it.

SARAH

Just look at his parents.

JOHNSON

But you and I never wrote a paper. A paper! A scientific paper at fifteen. And sending it to the state university museum director.

Sarah takes up the two mugs, moves toward the kitchen.

JOHNSON

Sarah?

She stops, waits.

JOHNSON

Am I still the guy with all the big plans you married? No, I'm not.

SARAH

Plans have changed, the man hasn't.

Johnson lets his finger trace over the book.

JOHNSON

It's me who wants to go, you know.

SARAH

I know. Freshman Johnson Shea -- now, that would be a sight! Let me wash these.

Sarah starts to exit into the kitchen, then walks over and gives Johnson a peck on the temple. Then into the kitchen.

INT. THOMAS' BEDROOM

Thomas at his desk, books open, his eyes staring at the wall in front of him. A KNOCK on his door.

JOHNSON (O.S.)

Thomas?

THOMAS

It's open, Dad.

Johnson and Sarah enter, Johnson holding the book.

JOHNSON

Special delivery.

Thomas takes the book, but when he sees the title, his whole attitude changes -- his face softens, his eyes shine.

THOMAS

(handing back book)

Hold this.

In a rush he clears off his textbooks, then re-takes the book and lays it gently on the desk, like some sacred text, which, to him, it is. The title page: "Geological Evidences of the Antiquity of Man, by Sir Charles Lyell."

JOHNSON

I wanted to go for the three volumes of his Principles of Geology, but --

Thomas leafs through, his face filled with wonder and joy.

THOMAS

This is amazing. Look at this.

Johnson and Sarah join him on either side, and they leaf through the book, Thomas and Johnson exclaiming, as if leafing through a volume of family pictures.

INT. THOMAS' BEDROOM - LATER

Thomas, sitting up in his bed, the lantern on his side table, reading, skimming, now almost to the back cover.

THOMAS' VISION

Standing at the base of a rugged bluff. Suddenly, the face of the bluff slides away, revealing a perfect layering, each labeled with its proper geological name. Levitated, Thomas ascends, covering the whole course of geological evolution until he comes to Holocene, where, embedded in a large piece of shale, he sees a perfect fossil relief of his own face, which smiles back at him.

INT. JOHNSON AND SARAH'S BEDROOM - LATER

Johnson's eyes pop open. Sarah sleeps beside him. A NOISE -- the front door OPENING and CLOSING. From the window he sees Thomas, lantern in hand, walking down the road.

Quietly, Johnson picks up his clothes, tip-toes out.

Just as he leaves, Sarah sits up. She listens to Johnson's not-so-quiet dressing and leaving. She also stands at the window and watches Johnson's lantern dwindle down the road.

Sarah sits back on the bed, hesitates, then swiftly pins up her loose hair and moves downstairs to the kitchen.

EXT. GRAVEL PIT

Under a massively starry sky, Thomas comes to the gravel pit. He scans the ground and pit wall, pulls a geologist's hammer from his coat pocket.

His eyes pick through the rubble like a dog picking up a scent until he lights on a thick slab of rock. A few taps of the hammer, the rock splits, and there, a fossil.

Thomas suddenly pivots as he hears FOOTSTEPS.

THOMAS

Who's there?

Johnson holds up his lantern to show his face.

JOHNSON

Late night geology?

THOMAS

The book -- couldn't sleep.

JOHNSON

I couldn't sleep because you couldn't sleep. Nice find.

Thomas puts it in his pocket.

THOMAS

I heard what you and Mom were talking about tonight.

JOHNSON

Our voices do travel, don't they?

Johnson sits. Thomas joins him. They pick up stones and toss them into the darkness as they talk.

THOMAS

And that means I'm going to have to travel, doesn't it?

JOHNSON

Only if you want to. There's no "have to" about it, Thomas.
You can stay here and raise dirt and no money --

THOMAS

I should stay and help you and Mom.

JOHNSON

(ignoring)

-- or you go to state university and raise your chances of
being somebody. Dirt -- or success. Simple as that.

THOMAS

Simple?

JOHNSON

If you stay to home out of being scared or you think you're betraying something or out of loyalty to me and your mother -- then you're being a fool. And we didn't raise a fool.

THOMAS

It's not that bad here, Dad.

JOHNSON

Then you are going to make one terrible scientist because the evidence is all around you. Property auctioned off every day, mastitis running through herds -- you're not blind, Thomas, I know you know this stuff.

Thomas and Johnson throw stones into the darkness.

THOMAS

Would you come visit?

JOHNSON

I am going to embarrass the hell out of you, I'm going to visit you so often. I will miss you.

Suddenly, they both perk up their heads as they hear FOOTSTEPS on the road, then see another lantern. Sarah appears, carrying a basket. Johnson takes it from her.

SARAH

Couldn't sleep.

JOHNSON

Tea, bread, jam -- a moonlight picnic.

SARAH

Would you mind serving us, Mr. Shea?

JOHNSON

'Twouldn't mind at all, Dame Shea.

As Johnson serves, Sarah caresses Thomas' cheek.

SARAH

You will do us proud.

They drink, eat, talk, laugh as the stars wheel overhead.

INT. UNIVERSITY LECTURE HALL - SPRING SEMESTER FRESHMAN YEAR

Arrowheads like those in Thomas' barn appear on the pages of a textbook Thomas has open while PROFESSOR HARLAN JORDAN, museum director and department head, paces the front of a lecture hall.

On the blackboard at the front of the hall Jordan has written "Lines of Ascent." Under that he has drawn parallel lines labeled "Neanderthal," "Cro-Magnon," "Java Man," "Piltdown," and "???".

JORDAN

The Piltdown Man's fossil remains show clearly that modern man arose from the apes and gorillas.

AUDIENCE

FLETCHER CALVIN, sitting next to Thomas, and Thomas' roommate, raises his hand.

FLETCHER

Professor --

THOMAS

(whispering)

Fletch, don't.

FRONT OF HALL

Jordan holds him off.

JORDAN

I'm well aware, Mr. Calvin, that God and Mr. Darwin may differ about how you evolved enough to end up in my class, so let me finish before you bring the wrath of the Almighty down among us.

(to the rest)

Mr. Calvin resents that he may be a descendant of apes.

AUDIENCE

FLETCHER

Human beings are not just animals.

THOMAS

(whispering)

Fletch, hold off.

FRONT OF HALL

Again, Jordan gestures for him to stop.

JORDAN

We don't yet know, however, what the apes think of having such a cousin as Mr. Calvin.

A small ripple of LAUGHTER.

JORDAN

The ways of God are mysterious, Mr. Calvin -- but he's not a trickster.

Jordan picks up a pair of knuckle bones from his desk and rolls them across the tabletop.

JORDAN

He does not play dice with our minds. Everything is available to us if we only put our minds to finding it out. Which should give us a good dose of that Christian humility you prefer.

Jordan picks up the skull of an ape.

JORDAN

And who knows? Perhaps in some jungle university, as we speak, an orangutan Harlan Jordan is holding forth to a group of primate freshmen --

Jordan wiggles the jaw, again making everyone LAUGH.

JORDAN

-- about this creature called Homo calvinus and wondering if he, indeed, despite his protests, is really the be-all and end-all of God's creation. Which leads us to -- Thomas Shea, would you stand up?

AUDIENCE

Thomas, startled at hearing his name called, stands.

FRONT OF HALL

JORDAN

Ah, good. Mr. Shea, who is Mr. Calvin's roommate, if I'm not mistaken.

THOMAS

Yes, sir.

JORDAN

Mr. Shea wrote an excellent response to my question to you all last class about Neanderthal, Java Man, Piltdown Man, and the "missing link."

The class, as one, turns to look at Thomas, who stands like a deer caught in the headlights.

INTERCUT BETWEEN JORDAN AND THOMAS

THOMAS

Sir?

JORDAN

You made a point about human nature, Mr. Shea, that I would like you to repeat to the rest of us.

THOMAS

Sir?

Jordan speaks to the rest of the class.

JORDAN

The chimpanzee need not be afraid of this old orangutan.
Mr. Shea -- your point. For the rest of us.

Thomas hesitates, looking at the all faces looking at him. Fletcher, looking up at him, grins and WHISPERS.

FLETCHER

Should've let me keep talking.

Thomas speaks, hesitantly at first.

THOMAS

My point. If the "missing link" exists --

JORDAN

It does -- it just hasn't applied for admission to my class yet.

LAUGHTER, some smiles.

THOMAS

(pointing to door)

If it did show up for class -- then we have some hard questions to ask about -- whether it is human, if it would be our brother.

JORDAN

Mr. Shea is modest. He said that we would have to re-define what it means to be human -- even better than that --

THOMAS

Professor Jordan --

JORDAN

He said that this thing we call "human nature" doesn't exist at all but that we make it up as we go along. A story we tell ourselves about who we are. Mr. Calvin, that would seem to put God out of a job.

FLETCHER

I don't think God has a job, Professor.

JORDAN

Not in Mr. Shea's universe.

FLETCHER

Though He wouldn't mind being a university professor.

JORDAN

I'll see if I can get him tenure, Mr. Calvin. Thank you, Mr. Shea. If all of you can't find the missing link by the next class, at least read the next chapter and give me the usual 2-page summary of its major points.

INT. HALLWAY

Students and professors crowd the area, VOICES loud. Fletcher punches Thomas playfully in the arm, speaks to the crowd around him.

FLETCHER

(kiddingly)

Teacher's pet. Teacher's pet.

Thomas speaks to the crowd as well.

THOMAS

(punching back)

And lucky me -- I get the missing link for my roommate.

Jordan approaches the group, which parts respectfully.

JORDAN

No lightning bolts yet.

FLETCHER

That's Zeus, Professor.

JORDAN

I cannot keep all those gods straight.

FLETCHER

That's okay, professor -- they'll keep you straight.

JORDAN

How do you like him as a roommate?

THOMAS

Give him enough bananas, he's fine.

JORDAN

You've got a sharp tongue, Mr. Calvin -- we'll convert it to science yet.

Fletcher playfully cowers, looking up at the ceiling, then snaps his fingers.

FLETCHER

Can't get a lightning bolt when you need one. I might lose faith after all.

JORDAN

It's a start. Mr. Fletcher, would you allow Thomas to come with me?

FLETCHER

I release you. Just be sure to get back in time to write the literature essay for this poor gorilla.

Thomas and Jordan leave, which continues to CHATTER. Fletcher watches them walk away, speaks to the group.

FLETCHER

I think he is one star worth hitching a wagon to.

INT. HALLWAY - ANOTHER BUILDING

More quiet, more cloistered. Off the hallway are labs. Thomas glimpses white-coated workers measuring bones, making casts, and so on, recording data in huge ledgers.

THOMAS

Are you sure I'm supposed to be here --

JORDAN

I am Virgil, guiding you through.

Jordan sees that Thomas doesn't get the reference.

JORDAN

Dante? Divine Comedy? We have to expand your reading.
Remind to make you a list. Follow me.

INT. JORDAN'S OFFICE - OUTER LOBBY

Seated at a desk neatly arranged is MISS JENNINGS, 30s, Jordan's secretary, hair up neatly, sweater draped. She is opening mail, the opener deftly slicing the envelopes.

JORDAN

Miss Jennings. My muse and savior.

JENNINGS

You have a letter here from Dawson, in England, and --

Jordan stands at the door to his office, ready to open it.

JORDAN

I'll get to that later.

JENNINGS

Should I give him the helmet before he goes in there?

JORDAN

It's a bit of a mess.

The ZIP of the opener through a thick envelope.

JENNINGS

They never found the last student.

Another deft SLICE.

JORDAN

Actually, they did -- his femur's in drawer 4A, in the west annex.

JENNINGS

(to Thomas)

It was nice to have known you.

INT. JORDAN'S OFFICE

A veritable cave of wood paneling, books, papers, skeletons -- the den of a very learned anthropologist.

JORDAN

Plato had his cave, and I have mine.

(sees Thomas' puzzlement)

Not Plato either?

THOMAS

My school only had one room.

JORDAN

And thirty students and half that number of books, excluding Bibles. And one teacher. Do you know how remarkable it is for you to be here?

THOMAS

I never forget it, sir.

Jordan picks up an arrowhead and hands it to Thomas.

THOMAS

Susquehanna group.

Jordan takes it back, looks at Thomas.

JORDAN

Most would have guessed --

THOMAS

It's easy to confuse -- the edges --

JORDAN

I know the differences. And so do you.

Jordan tosses the arrowhead back onto the desk, which scatters a nest of pencils and gim-cracks.

JORDAN

That isn't why I brought you here.

INT. STORAGE ROOM

A solid wooden door swings open as Jordan pushes in against its weight and holds it open for Thomas to enter.

JORDAN

The sanctum sanctorum.

Thomas stands awed. Arrayed before him is a seemingly endless row of enormous cabinets, drawers, lockers, broad worktables, everything crammed with animal fossils.

JORDAN

Do you recognize that?

GLASS CASE

Jordan points to the plaster cast of what looks like a misshapen skull and jawbone.

JORDAN

Piltdown -- a cast of --

Jordan opens the case, takes the skull, hands it to Thomas.

JORDAN

I went to England to see the pieces for myself. Would certainly like more of him. But -- our supposed missing link.

Thomas turns the skull in his hands, looking at it from all angles, immediately absorbed.

JORDAN

(whispering)

Alas, poor Yorick --

But Thomas doesn't hear him. As he hands the skull back, utter amazement wreathes Thomas' face.

THOMAS

I can't believe --

Jordan puts the skull back, locks the case.

JORDAN

A lot of people still don't. He is just too oddly built for their tastes. But Mr. Darwin said we need him, Mr. Charles Dawson of Piltdown, England, has delivered him, so what can mere mortals do? Come, let us reason together.

THOMAS

That one I know.

Jordan escorts him along the cases, watching Thomas discover the treasures.

THOMAS' VISION

For Thomas, the inanimate objects spark visions -- in his mind they reconstitute themselves and come alive, evolution reassembling itself in his mind's eye.

INT. JORDAN'S OFFICE

THOMAS

My father and I stuck arrowheads up on a wall. But nothing like that.

JORDAN

That's not all your father did. Did you know that somewhere out there are fossils your father sent to us?

THOMAS

My father?

JORDAN

Mastodon bones, I believe. Correctly named, dated, measured. Not bad for a dirt farmer, eh? And like father, like son -- I'm sure I could dig up that paper you sent me --

THOMAS

You still have that?

JORDAN

Courtesy of your teacher. That's why you have a scholarship -- courtesy of this teacher, impressed with father and son.

THOMAS

Thank you.

JORDAN

And that's why I want to talk to you, Thomas. I have a proposal. I didn't take you on the tour just for exercise.

THOMAS

Yes, sir.

But instead of explaining, Jordan gets up from his desk.

WINDOW

Jordan watches the students crossing the quadrangle, watches the wind take up the new leaves of the trees.

THOMAS

Sir?

Jordan turns to look at Thomas, looks very carefully.

THOMAS

Sir?

JORDAN

Like you, Thomas, I got hooked as a child. For fifty years the search for man has never disappointed me.

DESK

Jordan takes up a bolo and drops it from one hand to the other, then puts it back.

JORDAN

Thomas, I am going to say something I've not said to anyone else -- yet. Piltdown -- the supposed "missing link"? I think we can do better.

THOMAS

Better?

JORDAN

Why should Europe and Asia have all the glory?

THOMAS

Sir?

JORDAN

Boule with his Neanderthals, Breuil with his Cro-Magnons, Dubois with his Pithecanthropus. Haeckel predicted a missing link, but he never said where. Well, why not here? (gesturing to office) Well, not here -- but in the United States.

Jordan paces.

JORDAN

They called Piltdown "Dawn Man" -- eoanthropus. Why not our own "dawn man?" What do you say to that? The New World, the New Man -- eoanthropus libertatis. Doesn't this nation deserve it?

Jordan is now thoroughly caught up in his vision.

JORDAN

The American Dawn Man -- the origin of what has become good and fine in the world. It'll take a lot of hard work -- but think of the glory, Thomas, if we can do it. The pride of America. And not just that -- the pride of the American race. Just imagine if we find it!

THOMAS

Do you really think --

JORDAN

Without a doubt. We are not a doubting people, Thomas, are we? Those storage rooms? We have stuff no human has ever cleanly examined. I need a keen eye next to mine to sift through it. I need a good brain to read and analyze. That would be yours.

THOMAS

You want me to work for you.

JORDAN

Not work, Thomas. This is not work -- this is discovery, exploration -- a grand journey. I want you to travel that journey with me. I want you to be my assistant, my protégé -- Watson to Holmes. (look of incomprehension) We have to work on that reading list. Do you accept?

THOMAS

I would be paid?

JORDAN

You would have money enough to send home -- where I understand it would do a lot of good. You'll start now, stay here for the summer. Yes?

THOMAS

When's my first payday?

Jordan reaches over to his intercom.

JORDAN

Miss Jennings -- an employment application, if you please.

JENNINGS (O.S.)

He's still alive?

JORDAN

Yes.

JENNINGS (O.S.)

Will wonders never cease.

INT. WORKSHOP - SUMMER

Thomas, sweating, gets a face-full of dust as he opens a drawer full of teeth. Jordan takes a brush and, laughing, dusts off his forehead.

INT. WORKSHOP - BENCH

Thomas, in his miniscule type, fills in ledger columns with measurements of bones he takes with calipers and rulers -- page after page until his eyes grow bleary.

INT. MOLDING ROOM

Thomas, grimy, as he wrestles to make a clay mold for a mastodon tusk as least as long as he is. Jordan supervises him with a bemused expression on his face.

INT. LIBRARY

Towers of books surround Thomas as he reads and take notes -- and is almost crushed when one pile tips over, echoing through the empty space. The librarian scowls.

EXT. STEPS OF MUSEUM

Jordan and Thomas, bag lunches in front of them, toss pebbles into an upturned top-half of a skull, laughing.

INT. MOLDING ROOM

The plaster cast crumbles.

INT. DORMITORY ROOM

Thomas looks at the sunset while he rolls in his hands an arrowhead sent to him by his father.

INT. WORKSHOP

Thomas tapes a notecard to the drawer: "Done." Drawer after drawer bears the same notecard: "Done."

INT. MOLDING ROOM

Thomas pulls off the clay; the plaster cast holds. Jordan applauds politely.

INT. FACULTY CLUB

Jordan, neatly dressed, meets with a crowd of similarly dressed men. He introduces Thomas to them all.

EXT. STEPS OF MUSEUM

Six successive "hits" in the skull, followed by two crumpled brown paper bags.

INT. SHEA DINING ROOM

Johnson slides fresh money from an envelope. Also enclosed is a catalogue card with a neatly printed citation on it, attributing the mastodon bones to one Johnson Shea.

INT. WORKSHOP

Thomas closes the last of the ledger books, then puts it into a posterboard wrapper and ties it shut, placing it on top of the pile of other completed ledgers.

He straightens the pile a hair, then folds his hands and looks at it. Smiles.

THOMAS

Done.

INT. DORMITORY ROOM - FALL SEMESTER SOPHOMORE YEAR

Thomas, wearing a white lab coat, rushes into the room, lets his bag of books thump to the floor. From the bag he takes out a letter, slits it open, and reads. As he reads, he slowly sinks into his desk chair.

Fletcher pops in.

FLETCHER

Coming to the pep rally?

THOMAS

No.

FLETCHER

Hey, doom and gloom, what's the matter?

Thomas hands him the letter. Fletcher reads.

THOMAS

My father's never said a word.

FLETCHER

How long has the bank given him?

THOMAS

I don't know -- he and the banker know each other pretty well. I figure -- I don't know what to figure.

Fletcher hands back the letter.

FLETCHER

I'm sorry.

THOMAS

I don't know what to do.

FLETCHER

So come to the pep rally.

THOMAS

Can't -- got to get back to work for Jordan.

FLETCHER

He slaved you all summer --

THOMAS

(holds up letter)

Without Jordan's money --

FLETCHER

I'll shout extra hard for you, my friend.

STUDENTS in the hallway -- someone calls Fletcher's name.

FLETCHER

Coming!

(to Thomas)

I want to say "don't worry" --

THOMAS

Don't worry -- go.

Fletcher joins the herd and disappears.

EXT. STEPS OF MUSEUM

The late autumn sky, now almost dark, wind and leaves -- the lonely beauty of it strikes Thomas fully. With a SIGH, he enters the huge dark museum.

INT. JORDAN'S WORKSHOP

Thomas sees the light on and Jordan at his workbench.

THOMAS

Professor?

Jordan turns and smiles when he sees Thomas.

JORDAN

You are one glutton for punishment. Come in. Sit.

Thomas pulls up a high chair to the bench.

SURFACE OF WORKBENCH

Thomas sees sepia bottles labeled with chemical names, pots of paints bristling with brushes, pieces of bone scattered.

JORDAN

Thomas, I want to show you something. And I will pay you for the showing -- consider this a paid night off.

Thomas pulls his chair closer. He wrinkles his nose at the strong chemical smells.

JORDAN

A hobby of mine -- faking fossils. Keeps me on the look-out.

THOMAS

Fakes?

JORDAN

A big business in forgery. And we're always a step behind.

Jordan holds a piece of fresh bone. In front of him is a piece of fossilized bone, much darker in color.

JORDAN

Fresh bone, unfossilized -- full of organic matter. Feel how light compared to this.

Thomas balances them, nods yes. Jordan takes up a drill with a thin bit.

JORDAN

Now this.

Jordan drills into the fresh bone, and a wisp of black smoke rises.

JORDAN

Smell that?

THOMAS

Like burning horn.

JORDAN

Now this.

Jordan drills into the fossil -- nothing but powder, no smoke at all.

JORDAN

But now watch this.

Jordan takes a pot and a brush and paints the fresh bone.

JORDAN

Potassium bichromate. Watch.

Slowly the bone colors like the fossil.

JORDAN

It's only skin-deep, so to speak. When it dries, you can wash in off with hydrochloric acid -- or scratch it with a pin. But if you don't -- it'll look real. And it hardens the bone, too. Give me that tooth there.

Jordan takes a tooth no larger than a little fingernail, dabs into another pot, and paints the tooth.

JORDAN

Now that one.

Jordan holds them both up, and they look remarkably alike.

JORDAN

Van Dyke brown adds a couple of thousand millennia in an instant.

THOMAS

How many --

JORDAN

In this museum? Don't even want to think about it, even though as director I have to.

Jordan stretches, gets up from his chair.

JORDAN

But a question for another time. Let's call it a night, dear friend. The discovery of the spectacular can wait until tomorrow.

THOMAS

Professor, I got a letter from my father today.

EXT. MUSEUM - STEPS

Thomas locks the door, pockets the keys. Jordan and Thomas stare at the stars, the wind SIGHING. Silence.

JORDAN

Don't worry, Thomas. Things will work out. Go get some rest.

Jordan shakes Thomas' hand, then walks into the darkness. Thomas watches, then looks up at the façade of the museum. He jingles his keys as the leaves swirl around him.

INT. DORMITORY ROOM

Thomas, on his back, hands behind his head, staring at the ceiling, the wind RATTLING his window.

INT. SHEAS' BEDROOM

Johnson and Sarah stare at the ceiling, the same wind RATTLING their windows.

INT. THOMAS' BEDROOM

Thomas gets up and in the darkness dresses slowly.

Fletcher tosses in the next bed, then settles back in.

Thomas grabs a burlap bag. Tip-toeing lightly, he leaves.

EXT. MUSEUM - STEPS

Thomas faces the door. The branches toss in the strong autumn wind, tug at the burlap bag slung from his shoulder.

He slides his key into the door, turns, opens, and enters.

INT. HALLWAY OF DORM - END OF SEMESTER

Suitcases, trunks, bags, and shouting people jam the hallway as everyone prepares to go home for the holidays.

INT. DORMITORY ROOM

Thomas stuffs the burlap bag into his duffel bag. Fletcher's bags are on his bed. VOICE of the PORTER bulls out from the hallway.

PORTER (O.S.)

Train station next. All jackasses goin' home get aboard!

THOMAS

That's my call.

Thomas and Fletcher pause, then give each other a "masculine" embrace, with a sharp slap on the back.

FLETCHER

You're coming back, you hear?

THOMAS

Wild horses wouldn't keep me from arguing with the preacher's son.

Thomas shoulders his duffel bag.

FLETCHER

What would I do if I didn't have the heathen to convert?

THOMAS

You can always tell a religious man --

FLETCHER

But you can't tell him much.

They shake hands.

FLETCHER

Good luck.

INT. TRAIN CAR

Thomas peers at a rural winter landscape, a dreary beauty.

EXT. TRAIN CAR

Flashing by: an "Auction" sign, then another, then a "For Sale" sign, then a rapid succession of such signs, all indicating economic depression.

INT. TRAIN CAR

Thomas is startled by the CONDUCTOR leaning over his shoulder. His VOICE, twangy, rings in his ear.

CONDUCTOR

Ticket?

Thomas hands it to him, and the conductor, with a brisk succession of pops and snaps, punches it, hands it back.

CONDUCTOR

University?

THOMAS

Second year.

CONDUCTOR

Lot nicer there than out there. Sad sight, eh? Like that all along the line. Drying up and blowing away.

THOMAS

You live around here?

CONDUCTOR

I live on the rails -- a lot safer.

THOMAS

Lonelier.

CONDUCTOR

I'll take lonely over starving.

Conductor salutes Thomas, toddles off.

EXT. TRAIN STATION

Johnson and Sarah greet Thomas at the station, and for a moment, amidst the embraces and happy VOICES, the winter and its discontents are forgotten.

But only momentarily. As they leave the station, Thomas catches sight of women and men looking defeated, their faces seamed and grey, beggared if not yet beggars.

INT. THOMAS' BEDROOM

Johnson, holding Thomas' duffel bag, pushes open the bedroom door. Thomas is carrying a lantern.

JOHNSON

Kept it just the way you left it.

Thomas enters the room, puts down the lantern.

THOMAS

You make it sound like a world tour.

Johnson puts down the duffel bag, sits on the bed.

JOHNSON

Compared to around here, you have. You saw -- never great even in the best of times, and these are not the best of times.

Thomas opens the duffel bag and puts away his clothes. He carefully puts the burlap bag down next to his desk.

THOMAS

I wish --

JOHNSON

Don't even say it, Thomas. There's not a thing you could do that would make it any better. The only thing keeping the wolf from the door is your money and that gravel pit -- the road crews are digging it out and laying it down as fast as they can.

THOMAS

So, some "stones in your pocket" --

JOHNSON

The bank's pocket, you mean.

Johnson pats the bed.

JOHNSON

Sit down. I just want to tell you how proud I am of you. Proud that my son --

DOOR TO ROOM

Sarah, apron in hand, stands in the doorway.

SARAH

And my son, too.

JOHNSON

She had a little something to do with it.

SARAH

We're both proud.

THOMAS

I just wish --

SARAH

We've always survived -- no reason to forget that we know how to do that.

JOHNSON

Yes, well --

An awkward SILENCE as they realize Sarah's words are so much whistling past the graveyard.

JOHNSON

You must be tired.

SARAH

Sleep well.

Awkwardly, Johnson kisses his son on the cheek.

JOHNSON

Sleep well.

Johnson and Sarah leave, and Thomas hears their VOICES recede down the hallway.

Bathed in the glow of the lantern, Thomas stares at his reflection in the window while the wind grips the branches and whips them around.

EXT. SHEA HOUSE - SEVERAL HOURS LATER

The window to Thomas' bedroom opens and Thomas, with lantern and burlap, climbs out onto the porch roof and makes his way to the edge.

With a movement practiced a thousand times as a child, he slithers down the porch post and drops to the ground.

He pauses. Nothing but the stars turning in the sky.

INT. BARN

Thomas grabs a shovel and pick.

EXT. ROAD

Thomas, in complete darkness, makes it to the top of the hill overlooking his family's property. Only then does he light the lantern and continue down the road.

EXT. GRAVEL PIT - SHEA PROPERTY

The lantern's beam falls on a mess of clay and stone roughly gouged out of the earth.

With the shovel and pick, Thomas scrapes away gravel. From his bag he pulls three pieces of discolored skull bones he had lifted from the museum.

He scoops up some grayish muck and rubs the bones, then works them until the wet clay grabs them tight. Then a skim-coat of gravel to cover them.

ANOTHER PART OF THE PIT

He repeats the process, stashing several more pieces of the skull, marking each location with a stick or branch that looks unobtrusive.

ANOTHER PART OF THE PIT

An overhanging shelf. Using a small spade, Thomas digs a cavity under the shelf.

Carefully, Thomas takes a partial skull and a partial jaw with two teeth out of his bag. The bone fragments already salted come from this skull, but the jaw is of a very different size, even though it shares the brownish patina of the skull.

Thomas inserts them into the hole and, using both hands, tucks in a slurry of clay and stone to cover them up. Using his spade, he slashes a tree root just over the buried bones to mark the site.

EXT. ROAD

For a moment Thomas stares at the sky, engulfed in darkness.

EXT. HILL - EARLY MORNING

An uncharacteristically warm December day: a butter sun in a blue sky flecked with clouds.

Thomas, the burlap bag over his shoulder, looks down on his father and the road crew. Their trucks look like large beasts. He also carries a wood-and-wire mesh for sifting dirt, and a shovel and pick.

Sarah pours out tea and CHATS UP the workers.

Thomas turns and books down the road.

EXT. ROAD

The trucks GRIND up the hill. Johnson, in the bed of the lead truck, angles his face to catch the sun.

EXT. GRAVEL PIT

Thomas, kneeling, geologist's hammer in his hand and small spade by his knee, waits as the GROWL of the trucks turns into a loud ROAR as they close in.

EXT. LEAD TRUCK

Just as they turn the bend, Johnson sees Thomas in the gravel pit, his geologist's hammer cracking stones.

JOHNSON

What is that boy --

EXT. GRAVEL PIT

Thomas sees his father. He does a few flicks of his spade to expose the tips of the first planted skull bones.

THOMAS
(whispering)

Here goes.

Thomas stands, waves his arms, YELLING.

THOMAS
Dad! Dad! Come here!

EXT. LEAD TRUCK

The truck pulls to the pit edge. Johnson sprints to Thomas.

BEHIND LEAD TRUCK

The other trucks stop, turn off their engines. The air fills with a sudden SILENCE.

EXT. GRAVEL PIT

Johnson, breathless, goes to speak, but Thomas points to the ground, and they both drop carefully to their knees.

THOMAS
Look.

Johnson presses his face close to the ground, an inch away from the bone tip. He sniffs. He rests a very light fingertip against the bone, feels the rough edge.

EXT. LEAD TRUCK

The DRIVER gets out of the truck, takes off his jacket.

DRIVER
Mr. Shea!

EXT. GRAVEL PIT

Johnson, without taking his eyes off the bone fragment, holds up his hand, as if to say "Wait."

EXT. LEAD TRUCK

The driver, seeing the gesture, throws his jacket into the front seat.

DRIVER

It better be emeralds they're looking at.

EXT. GRAVEL PIT

JOHNSON

(softly)

Dig it out.

Using a small chisel-shaped tool, Thomas carefully pulls the bone out of the muck with a "pop." The second and third pieces appear, and Thomas pulls them out as well.

He lays all three pieces in Johnson's hand.

JOHNSON

You tell me -- you're the expert now.

EXT. LEAD TRUCK

DRIVER

Mr. Shea!

EXT. GRAVEL PIT

THOMAS

Probably skull pieces.

Thomas picks up one, hefts it.

THOMAS

See how thick it is. Fossilized.

JOHNSON

Real, then. Human?

THOMAS

Probably.

Johnson lets out a WHOOP.

EXT. LEAD TRUCK

Johnson runs up to the driver, cradling the bones as if they were glass, Thomas trailing behind.

Other WORKERS drift up to see what is going on.

JOHNSON

You gotta see these.

DRIVER

They look like bones.

JOHNSON

Skull bones.

DRIVER

(to crowd)

Looks like they found my wife!

JOHNSON

No, you don't understand --

Thomas walks up, lays a hand on his father's shoulder.

THOMAS

Dad.

JOHNSON

(ignoring Thomas)

These are ancient!

THOMAS

Dad --

JOHNSON

I mean, ancient. Feel how heavy they are.

DRIVER

Older than Scotty over there, who's older than dirt?

JOHNSON

Aren't they beautiful? And he found them, right over there, my son, he found them.

Thomas again puts a hand on his father's shoulder.

THOMAS

Dad.

Johnson turns on Thomas with an unusual fierceness.

JOHNSON

What?!

Everyone in the crowd freezes as they hear the anger in Johnson's answer. And several beats behind, Johnson hears it himself, his face melting immediately into apology.

THOMAS

(to driver)

They're just some old bones -- really old, probably 50,000 years old.

DRIVER

Well, I think that's really interesting.

The VOICE of SCOTTY pipes up from the back.

SCOTTY

That's a bit older than I am.

DRIVER

(shouting over shoulder)

Not by much.

Everyone laughs, and the tension breaks.

THOMAS

We used to do this when I was kid.

JOHNSON

(sheepish)

Would you mind -- I know it's a hell of a thing to ask -- but could you dig over in the south forty?

DRIVER

You really like those bones?

THOMAS

It'd just be for today -- promise. Promise.

The driver gestures, and Johnson hands him one of the fragments, which he weighs in his hand.

DRIVER

Fifty thousand?

THOMAS

Give or take a birthday or two.

The driver holds the fragment over his head and SHOUTS.

DRIVER

Hey, Scotty -- get a load of your long-lost cousin!

Everybody LAUGHS. The driver hands the fragment back.

DRIVER

All right, Mr. Shea. Adds 10 minutes at either end of the day, but --

THOMAS

That's 20 minutes of sunshine in December -- how often do you get that?

DRIVER

You got a smart son.

EXT. ROAD

Johnson and Shea watch the last of the trucks take the bend.

JOHNSON

Let's dig.

THOMAS

Dad --

JOHNSON

They don't need me -- I dig with 'em just to keep myself from going stir-crazy. Get paid whether I dig or not.

Johnson walks down into the pit.

JOHNSON

Like old times, eh?

EXT. GRAVEL PIT - SEVERAL HOURS LATER

They are sifting dirt when Johnson pulls out another bone fragment, holds it overhead with a grand smile on his face. He adds to the pile.

A WHILE LATER

Another fragment -- shout of triumph.

A WHILE LATER

Another fragment -- this time a weary smile.

EXT. ROAD - LUNCHTIME

Sarah, carrying a basket, comes up over the crest, a puzzled look on her face. But she does hear VOICES.

EXT. GRAVEL PIT

Sarah stands looking down at Johnson and Thomas, grimed and grinning, as they shimmy their bodies shaking the dirt through the sifter.

SARAH

Johnson and Thomas Shea.

Johnson looks up, sees her, whoops, runs up the slope, and embraces her with a twirl.

JOHNSON

Look at what I found. Thomas! Bring 'em up!

EXT. GLADE OF TREES - LUNCHTIME

Sarah handles one of the bone fragments.

SARAH

Are you sure?

JOHNSON

Of course he's sure -- he's being taught by the best!

SARAH

But can you really tell?

JOHNSON

Of course he can!

SARAH

Eat your sandwich. I just mean, all that digging you two did here -- and then the road crews, all their digging -- and never once --

JOHNSON

It's like that -- big haystack, one needle. Most of the time -- straw. Right?

THOMAS

Right.

JOHNSON

That's how it works.

SARAH

Well -- there's a smile on that face I haven't seen in a while.

Sarah bounces the fragment in her hand.

JOHNSON

Her skeptical mind works.

Sarah tosses it back to Johnson, who deftly catches it.

SARAH

Look, muck about with bones if you want. I've got to do such boring things as clean your underwear and cook some food for your ordinary bones.

JOHNSON

(mock Irish accent)

Ah, what a fine woman she be, eh?

Thomas watches his parents joke and smiles shyly at their banter. For the moment, his face looks completely relaxed.

EXT. GRAVEL PIT - A FEW HOURS LATER

Johnson stretches and groans. They are near the shelf where Thomas had salted the skull and jaw.

JOHNSON

My back is not as young as it used to be. What d'ya say we call it a day?

THOMAS

(pointing to shelf)

What about there?

JOHNSON

Where?

THOMAS

Over your shoulder.

JOHNSON

There?

THOMAS

It looks like a place for a needle.

A big smile on Johnson's face as he inspects the shelf.

JOHNSON

A turn in an ancient river, water slows down, things settle to the bottom.

THOMAS

A last try?

JOHNSON

Give me the spade.

Johnson, using Thomas' small spade, delicately pulls away dirt and stone, then he stops.

THOMAS

What?

Wordlessly, Johnson points, and Thomas sees the protruding end of the jawbone.

THOMAS

Maybe just a branch. From the trees.

Using an even smaller spade, Johnson carves around the jawbone, exposing more and more of it. Johnson has to restrain himself, so eager is he to rip it free. He leans in to smell the bone, then points with the shovel-tip.

JOHNSON

This isn't a branch.

INT. KITCHEN -- SEVERAL HOURS LATER

On a rough cloth in the middle of the table are their "finds." Johnson, still grimed, hovers, Sarah off a little to the side, Thomas in the background.

JOHNSON

(whispering)

Goddamn!

SARAH

Johnson.

JOHNSON

Sorry.

Johnson clomps into the dining room, returns almost immediately with a large book, then lays it open on the table and points to the timeline with the prominent question mark and caption "The Missing Link?"

JOHNSON

That's what I think.

(to Thomas)

And we're going to go to Professor Jordan and get him to say that. Because it's true.

Before Thomas can answer, they hear the GRIND of gears as the trucks roll in. Almost immediately, they can hear the driver's knock on the back door.

DRIVER

(to Johnson)

Just wanted to let you know -- Hey, more bones, I see.

JOHNSON

Not just bones, you see -- (pointing to book)The Missing Link.

DRIVER

You don't say.

JOHNSON

I do say.

The driver steps to the door and shouts.

DRIVER

Hey, Scotty -- we got your great-great-great aunt in here!

The workers pile in to see the bones.

JOHNSON

My son and I -- we have found the missing link.

Johnson continues saying this to everyone, and the HUBBUB gets louder as Johnson tells the story of the "find."

Thomas catches Sarah's eye. She looks at him as if to say, "What gives?" But he shrugs and looks away. Johnson looks absolutely ecstatic as he explains about the missing link and geology and so forth and so forth -- as if he were Professor Jordan in front of his freshmen. The HUM of talk gradually tails off into....

EXT. PORCH - SEVERAL DAYS LATER

Knuckles RAPPING on the front door, the knuckles of DAN MORAN, reporter. The unseasonably warm weather has held.

INT. HOUSE

Sarah parts the curtain, looks at the ruddy face and fedora cocked back on his head, pad of paper and pencil in his hand. She sees a bicycle propped against the porch.

Sarah opens the door and steps out.

EXT. PORCH

MORAN
(touching hat)

Morning.

SARAH
Morning.

MORAN
Is Johnson Shea around?

SARAH
Not within shouting distance.

MORAN
How far would I have to go to be in shouting distance?

SARAH
Who are you?

MORAN
Dan Moran, newspaper reporter.

SARAH

There's been no killings around here.

MORAN

I am here for the missing link. I understand Mr. Shea has one?

SARAH

How can you have a link that's missing? If it's missing, you can't have it, so leave.

MORAN

If I lose something, I still have it, even if it's missing.

SARAH

Who told you?

MORAN

I got a call at the paper from someone here in town.

SARAH

Who?

MORAN

Confidential.

Sarah gives his scuffed shoes and ratty sweater the once-over.

SARAH

He's off digging.

MORAN

How can I get there?

SARAH

See that grove of trees over there?

MORAN

I can't walk down that road over there?

SARAH

You saying I don't know my own property?

MORAN

All right -- that grove of trees.

EXT. GRAVEL PIT - SOUTH FORTY

Johnson and the other workers look up as they hear something thrashing through the woods, with an occasional OUTCRY or shouted CURSE.

Finally, Moran stumbles out of the woods, pricked and briared and muddled up.

JOHNSON

Who are you?

MORAN

Who the fuck are you? Goddamn --

JOHNSON

Johnson Shea.

MORAN

Oh.

JOHNSON

And who, as you say, the fuck are you?

MORAN

Dan Moran, newspaper reporter.

JOHNSON

Why didn't you just come down the road?

MORAN

Your wife -- I assume she was --

JOHNSON

Evil-looking woman, sneer on her face?

MORAN

Wouldn't go that far.

(indicating behind him)

She told me to come that way.

JOHNSON
(pointing down the road)
My house is a half mile that way.

MORAN
I walked --

JOHNSON
You've had a good long jaunt, Mr. Moran. And for what purpose?

MORAN
The missing link. I want to do a story about you and the missing link.

JOHNSON
You don't say.

MORAN
Do say.
(takes out pad)
S-H-E-A or S-H-A-Y?

INT. SHEA DINING ROOM

With a WALLOP, a newspaper, "The Sun Times," lands on the table, headline crisp: "Is This America's 'Missing Link'?"

Under the headline, a sub-headline: "Local farmer got a crop he didn't expect."

Under the sub-headline, a sketch of the skull and jawbone, along with an artist's rendering of what the "missing link" might look like, wildly inaccurate and a hoot to look at.

A finger points out the headline -- Johnson Shea's finger.

JOHNSON (O.S.)
Look, Thomas -- now that is beautiful.

Sarah, arms crossed, scowling, gives Thomas a "look."

SARAH

Yes, I'm sure the bank is now going to forgive the mortgage based on --

JOHNSON

(with affection)

The wet blanket. I wonder what else is out there, Thomas? What else haven't we dug up yet?

THOMAS

Dad, don't go getting yourself --

JOHNSON

I'll bet you there's more out there.

Johnson looks back down at the paper.

JOHNSON

I'll just bet you. Shea Man. They're gonna call it Shea Man.

EXT. CITY STREET

A kiosk. A row of newspapers on the counter, one of which, "The Sun Times," in large type and garish font, states: "Is This America's 'Missing Link'?"

A coin lands on the newspaper, and the VOICE of L.T. HOUSEMAN booms.

HOUSEMAN (O.S.)

I'll take that one.

A beefy hand from the kiosk places the newspaper into an equally beefy hand decked with a large emerald ring in a gold setting that glints in the morning sun.

Houseman, 50s, corpulent, bewhiskered, with a ruddy face cunning and handsome, scans the 144-point type headline, reads the sub-headline, and plunges into the article.

HOUSEMAN

Well, well, well.

As he reads, he turns to enter....

EXT. HOUSEMAN MUSEUM

Where a sign, "The L.T. Houseman Museum of Amazing Wonders," runs the entire width of a brick façade bedecked with bunting, pictures of animals and freaks, posters, and other items of renown and announcement.

Houseman's broad back, draped in a fawn-colored light wool suit jacket, with matching pants, and a pair of alligator skin shoes showing just a glimpse of scarlet silk socks, disappears into the building. At that same moment...

INT. JORDAN'S OFFICE

Jordan, at his desk, reads a letter, coffee in one hand. With a soft glide, a newspaper, "The Sun Times," held by Jennings's competent hand, slides into place in the middle of Jordan's desk.

JENNINGS

I thought you might like to see this.

As Jordan's eye jumps from word to word in the 144-point headline, Jennings takes the letter from his hand.

His glance leaps down to the name "Johnson Shea."

Jordan's face shows a mix of extreme displeasure and an effort not to show anything to Jennings, who is not fooled at all. He picks up a pencil and circles, several times, Johnson Shea's name.

JENNINGS

That is the same name as --

JORDAN

Yes.

JENNINGS

A telegram.

JORDAN

Immediately. And a train ticket.

JENNINGS

The professor sets off into the wilds.

JORDAN

This is not funny.

JENNINGS

Yet.

JORDAN

Just do your duties.

JENNINGS
(small salute)

Aye, aye, sir.

Jennings leaves, her sweater billowing like a small cape.

JORDAN
(under his breath)

Aye, aye, my ass.

Jordan eyes laser in on the headline. The pencil point digs into the cheap newsprint as Jordan jabs it sharply again and again, the pocking SOUND changing into...

INT. POST OFFICE

A POSTAL CLERK listens to the click-click-clack of the telegraph and scribbles out a message. A SECOND CLERK pops letters into mail slots. Moran lingers at the counter.

MORAN

Is that for me?

The clerk shakes his head "no," finishes the message.

MORAN

Who's it for?

CLERK

Confidential.

MORAN

Who in this town would get a confidential telegram?

The clerk looks at the second clerk, who is completely pre-occupied with his letter-sorting.

CLERK

Got a buck?

MORAN

Yeah.

The clerk snaps his fingers, and Moran tosses over a dollar. Moran reads the message, then hands it back.

MORAN

That was a buck well-spent.

CLERK

I thought so.

(to second clerk)

Delivering a message. Cover for me.

Moran watches the clerk disappear down the main street. The second clerk stands at the counter.

SECOND CLERK

I got some other telegrams if you're in the mood for paying.

MORAN

(ignoring question)

What's the quickest way to the train station?

EXT. TRAIN STATION

A small crowd of farmers, townspeople, hangers-around on the platform as the iron horse steams into the station with a screeching halt.

Thomas, nervous, stands just to the side and behind his father. And just behind and to the side of Thomas floats Moran, taking notes.

JOHNSON

Do you see him?

And Thomas does, though every part of his mind and body wants to say no. But before Thomas can speak, Jordan waves and strides towards them.

For a moment the three men -- one grizzled, one smooth and erudite, one young and anxious -- face each other.

JORDAN

Mr. Shea, I presume?

Johnson shakes his hand.

JORDAN

Thomas. Well, Mr. Shea -- we have some business together.

Moran bustles up.

MORAN

Professor Jordan --

JORDAN

How do you know who I am?

MORAN

Name's Dan Moran.

JOHNSON

You wrote the article.

MORAN

I am the perp.

JORDAN

How did you know --

MORAN

Investigators investigate.

JORDAN

Mr. Shea, we can't have --

MORAN

Mind if I tag along?

JORDAN

I do. Mr. Shea, we can't --

By this time, people are gaping at the quartet, whispering among themselves: the grapevine at work.

MORAN

(turning to Thomas)

Thomas Shea, right? You were with --

JOHNSON

Leave the boy alone.

MORAN

Then let me tag along, and I promise -- on my mother's grave.

JOHNSON

(to Jordan)

Can't blame a bull-dog for biting.

JORDAN

This is not how we do things.

JOHNSON

Welcome to the country, professor. Mr. Moran -- it'd be a pleasure. I got the wagon over here.

As they walk, Jordan gives Thomas a piercing stare.

JORDAN

Thomas --

But Thomas hurries to help his father with the horses.

INT. HOUSEMAN MUSEUM - HOUSEMAN'S OFFICE

In the midst of a garish office stuffed with curios and quiddities sits REEVES, Houseman's assistant, filing papers and separating the morning mail with practiced wrist-flicks and hand-tosses.

As Houseman enters, Reeves holds his arm straight up, and Houseman tosses his hat, which settles neatly on top of his outstretched fingers. In turn, Reeves, without a wink, re-tosses the hat so that it lands on the top of coat pole made from a narwhal's tusk.

HOUSEMAN

Unbroken record.

REEVES

Don't forget your dinner tonight.

HOUSEMAN

I never forget a dinner with rich businessmen.

REEVES

And they never forget you.

HOUSEMAN

Which is why I can pay you such a handsome salary for your marksmanship.

DOOR TO INNER OFFICE

Houseman pauses and turns.

HOUSEMAN

Get me Chalmers Diggs on the phone.

REEVES

The editor of the Sun Times?

Houseman holds up the newspaper, headline bold.

HOUSEMAN

The very one.

INNER OFFICE

Houseman throws the newspaper down on a desk littered with artifacts, genuine and faked, from around the world. He then tears out the front page of the newspaper.

Along one wall, display cases lined with bottles of all sizes, inside of which float oddities and grotesqueries. Also displays of torqued skulls, fractured bones, homunculi, and other biological curiosities.

DISPLAY CASES

Name cards identify each item -- for instance, "Missing link, found 1907, Borneo." In effect, Houseman's personal hall of fame for missing links.

Houseman opens the last case. He folds the newspaper page so that it sits there blaring out its headline.

HOUSEMAN

Coming soon.

DESK

The phone rings.

HOUSEMAN

(answering)

Thanks, Reeves. Chalmers! No, no, no, this is not about La La, the Siamese twin -- that has been -- I'm glad to hear the relief in your voice. No, I have a favor to ask. You have a reporter on your staff -- Dan Moran. Right, today's front page. About Shea Man. I need to get in touch with him.

INT. SHEA DINING ROOM

The bones on a white cloth, the dirt still clinging to them, lit by a bright lamp hanging overhead. Jordan sits before the bones, Johnson, Thomas, and Moran in the background.

Sarah hands a cup of tea to Jordan.

JORDAN

Many thanks, Mrs. Shea.

The cup shakes slightly in Jordan's slightly nervous hand, nervous because what he sees looks as genuine as it does improbable.

Thomas gnaws on his fingernails. Sarah gently but firmly pushes his hand away from his mouth.

JOHNSON

We didn't wash them. Tried not to handle them much.

Jordan does not take his eyes off the bones as he speaks.

JORDAN

Did you mark the site?

THOMAS

Not exactly.

JORDAN

I taught you --

JOHNSON

They all came from the gravel pit, within yards of each other.

JORDAN

But stratigraphy -- for dating --

But his voice trails off as he looks ever more closely at the bones. He puts the cup down on that table's edge, and Sarah has to catch it -- but Jordan completely ignores it.

MORAN

Professor --

Jordan ignores him as well as he reaches into a bag and pulls out white cotton gloves and a small leather roll, which unrolled is full of what look like dental tools.

Very carefully, everyone hushed and tense, he uses the tools to turn over the bones, poke at them, scrape them. Only when he's done this for a minute or so does he actually pick up one of the skull fragments and the jaw and weigh them in his hands.

JORDAN

The first way to test if bone is new or ancient?

THOMAS

By its weight -- fresh bone, full of organic matter, is light compared to --

JORDAN

Compared to fossilized bone.

Jordan abruptly puts them down and pulls back, as if catching himself at the edge of a cliff, and takes a deep breath.

JORDAN

Thomas, your theory.

Thomas surveys everyone around him.

JOHNSON

Thomas.

THOMAS

Well -- the end of the jaw --

JORDAN

The condyle -- use the right term.

THOMAS

The condyle. Is missing, so it's hard to know how the jaw hinges to the skull.

JORDAN

I noticed that right away.

THOMAS

But all the bones were found close to each other.

JORDAN

The jaw, Thomas -- the jaw.

THOMAS

The color of the jaw and the skull are close. The densities are close.

Moran scribbles. Thomas hesitates. He looks up at his father, whose face is set in anticipation and delight.

THOMAS

I think we have eoanthropus, Professor.

JORDAN

Mr. Shea, would you sit down, please?

Johnson sits, and everyone waits, tensely.

JORDAN

More tests, of course -- more tests -- these will have to go back to the lab. But --

MORAN

Does that "but" mean what I think it means?

JORDAN

This is the Dawn Man --

MORAN

(to himself, writing)

Shea Man is Dawn Man --

JORDAN

Today, Mr. Shea, America triumphs.

Across the page Moran scribbles "America triumphant."

JORDAN

(laughing)

Take that, Piltdown!

MORAN

Piltdown?

THOMAS

The missing link found in England.

Moran scribbles across the paper, "Take that, Piltdown!"

MORAN

"Take that, Piltdown!" Don't know what it means, but it makes a corker sub-head.

INT. LECTURE HALL - TWO MONTHS LATER

Jordan, on stage, speaks to scholars about the missing link. On easels are large drawings of the bones and a sketch of what the missing link might have looked like.

JORDAN

And my laboratory has confirmed, by the most modern methods of analysis, that these bones are genuine, and that their proximity at the site indicates they come from a single individual.

PRESS GALLERY - TO THE SIDE

Moran, surrounded by scribblers, scribbles his own notes.

BACK OF HALL

Thomas, squirreled against the wall, watches everything with eyes that look frightened and cornered. He gnaws his fingernails without pause.

AUDIENCE

A stout, bewhiskered SCHOLAR rises to speak.

SCHOLAR

But have you done the necessary stratigraphic analyses --

JORDAN

I have visited the site myself.

SCHOLAR

In the face of evidence that, to me at least, is quite incredible and hard to swallow --

JORDAN

Most bitter pills are, my friend -- I've been swallowing a few of them over the past month.

A ripple of subdued LAUGHTER.

SCHOLAR

(undeterred)

You are willing to, well, bet your reputation on this Shea Man?

JORDAN

My good friend -- I already have. For science, for the greater glory of my country, for my race -- I already have.

A MURMUR as they comment on Jordan's comment.

PRESS GALLERY

Moran scribbles "I have bet my fortune and honor on the truth."

MORAN

(whispering to himself)

That'll sound better.

STAGE

JORDAN

Now, let me review in more detail --

BACK OF HALL

Thomas turns abruptly and leaves.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE LECTURE HALL

Thomas leans unsteadily against the balcony railing. He closes his eyes and gulps hard several times, as if trying to not throw up.

Thomas does not see Fletcher come up.

FLETCHER

You okay, pal?

Thomas whirls, sees Fletcher's concerned face floating in a haze.

THOMAS

It was hot in there.

FLETCHER

You look green!

THOMAS

I'm fine, I'm fine -- I've just got to get some air.

Fletcher watches Thomas unsteadily make his way down the stairs and out of the building.

FLETCHER

Must've been really hot in there.

INT. HOUSEMAN'S OFFICE

Reeves types a letter, completely ignoring Moran sitting in a leather chair outfitted with elephant legs.

REEVES

(without looking up)

Your hat. You can't wear your hat in here.

MORAN

All right.

Moran takes off his hat but doesn't know where to put it.

REEVES

Toss it here.

Moran hesitates, then sails it toward Reeves, who catches it and, in a continuous motion, re-directs it, where it settles on the tip of a rack of antlers.

What sounds like the Westminster CHIMES played on a bunch of tin cans breaks the air.

REEVES

(without looking up)

He'll see you now.

INT. HOUSEMAN'S INNER OFFICE

Moran sees no one behind the desk.

HOUSEMAN (O.S.)

Over here.

Moran finds Houseman in front of the wall of missing links. Moran doesn't know whether to be impressed or appalled.

HOUSEMAN

Don't worry -- no family resemblance to you. Filed your story yet?

MORAN

(still transfixed)

Yes.

HOUSEMAN

Well? Mr. Moran?

Moran tears his eyes away from the display and pulls his pad out of his pocket.

MORAN

I quote Professor Jordan's quote: "I have bet my fortune and honor on the truth."

HOUSEMAN

Good enough for me. Care to take another visit to the countryside?

But Moran is mesmerized again by the display, and Houseman lets him gaze while he churns over his next plan.

INT. DORMITORY ROOM

Thomas sits in the dark. Stray light plays off the rime on the window. Fletcher's VOICE comes out of the darkness.

FLETCHER

Thomas, you here?

A hesitation, then...

THOMAS

Yes.

FLETCHER

Didn't see you at dinner, the library.

THOMAS

I'm fine.

FLETCHER

Always a bad liar.

THOMAS

I'd like to be alone.

But Fletcher sits down, ignoring the request.

THOMAS

I'd like to be alone.

FLETCHER

You shouldn't lie to a preacher's son.

Silence -- perhaps the SIGH of wind outside the window.

FLETCHER

Ever since those bones --

THOMAS

Fletch -- is it wrong if something you did wrong makes someone else happy?

More silence, thoughtful.

FLETCHER

How happy is happy if you always got a sword hanging over your head?

More silence.

FLETCHER

I have no idea if that's a good answer.

THOMAS

Neither do I.

FLETCHER

How about this? Mixing sugar with shit doesn't make the shit taste any better.

They both stare out the window as the wind WHISTLES by.

EXT. SHEA PORCH

Knuckles RAPPING on the front door, the knuckles of Dan Moran. Houseman stands next to him, dressed in a huge fur coat made from the pelts of some unnamable exotic animal.

FRONT YARD

Reeves sits and read in a snappy car, the Houseman insignia embedded on all the doors and the hood.

PORCH

Johnson Shea answers the door.

HOUSEMAN
Mr. Shea?

JOHNSON
I got your telegram.

HOUSEMAN
May we?

Johnson stands back as they enter the house.

INT. DINING ROOM

Sarah serves tea, bread, and jam, then sits. A tense silence, though Houseman does not seem tense at all.

SARAH
Would your driver like anything?

HOUSEMAN
He's quite self-sufficient. Do you like the car?

JOHNSON
It's --

HOUSEMAN

It's a model not even on the market yet -- I know the manufacturer personally. He made it just for me.

SARAH

Mr. Houseman, we are very impressed. Our neighbors are impressed.

HOUSEMAN

"Now what?" you mean?

SARAH

Exactly.

JOHNSON

It doesn't do to be rude.

SARAH

This is a man who made the money sitting in the yard out there from being rude. And crude.

HOUSEMAN

And lewd. Money in all three. But the funny thing, Mrs. Shea? The money stays innocent, free and clear, because you can put it to anything you want. I have seen money start out crude and end up angelic -- washed clean. Money is the true universal solvent.

SARAH

And you want to help us get our wings?

HOUSEMAN

As you said: Exactly.

SARAH

Well, we are not interested --

JOHNSON

Sarah. I think we should let our guest speak his mind.

SARAH

Johnson --

JOHNSON

Do you know where the next few mortgage payments are coming from? I don't.

Silence as Sarah shoots Johnson a hard and hurt look.

SARAH

If you'll excuse me --

Sarah exits into the kitchen.

HOUSEMAN

I don't want to be the cause --

JOHNSON

She'll be fine.

INT. KITCHEN

Sarah rattles around, furious. She then plants herself by the door, looking through the crack, her breathing heavy, her hands shaking.

INT. DINING ROOM

HOUSEMAN

I don't want to be hypothetical about this, Mr. Shea. Mr. Moran here has confirmed for me that Professor Jordan has authenticated the bones.

Houseman gestures to Moran, who recites from memory.

MORAN

"I have bet my fortune and honor on the truth." Exact quote.

HOUSEMAN

The question that comes to me is this: who owns Shea Man? Because he who owns the bones -- do you see my drift?

JOHNSON

What would you want with the bones?

HOUSEMAN

What would I want with the bones? Mr. Johnson, you worry about your mortgage payment. How would you like to never hear the word "mortgage" again?

INT. KITCHEN

Sarah, tense, slams her hand gently against the door frame.

SARAH

Don't.

INT. DINING ROOM

JOHNSON

That would be a word worth losing.

HOUSEMAN

Then let me show you how.

Houseman gestures again to Moran, who pulls out a neatly folded paper from his inside pocket and hands it to Houseman, who spreads it open on the table. In great block lettering, crisp against the white of the paper, is a title: "The Museum of the Missing Link."

HOUSEMAN

Let me explain.

EXT. PORCH - SEVERAL HOURS LATER

Johnson watches Houseman's car pull away.

INT. DINING ROOM

Sarah scowls at the paper with its block lettering.

JOHNSON

Don't say a word.

Several beats of tense silence.

JOHNSON

Well, say something!

SARAH

I'm not supposed to say a word.

JOHNSON

I'll give you ten.

SARAH

How's it feel to sell your soul to the devil?

JOHNSON

Pretty good, actually.

Johnson suddenly looks very deflated, not able to keep up this tough stance at all. He sits heavily.

JOHNSON

Sarah, we got no pot to piss in -- and this Houseman is giving us the pot.

SARAH

And the piss.

JOHNSON

What do you want me to do? I'm supposed to take care of my family -- what do you want me to do?

Sarah sits next to him, strokes his hair.

SARAH

We'll make it through -- we always do.

But this angers Johnson, who bounces out of his chair.

JOHNSON

No we won't! You know we won't! We're in that handbasket that's always going to hell -- and there's no fooling ourselves. I am going to get those bones -- they're mine --

SARAH

And Thomas'.

JOHNSON

Then we are going to get those bones, and I'm going to let this Houseman guy set up his museum, and we are going to make ourselves some money!

Sarah spins the paper on the table.

SARAH

We could call this house the museum of missing links.

INT. JORDAN'S OFFICE - OUTER LOBBY - SEVERAL DAYS LATER

Jennings sits perfectly still at her desk as the drum of ANGRY VOICES floats out of Jordan's inner office. A lull -- and Jennings quickly types a few words. The voices start up again -- she stops to listen.

INT. JORDAN'S OFFICE

Jordan, Johnson, Houseman, Moran, and DANIEL GOLENBOCK, Houseman's lawyer, sit in a tense circle. Golenbock wears pince-nez attached to a cord strung with small pearls. Thomas stands off to the side, chewing on his fingernails.

JORDAN

You can't take the bones!

HOUSEMAN

And again I'll have Mr. Golenbock render his legal opinion.

GOLENBOCK

The bones were found --

JORDAN

I know where the bones were found! Mr. Shea, you can't --

Johnson goes to speak, but Houseman halts him and gestures to Golenbock, who opens his briefcase, takes out a legal document, and hands it to Jordan.

HOUSEMAN

I allowed Mr. Johnson to talk before, but that, instead, will speak. You'll notice that it's a power of attorney.

JORDAN

So, you own the bones now.

GOLENBOCK

No -- we simply speak for the bones. Mr. Johnson still owns them.

JORDAN

Mr. Johnson --

HOUSEMAN

Look at me. We have come for their release. Unless you want the police to take them away for me, which we have every right --

Jordan, seething, sweeps the legal document off the desk.

INT. JORDAN'S OFFICE - OUTER LOBBY

Jennings picks up a toy from her desk, where by winding it up, two boxers throw punches at each other. She winds it up and watches the figures pummel the air.

INT. JORDAN'S OFFICE

JORDAN

You don't know what you're doing.

Golenbock retrieves the legal document, then takes out a handkerchief and very carefully cleans his pince-nez.

HOUSEMAN

I -- we -- know exactly what we're doing.

JORDAN

I've staked my reputation!

HOUSEMAN

'Tis bitter -- I understand. Would there be anything that would sweeten life for you at this moment?

JORDAN

What do you mean?

Houseman gestures, and Golenbock retrieves another document from the depths of his briefcase, hands it to Jordan.

JORDAN

What is this?

HOUSEMAN

A contract. That would allow you sole access to Shea Man for research. Only you, Dr. Jordan. Only you would be able to publish about them, talk about them, pontificate about them.

JORDAN

That goes against everything I've ever believed -- about sharing knowledge --

HOUSEMAN

Charitable -- I commend it. Don't you commend it, Mr. Golenbock? But if it's facts you deal in, deal in this: either you sign, or you will never handle these bones again.

INT. JORDAN'S OFFICE - OUTER LOBBY

Jennings winds up the toy, and this time, one boxer hits the other boxer, and the other boxer's head pops off, held by a single string. Knock-out.

INT. JORDAN'S OFFICE

JORDAN

Why me?

JOHNSON

Dr. Jordan --

HOUSEMAN

(holding up hand)

A gift from Mr. Johnson. He thanks you for what you've done for Thomas.

JORDAN

I can't -- I can't --

HOUSEMAN

I don't really care about scientific advancement, the search for knowledge, and all that. But when a scientist like yourself blesses these bones -- opportunities arise.

Houseman gestures again to Golenbock, who takes a poster out of his briefcase and holds it up -- the usual garish Houseman poster, for the new "Museum of the Missing Link."

Houseman points to a line on the poster.

HOUSEMAN

I had this made up to show you something -- right there. "As verified by Dr. Harlan Jordan" --

JORDAN

I can read it.

HOUSEMAN

A new approach for me -- truth in advertising. Your name, right there -- stamp of approval -- that's worth money. To me. And to you.

INT. JORDAN'S OFFICE - OUTER LOBBY

Jennings re-sets the boxers -- same result.

INT. JORDAN'S OFFICE

JORDAN

I don't care --

HOUSEMAN

Simple math, Dr. Jordan -- you will make more money than your pitiful salary will ever bring you, and you can apply that money to your "work." Make contributions to young scholars like Thomas -- opportunities that otherwise will never exist as long as you wait upon the kind heart of the

legislature. Dr. Jordan, more money -- more freedom.
More glory for America.

Jordan takes a slow look at everyone, then down at the formidable legal document.

INT. JORDAN'S OFFICE - OUTER LOBBY

Both boxers connect, and both heads pop back.

INT. HOUSEMAN'S OFFICE - A MONTH LATER

On a large table in Houseman's office is a model of his new Museum of the Missing Link. Moran with a clipboard, now Houseman's public relations go-to guy for this project. Gathered are reporters and others. Food and drink abound. Johnson stands awkwardly, unsure. Thomas skirts the crowd.

HOUSEMAN

And the newest amusement for the well-to-do. Travelers
will catch the train here in the city, then end up here --

Houseman points to a renovated train station.

HOUSEMAN

Take up their hotel rooms here --

Points to a grand hotel, ornamented and ornate.

HOUSEMAN

Be driven out to the site of the world-famous find --

Points to the black ribbon flowing out to the Shea house.

HOUSEMAN

On the newly macadamized road. And visit the newest
addition to the L.T. Houseman caravan of wonders: the
Museum of the Missing Link. Mr. Moran?

MORAN

We have a new name for this -- we're calling it a "theme
park" -- and --

CORNER OF THE ROOM

To Thomas, the voices BUZZ in his ears, vover the POUNDING blood.

He catches his father's eye, and Johnson smiles wanly at him, completely at sea, a little stunned.

THOMAS' VISION

Suddenly, everyone in the room becomes skeletons, with a human skull and an ape jaw. They still hold drinks and eat (though the food and drink dribble out of their rib cages) and talk (their teeth CLACKING like typewriter keys).

Thomas looks at himself -- nothing but bones as well.

He looks at Houseman who, unlike others, has horns glued to his skull, and in his eye sockets are dice spinning like a slot machine. Houseman, returning Thomas' look, smiles, the bones stretching grotesquely.

Suddenly, a VOICE, thick and gross.

VOICE (O.S.)

Are you all right?

Again, suddenly, Thomas' vision clears.

HOUSEMAN'S OFFICE

Everyone is looking at him while Johnson stands next to his son, a hand on his arm, shaking him gently.

JOHNSON

Thomas -- Mr. Houseman wants to introduce you.

Thomas gives everyone a wan smile and waves. They just as quickly turn away, he and his father exiled in the corner.

JOHNSON

This is out of our hands, isn't it?

Thomas nods yes, afraid. The people hover over the model, the air HUMMING with their deal- and image-making.

EXT. TOWN - MAIN STREET

Houseman overseeing the bustle of the renovation of the train station and the hotel.

EXT. TOWN - ROAD

Houseman moves among the workers laying the new road from the town out to the Johnson house.

EXT. JOHNSON HOUSE

Houseman moves among the workers spreading out the new parking lot, renovating the buildings on the property. Sarah watches, arms crossed, from the porch. Houseman waves to her, but she remains impassive.

INT. HOUSEMAN'S OFFICE

Reeves serves food and drink to Houseman as he looks at the galley proofs of two books in front of him. The title page of one: "Onward and Upward: A Popular History of Mankind, by Prof. Harlan Jordan. Published by L.T. Houseman Press." The second title page: "How The Missing Link Was Found, by D. Moran. Published by L.T. Houseman Press."

HOUSEMAN

(pointing to Moran's book)

Especially the chapter on the sex lives of missing links. It makes history.

REEVES

Not to mention money.

HOUSEMAN

Since when in this house have the two ever parted company?

REEVES

(smiling)

And that is why I live to serve.

INT. JORDAN'S WORKSHOP

Thomas, in lab coat, works with Jordan to use castings to re-create the "skull," copies of which will end up in gift shops and other such stores.

EXT. TOWN

Opening day of the "theme park," a gala event, the town inundated with hordes, money flowing easily.

INT. JORDAN'S WORKSHOP

The skull progresses, piece by glued-together piece.

INT. MUSEUM

Houseman conducts a tour for his rich friends, pointing out the gift shop, where, featured prominently, are row on row of the skulls. Also prominent is Houseman's collection of oddities and an extensive diorama of "The Ascent of Man," with the missing link displayed front and center.

INT. JORDAN'S WORKSHOP

The skull moves closer to completion.

EXT. SITE

Johnson conducts a visit for those same friends. The site now has a diorama of how the creature must have looked and lived -- all of which looks absurd, and all of which is ooh'd and aah'd over.

INT. JORDAN'S WORKSHOP

A finished skull sits to one side.

INT. MUSEUM - THAT NIGHT

A celebration where rural townsfolk and city people dance, drink, and eat -- a riot of class-mixing fueled by alcohol and illusions.

INT. DORMITORY - JUST BEFORE SUNRISE

Thomas sits in the dark. Fletcher asleep.

THOMAS

Fletch.

No response.

THOMAS

Fletch.

No response. Thomas gets up, kneels by Fletch's bed, stares. A pause, then Fletch pops open his eyes.

FLETCHER

What?

THOMAS

You any good at confessions?

FLETCHER

That's my old man's game.

THOMAS

Because I am sitting in the dark.

FLETCHER

What are you talking about?

THOMAS

The museum opened last night.

FLETCHER

We missed it.

THOMAS

And people are happy, and some money's coming in.

FLETCHER

Not just "some," from what Houseman says.

Thomas takes a big pause.

FLETCHER

And?

THOMAS

And Fletch -- it's all a lie. A big, fat, sweaty lie.

FLETCHER

There's a beginning to this, right?

INT. JORDAN'S OFFICE - MORNING

JORDAN

You stole the bones?

INT. JORDAN'S OFFICE - OUTER LOBBY

Jennings has a water glass stuck to the door in order to hear the conversation.

INSIDE THE GLASS

A clear view of Jennings's ear as the VOICES echo.

JORDAN (O.S.)

You stole the bones?

THOMAS (O.S.)

Yes.

JORDAN (O.S.)

Why? Why? Why? Miss Jennings! Miss Jennings!

DESK

Jennings slams the glass down, a painful ringing in her ear, as Jordan slams open the door.

JORDAN

Houseman, on the phone -- now! And train tickets!

INT. SHEA DINING ROOM - EVENING

Johnson, Sarah, Jordan, Thomas, Fletcher, Houseman, Moran -- all shoehorned in, everyone tense. Except for Houseman, who cleans his nails with what looks like a well-filed shark's tooth.

HOUSEMAN

Well, have we all eaten a big enough meal of doom and disaster?

JORDAN

You don't have a reputation that's ruined.

HOUSEMAN

Who outside this room knows what we know? Hmm?

A pause.

JORDAN

My secretary, Jennings. She eavesdropped through a water glass.

HOUSEMAN

And is she a poor working girl with something like an aged mother at home?

JORDAN

Father with lung disease.

HOUSEMAN

A generous contribution to his health care would go a long way. My man Reeves -- but he knows who owns his tongue. So, no one, then, outside our little circle.

SARAH

I know what you're getting at.

HOUSEMAN

Do you?

SARAH

Do you know what he's getting at?

But SILENCE greets her because everyone knows the answer.

INT. MUSEUM OF THE MISSING LINK

SARAH (VOICEOVER)

Do you know what he's getting at?

Various faces, one after the other, all looking as if expecting an answer: the yeti, the two-headed grizzly, the one-eyed fetus floating in formaldehyde, and so on.

INT. DINING ROOM

SARAH

You won't get away with it.

HOUSEMAN

Thomas --

SARAH

You leave him out of this.

HOUSEMAN

(ignoring her)

Thomas, everything you did, you did out of love -- isn't that right?

THOMAS

Yes.

SARAH

(to Thomas)

You don't have to talk to him.

INT. HOTEL - OFFICE

HOUSEMAN (VOICEOVER)

Love, yes.

THOMAS (VOICEOVER)

Yes.

The HOTEL OWNER dances with his WIFE as he counts up the day's receipts -- more money than they have ever known.

INT. DINING ROOM

HOUSEMAN

And would you want everything good that's now happened to the people you love -- money for your parents, for the town, for Professor Jordan --

JORDAN

Tainted --

HOUSEMAN

Would you want all of that to go away?

THOMAS

But I stole and I cheated and it's all a lie.

HOUSEMAN

You didn't answer my question. Would you want things to go back to the way they were before? Banks foreclosing. People moving away -- friends you'd known all your life gone. The town you grew up in dying.

SARAH

You are the devil!

HOUSEMAN

(again ignoring her)

Would you?

All eyes focused on Thomas.

THOMAS

No.

HOUSEMAN

Because you love them.

THOMAS

Yes.

(to Sarah)

It's true!

HOUSEMAN

Because you did what you did out of love.

THOMAS

Yes.

HOUSEMAN

Would any of you? Want to go back?

EXT. GRAVEL PIT - DIORAMA

HOUSEMAN (VOICEOVER)

Would you want to go back?

The face of the missing link stares into the darkness.

INT. DINING ROOM

HOUSEMAN

I'm going to take your silence as a "no."

JORDAN

Not for me. My reputation as an honest scientist is shot full of holes.

HOUSEMAN

I was getting to you.

JORDAN

You're getting to me, all right.

HOUSEMAN

Don't bite the hand that feeds you yet. Let me ask you this, Professor: so what if it's all a fake?

JORDAN

So what? So what? You can't do proper science --

INT. MUSEUM GIFT SHOP

JORDAN (VOICEOVER)

-- if what you're putting out there is fake!

Missing link skulls stare into the darkness on all manner of gift shop kitsch.

INT. DINING ROOM

HOUSEMAN

False things are not a part of science? I thought that --

JORDAN

Well, of course they are -- you cut out the false things to get the truth.

HOUSEMAN

Is there a timeline for that?

JORDAN

What?

SARAH

Man --

JORDAN

What?

SARAH

Man, oh man alive. You are slick, Mr. Houseman.

HOUSEMAN

(smiling)

The son obviously gets part of his intelligence from his mother.

JORDAN

What?

SARAH

Let's say that at some future date --

HOUSEMAN

Twenty years.

SARAH

-- it becomes known --

HOUSEMAN

Even by the scientist who "proved" it twenty years earlier --

SARAH

That eoanthropus libertatis was an elaborate hoax --

HOUSEMAN

And that science --

JORDAN

Wait, wait --

HOUSEMAN

In its ever-onward quest for truth --

MORAN

I get it!

JOHNSON

What?

JORDAN

Wait!

HOUSEMAN

Uncovers and corrects, reveals and re-directs --

JORDAN

You're suggesting --

SARAH

He is definitely suggesting.

MORAN

Professor, if it's a couple of double fins down the road --

HOUSEMAN

Science, ever self-correcting.

MORAN

You talk or don't talk as you see fit!

HOUSEMAN

And since you control access to the bones, by contract -- a legal contract, which you have signed, by the way --

MORAN

Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones!

HOUSEMAN

The professor makes a tidy sum with the publication of his popular history of human evolution --

MORAN

I get to keep my book on the hook.

HOUSEMAN

The museum -- which has never pretended to be a model of science anyway -- continues to roll on.

SARAH

The town keeps cashing in --

HOUSEMAN

Thomas gets a fine education all the way to a professorship if he wants.

JOHNSON

And everyone becomes happy.

HOUSEMAN

On board everyone except for --
 (pointing at Fletcher)
 -- him.

Fletcher has poured out a little pile of salt from the shaker, into which he etches figures with his fingertip.

FLETCHER

I'm with Thomas. "Mum" is my word of the day.

HOUSEMAN

All right.

(to all)

So? Now that we all know the truth -- we band of brothers
-- does anyone else need to know? Hm?

Everyone looks squarely at each other.

EXT. BEACH IN FLORIDA - YEARS LATER

Gentle waves on a beach. Under dual umbrellas on lounges lay Johnson and Sarah, cool drinks by their side, eyes closed, breathing easily.

INT. BOOKSTORE

People wait to have their copies of "The Apeman Cometh" signed by a beaming Harlan Jordan, the fifth in his series of Apeman science fiction novels.

INT. OFFICE - THE DAILY TAB

A stogie-chomping Dan Moran barks out orders to copy boys, writers, and others as they get the next issue of "The Daily Tab" ready, with the headline "Baby Born Reciting The Bible" and a front-page "photo" of a three-headed goat.

INT. HOUSEMAN BUILDING

Frosted glass office door with "Thomas Shea, President / Houseman Advertising.

INT. OFFICE - HOUSEMAN ADVERTISING

In lavishly appointed conference room, Thomas and Fletcher meet with makers of a hemorrhoid cream. On one easel, a large sign, titled "Your Name" and under that, "Itch-Free Cream." On another easel, another sign,

titled "Our Name" and under that, "Calmess." They talk enthusiastically about their elaborate ad campaign for the hemorrhoid cream.

INT. HOUSEMAN'S OFFICE

On Houseman's desk sits a burlap bag, tied with twine. Houseman picks it up, lets it drop with a THUNK.

REEVES

Dem bone, dem bones --

HOUSEMAN

It's time.

Houseman hands the bag to Reeves.

EXT. FERRY

Reeves stands on the deck of a ferry plying the river, bag in hand. By the railing, with no one looking, he lets go of the bag, and it disappears into the river.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - 100,000 YEARS AGO

An exact replica of the missing link find himself surrounded by a group of armed Homo sapiens, composed of creatures that look incredibly like Johnson, Sarah, Houseman, Jordan, Thomas, Fletcher, and Moran. As they proceed to beat the missing link to death, a VOICE, that of Jennings, now a guide for the Houseman Museum, speaks.

JENNINGS (VOICEOVER)

The struggle for survival was fierce --

INT. HOUSEMAN MUSEUM - DIORAMA

A group of schoolchildren listen raptly to Jennings recite the story of survival.

JENNINGS

And our race won out because we had more intelligence
and better weapons.

Jennings points out the various figures in the diorama as she speaks.

JENNINGS

That poor missing link -- an inferior race -- never had a chance. Inferior races never do. Now, over here --

Jennings moves the group to another exhibit as the air fills with the hustle and bustle of crowds paying their money to see the wonders of the Houseman Museum.

INT. DEVELOPMENT OFFICE - TOP UNIVERSITY - 15 YEARS LATER

Thomas and Fletcher huddle with the PR DIRECTOR of a major university fleshing out the upcoming giving campaign. They have come far from the days of hemorrhoids.

Charts, potential slogans, graphics -- shirtsleeves rolled up, brisk pace.

DIRECTOR

(pointing at chart)

Now, to increase the endowment by 30 percent --

A business-like KNOCK on the door.

DIRECTOR

Excuse me. Come in!

A SECRETARY carries in both a poster and a worried look.

SECRETARY

Sir --

DIRECTOR

What is it?

She hands him the poster. A frown settles on the director's face.

SECRETARY

I've got reporters crawling everywhere, I've got radio people wanting to set up a broadcast, newsreel people --

THOMAS

What's the problem?

DIRECTOR

(handing over poster)

Academic freedom.

As Thomas and Fletch read the poster, they struggle to keep the horror off their faces.

The poster: "Shea Man, Negroids, and Evolution: The Scientific Case for Segregation." Under that: "Professor Charles Herrnstein, Department of Anthropology."

DIRECTOR

Supposed to be just a simple keynote address at an obscure conference.

THOMAS

I can see your problem.

DIRECTOR

(to secretary)

Special protocol -- passes -- limited number -- my daughter's age, twelve, by lottery. Everyone else -- boilerplate later.

The secretary turns to go, but the director speaks again.

DIRECTOR

Keep me updated, every couple of hours. We don't need a race war inside the ivied walls.

(secretary leaves)

Now, back to getting the wealthy alumni to cough up.

INT. OFFICE - HOUSEMAN ADVERTISING

Thomas and Fletch throw down their charts and briefcases, loosen their ties, unbutton their jackets, and stare.

FLETCH

I need a drink.

THOMAS

A drink would help.

But they don't move an inch.

THOMAS

I have to call.

FLETCH

I know. Bourbon or scotch?

THOMAS

One for each hand.

DESK

Thomas punches the intercom.

THOMAS

Betty? I need your special magic. In two minutes I want you to track down the phone number of one Harlan Jordan.

BETTY (O.S.)

The science fiction writer?

THOMAS

That very one.

BETTY (O.S.)

I have his newest Aileron book right by my bed.

THOMAS

To each his own partner. Put him through directly to me.

BETTY (O.S.)

Up, up, and away!

Fletch brings over three glasses.

FLETCH

Scotch for the right, bourbon for the left.

(hold up his glass)

Vodka for me, right down the middle.

They both sip and stare at the phone.

INT. OFFICE OF HARLAN JORDAN

An older Jordan at a desk completely bare except for his typewriter and a neat pile of finished pages. The patient phone RINGS sweetly.

JORDAN
(picking up phone)

Hello?

As he listens, he slowly pushes the typewriter forward so that he can rest his elbows on the desk's edge.

INT. OFFICE - HOUSEMAN ADVERTISING

Thomas and Fletch do not even jump when Betty announces that Harlan Jordan is on the line. Thomas pushes the speakerphone button as if it were dynamite.

THOMAS
Hello, Harlan. I've got Fletch here.

FLETCH
Hel-lo.

INTERCUT BETWEEN THOMAS AND JORDAN

THOMAS
Sorry to bother you on what is probably a nice day where you are, but do you believe in ghosts?

JORDAN
If you're calling me now, then I am going to have to believe.

THOMAS
Because we are having a visitation.

FLETCH
(out of Jordan's earshot)
The sins of the fathers --

THOMAS
Have you heard of Charles Herrnstein?

Jordan pushes the typewriter even further away from him.

JORDAN

Yes.

THOMAS

I have a poster here.

JORDAN

I know. I heard. I still have ties.

THOMAS

Were you going to do anything?

Jordan does not answer, simply taps the "X" key on the typewriter.

THOMAS

So?

JORDAN

So it's time to put old ghosts to rest, isn't it?

FLETCH

An exorcism.

JORDAN

Reserve me a room at the Plaza. Leave a message where to meet you. I can get a plane out of here tomorrow.

THOMAS

You once told me that fossils never stop talking.

But Jordan has already hung up.

FLETCH

(finishing vodka)

Fossils never shut up.

THOMAS

I'll call my parents.

FLETCH

I'll call Moran. And Houseman, speaking of fossils.

A heavy SILENCE between them, punctuated by STREET NOISES and OFFICE SOUNDS from the outer office.

FLETCH

Did you really think it would never come back?

THOMAS

I hoped.

FLETCH

Me, too.

THOMAS

Stupid, eh?

FLETCH

Ah, the right thing -- why doesn't it feel so good?

They clink glasses, and Fletch downs the bourbon while Thomas does the same with the scotch.

INT. BEDROOM OF JOHNSON AND SARAH

Johnson and Sara put down their individual telephones. Sarah goes to the closet, pulls down a suitcase, and starts stuffing clothes into it.

SARAH

It's about time.

INT. EDITOR'S OFFICE - THE DAILY TAB

Moran rocks in his sumptuous leather chair until, with a decisive jolt, he rocks forward, punches a button on his phone, and barks out an order.

MORAN

Jameson? I got a conference I want you to cover. For our upscale rag.

INT. OFFICE - HOUSEMAN MUSEUM

Houseman, much older but still perked and sly, puts down the telephone, then launches full, deep belly LAUGHS.

HOUSEMAN

Reeves!

Reeves, hardly looking a day older, enters.

HOUSEMAN

The safe -- bring me the bag in the upper compartment.

Reeves, confused by the LAUGHTER, swings back a portrait of a bearded lady, opens a large safe, unlocks the upper compartment, and pulls out a burlap bag exactly like the one Reeves threw into the river. Houseman SLAPS his desk.

HOUSEMAN

Right here.

Which Reeves does, the bag landing with a solid THUNK. Reeves cocks his head, points to the bag.

HOUSEMAN

Yours was full of shrunken heads I didn't need anymore.

INT. RESTAURANT, BACK ROOM - SEVERAL DAYS LATER

Thomas, Fletch, Johnson, Sarah, Jordan, Moran -- all around a large circular table with a shining white tablecloth.

From the outer restaurant, they hear the familiar BOOM of Houseman's VOICE, and then the force that is Houseman sweeps in. The only difference between then and now is that he carries a polished walking stick as tall as he is.

He also holds a burlap bag.

HOUSEMAN

When shall we seven meet again, in thunder, lightning, or
in rain?

THOMAS

When the hurlyburly's done, when the battle's lost and won.
(to Jordan)
I finally read the list.

Houseman sits. He places the bag gently beside his chair.

HOUSEMAN

Now, besides dinner, what is our plan?

INT. LECTURE HALL

CHARLES HERRNSTEIN, brash, boiling, older than he looks, stands triumphant behind a lectern. A small table, filled with books and papers, stands next to the lectern.

Ranks of suited men -- and a sprinkling of women -- none of them dark-skinned -- spread in front of him, looking at the slide of Shea Man's skull thrown up on the large screen.

HERRNSTEIN

Though the actual Shea Man bones have been mysteriously lost, innumerable casts of the reconstructed skull exist, one of which you see here. Next.

The slide changes: Shea Man as drawn by an artist.

HERRNSTEIN

That speaks for itself. Next.

The slide changes: Shea Man on the left, a Negroid drawing on the right.

BACK OF LECTURE HALL

The seven move smoothly through the paneled doors, Jordan in the lead.

STAGE

HERRNSTEIN

Modern anthropologists have tried mightily to erase what they believed was the racist science of the 19th century -- but they were wrong to do so. Races do exist, and they differ in their abilities, and the dark-skinned races rank lower than the white race, with Shea Man --

BACK OF LECTURE HALL

Houseman BANGS his walking stick several times, and its resonant BOOM turns everyone around.

THOMAS' VISION

Everyone turning to face them is dressed as if they were the BARBARIANS attacking Rome, faces in a snarl, canines bared, rude weapons ready to disembowel.

BACK OF LECTURE HALL

Houseman's VOICE brings Thomas out of the vision.

INTERCUT BETWEEN STAGE AND BACK OF LECTURE HALL

HOUSEMAN

Hear ye, hear ye, hear ye.

JORDAN

Mr. Herrnstein.

HERRNSTEIN

Doctor. And who are you?

JORDAN

You are seriously, seriously mistaken.

HERRNSTEIN

Who are you?

Moran looks over to the media section, catches the eye of his REPORTER, and gives him a thumbs-up. The reporter gives Moran a thumbs-up back.

Herrnstein watches the group moves to the stage, each head pivoting to trace their journey, the communal movement sounding like WIND in the suddenly quiet lecture hall.

THOMAS' VISION

All seven of them, dressed barely in torn togas and laurel wreaths, parade through a gauntlet of spears and SCREAMS.

STAGE

The seven ascend to the stage.

MEDIA SECTION

Photographers pop off shots, the reporters scribble, a movie camera grinds out footage.

STAGE

HERRNSTEIN

You can't --

But Houseman moves Herrnstein aside easily with his stick, and Jordan steps up to the microphone. Houseman drops the burlap bag on the table beside the lectern: THUNK.

JORDAN

My name is Harlan Jordan. Formerly Professor Harlan Jordan. Some of you may know me. The -- what? -- well, whatever I was, my name has been attached to that thing up there.

WHISPERING whips through the crowd. Jordan nods to Houseman, who hands his stick to Thomas, unties the bag, and gently dumps out Shea Man.

JORDAN

And to these as well.

HERRNSTEIN

They were lost.

HOUSEMAN

Once was lost has now been found. Hallelujah!

Herrnstein goes to touch them.

HOUSEMAN

Off!

JORDAN

Professor Herrnstein -- whatever your ideas -- no matter how wrong they are -- and they are very wrong -- you can't base any of them on Shea Man. Because he never existed. Never. Existed. We -- the seven of us -- have a story to tell you. Let me start.

THOMAS' VISION

As Jordan speaks, Thomas sees, not a crowd of barbarian academics, but a vast field of sunflowers waving slowly in the wind under a bright nourishing sun.

INT. SCREENING ROOM - ONE YEAR LATER

Light flickers over the seven as they watch a trailer for "ShaMan," a superhero who combines in himself both animal and human and fights against prejudice everywhere.

Credits follow the trailer. Clearly emblazoned on the screen is the following: "Screenplay by Harlan Jordan. From a story conceived by Johnson Shea, Sarah Shea, Thomas Shea, Fletcher Calvin, Dan Moran, and L.T. Houseman."

Lights come up, and they all turn to Jordan.

SARAH

Like it a lot.

JOHNSON

I second that.

MORAN

It's got the juice.

HOUSEMAN

Already booked into my theatres for its opening. With expert publicity by --

THOMAS

Thomas/Fletcher Inc.

FLETCHER

And a great print campaign in --

MORAN

The Daily Tab's family of newspapers and magazines. And
a top-dog product line of toys and stuff --

JOHNSON

By J&S Manufacturing Enterprises, based in sunny Miami,
Florida.

HOUSEMAN

(to Jordan)

You're looking pensive, my friend.

JORDAN

I was just thinking what a good friend Shea Man -- ShaMan
-- has been.

HOUSEMAN

Here, here.

ALL

Here, here.

JORDAN

(quoting)

"With a clarion call -- "

SARAH

"ShaMan fights -- "

THOMAS

"For justice to all -- "

FLETCHER

"And everyone's rights."

THOMAS' VISION

On the screen in a packed movie theatre ShaMan swoops through the sky defeating evildoers while MARCHING MUSIC prompts the movie audience of old and young alike to applaud wildly.

FADE OUT

Georgia's Miss Baby

FADE IN:

EXT. MEMORIAL DRIVE, CAMBRIDGE

Traffic speeding along. Sunlight off the Charles River.

Placard on screen: "September 11, 2001."

EXT. MELANDA SMITH'S CAR

License plate: "Retired Air Force," with insignia.

INT. CAR

MELANDA SMITH, mid-50s, Caucasian, speaking on a cell phone to her son, MICHAEL. Small flag pin and a retired Air Force pin on the lapel of her coat. Music on the radio.

MELANDA

Michael, I saw the shoes this morning -- you've got to do more to protect them if they're going to last you through the season.

EXT. TRAFFIC LIGHT - MEMORIAL DRIVE

Red light at the intersection with the bridge on River Street. Melanda stops second in line.

INT. MELANDA'S CAR

Music stops -- announcer's VOICE.

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE

We interrupt our programming --

Melanda turns down the volume.

MELANDA

And one more thing. Did you send in that rebate? They're only going to honor it until the end of the month.

EXT. FIRST TRAFFIC LIGHT - BRIDGE

Car bullets through just as the light changes to red.

INT. MELANDA'S CAR

Melanda can see the bridge traffic light turn yellow, gets ready to pull out.

MELANDA

And one more thing: I love you. Sorry I had to leave so early this morning.

Light turns green.

EXT. BRIDGE

Car speeds over the crest of the bridge.

INT. MELANDA'S CAR

MELANDA

See you tonight.

Just as the words finish, Melanda's car disintegrates. The cell phone hangs in the air recording everything, and then Melanda is lost forever.

EXT. CAMBRIDGE RINDGE AND LATIN HIGH SCHOOL

MICHAEL SMITH, 16, light-skinned African American, loose shirt, fatigues, sneakers, hair long, with his friends.

Michael's cell rings: message.

MICHAEL

Yo, wait.

He listens. His face changes from ease to horror.

From a million miles away he hears his name.

VOICE

Michael! Michael!

Michael focuses on the STUDENT standing in front of him.

VOICE

Principal wants to see you.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

PRINCIPAL, ashen-faced, at her desk. JOSH SMITH, mid-50s, African American, buzz cut, stands there. Same small flag pin and retired Air Force pin on his lapel.

JOSH

Michael -- something's happened.

Michael holds up his cell phone.

MICHAEL

She left me a message.

PRINCIPAL

(to both)

I'm so sorry.

Josh opens his arms, and Michael, without hesitation, lets himself be embraced by his father.

EXT. CEMETERY

In the crowd several men and women wear Air Force dress blues, including Josh. An American flag drapes the coffin.

BRANCH OF A TREE

Three ravens bob their heads as they CAW.

GRAVESIDE

Dozens of people bow as the two women in uniform carefully fold the flag in regulation fashion and hand it to Josh and Michael.

OVER THE COFFIN

Michael's and Josh's hands throw dirt on the coffin. The ravens' CAWS fill the air.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - SEVERAL DAYS LATER

Michael's friends welcome him back: handshakes, embraces, etc. He smiles faintly and eases into his place. But the look on his face is distant and preoccupied.

INT. SMITH LIVING ROOM

On TV replays of the planes, the towers, their collapse. They have TV dinners, but their food stays untouched.

JOSH

God.

Josh takes his tray, asks Michael with a nod if he is done. Michael nods yes.

JOSH

Can't eat either.

Josh, the two trays in his hands, looking at the TV, looking at his son, his face both pained and empty.

INT. KITCHEN

The two aluminum trays slide into the wastebasket.

EXT. REAR DECK

Josh lets the screen door slam. He can see the living room full of TV light. He lifts his despairing face to the dark sky.

INT. LIVING ROOM

A recruitment commercial for the Marines plays on the television.

Flickering light and the RECRUITER'S VOICE wash over MICHAEL.

INTERCUT BETWEEN MICHAEL'S FACE AND TV SCREEN

ANNOUNCER

-- and you will protect your country -- learn to serve the
ideals -- and honor the freedom that we -- for the love of
your nation --

In the kitchen, the SLAM of the screen door.

DOORWAY

Josh watches the end of the commercial

JOSH

Everything okay?

MICHAEL

Yeah.

The TV shifts back to the news. Michael and Josh stare.

INT. SUPERCUTS - NEXT DAY

The HAIRCUTTER checks the sign-in sheet at the front desk.

HAIRCUTTER

Michael Smith?

Michael stands.

CHAIR

Michael sits as the haircutter sails the apron over him.

MIRROR

The Haircutter's images float over Michael's image in the mirror.

HAIRCUTTER

And what are we going to say about ourselves today?

MICHAEL gives himself a hard look.

EXT. RECRUITING CENTER

Through the window: Michael, now wearing a classic buzz cut, talks with a MARINE RECRUITER.

They stand. The Recruiter hands Michael a packet. They shake hands.

EXT. RECRUITING CENTER

Michael exits and turns down the street.

ELECTRONICS STORE

On multiple televisions in the display window, a re-run of the crashing of the planes into the towers. Michael watches.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Josh paces, the recruiting materials fanned out on the coffee table.

Michael sits at attention, silent.

JOSH

(points to literature)

I'm not going to sign anything!

Josh continues to pace.

INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE - DECEMBER

Well-appointed office. SOUND of pen on paper.

THERAPIST (O.S.)

Your wife's death occurred --

JOSH

Three months ago.

THERAPIST (O.S.)

And Michael just turned seventeen?

JOSH

Yes.

THERAPIST (O.S.)

For the last three months --

JOSH

He has imagined himself as a Marine.

SOUND of pages shuffling.

THERAPIST (O.S.)

More than imagined himself, it seems.

INT. GUIDANCE COUNSELOR'S OFFICE

Shabbily-appointed office.

COUNSELOR (O.S.)

You can't mean that.

SOUND of papers shuffling.

COUNSELOR (O.S.)

All our plans for college --

MICHAEL

Sir, I don't mean to be impolite -- but that's not important now. Not with the way things are.

SOUND of more shuffling papers.

COUNSELOR (O.S.)

And they are how, Michael?

MICHAEL

Ready to rock.

INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE

THERAPIST (O.S.)

-- many different ways to handle grief.

JOSH

Joining the "war" on terrorism is not one of them.

THERAPIST (O.S.)

You don't approve.

JOSH

It doesn't make sense.

THERAPIST (O.S.)

How have you been handling your grief these past months, Josh?

No response.

THERAPIST (O.S.)

Felt angry? Futile? I know you have.

Josh shifts uncomfortably in his chair.

THERAPIST (O.S.)

You miss Melanda.

JOSH

More than you can imagine.

THERAPIST (O.S.)

Then imagine it for Michael.

JOSH

I understand, but --

THERAPIST (O.S.)

He misses his mother -- as simple and as complicated as it gets, Josh.

JOSH

But the Marines --

THERAPIST (O.S.)

Serve and protect. Part of something bigger. Do the right thing. Do you know someone who joined the Air Force for the same reasons?

SOUND of writing on paper.

THERAPIST (O.S.)

I'm not saying you should let him do this. The both of you -- meet with me next week. Let's see what our three heads can come up with.

INT. GUIDANCE COUNSELOR'S OFFICE

MICHAEL

My mother was a good person -- she didn't deserve what happened. Just like those other people.

COUNSELOR (O.S.)

Michael, it's not too late for the applications.

MICHAEL

Not in my plans, sir. Three hots and a cot as soon as I can.

SHUFFLING paper.

COUNSELOR (O.S.)

All right. You know, I understand --

Michael rises.

MICHAEL

Thank you, sir. Will that be all?

INT. HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - MAY GRADUATION

Usual decorations. Principal on stage announcing names, students getting diplomas, pictures snapping, etc.

STAGE

PRINCIPAL

Michael Lawrence Smith.

Applause, but no Michael on stage.

Principal and counselor spot him at the back.

BACK OF AUDITORIUM

Michael, hands behind his back, at attention, watches.

AUDIENCE

Even though surrounded, Josh sits as if isolated, hearing his son's name ring through the space.

STAGE

PRINCIPAL

Jeanette Smollins.

Smiling JEANETTE waves as she strides across the stage.

INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE

Michael and Josh in separate chairs.

THERAPIST'S VOICE (O.S.)

Will that be all right with you, Michael? To go back?

MICHAEL

Yes, sir.

JOSH

I think it'll be good for us to go back to the cabin.

THERAPIST'S VOICE (O.S.)

A place your mother -- and your wife -- loved a great deal.

JOSH

Yes.

THERAPIST'S VOICE (O.S.)
(to Michael)

And where you loved her.

Though side-by-side, Michael and Josh are miles apart.

THERAPIST'S VOICE (O.S.)
Good. We'll meet when you get back.

INT. STATION WAGON - JUNE

Michael leafs through Marine Corps recruitment paperwork.

The back loaded with duffel bags and vacation "stuff." On the dashboard, a small statue of Our Lady of Knots along with St. Christopher. Music HUMS under the road sounds.

EXT. CAR

The New Hampshire countryside shimmers.

EXT. CAR - LICENSE PLATE

License plate: "Retired Air Force," with insignia.

INT. CAR

The low MUSIC fills the silence as Michael reads. Josh's hand slowly squeezes and lets go of the steering wheel, his only outward sign of irritation.

EXT. CAR

The blue sparkle of Newfound Lake as they come over a rise.

INT. CAR

Josh points to the lake.

Michael glances up, and for a moment, his face softens.

JOSH

Almost there.

Just as quickly Michael's face shifts back to serious. He gathers his papers and stares out the window -- all done precisely, without fuss.

EXT. CAR

A house, shadowed by ragged cedar trees. Among the trees, in bright contrast, a freshly painted carousel horse caparisoned like a knight's steed.

INT. CAR

The horse catches Josh's eye.

JOSH

Well, look at that.

MICHAEL

What?

But they've passed by it, so Josh u-turns.

EXT. CAR

The car u-turns, then slowly passes the horse.

INT. CAR

JOSH

I don't remember that. Do you remember who lives there?

Michael shakes his head no.

JOSH

Remember that carousel ride in Germany? You must have been --

MICHAEL

Long time ago, Dad.

Josh u-turns to go back in the original direction.

JOSH

Yes. It was.

EXT. ROAD

Sign: "Welcome to Bristol / Population: Happy." In bright design, with stars and comets, an attached sign: "Don't forget the Annual Bootids Celebration, June 27 and 28."

TURN

Road sign: "Lake Shore Drive." The car kicks up a dust-devil as it turns.

EXT. SMITH BUNGALOW - YARD

Josh pulls up beside a neat clapboard bungalow. ERNEST SHEA, 60s, with a rubbery belly and a smile to match, gets up from digging in the flower beds. He pulls a watch out of his pocket. Josh and Michael get out of the car.

ERNEST

Right on time, Colonel. Like always.

JOSH

You know me, Ernest.

Michael starts unpacking the car and lugging the bags into the house. Josh shakes Ernest's hand.

JOSH

Michael, come say hello.

Michael continues into the house.

MICHAEL

(shouting)

Hello, Mr. Shea.

Michael disappears into the house. Josh looks apologetic.

ERNEST

People didn't think you were coming this summer.

JOSH

The place looks good -- you've made it look good enough to sell.

ERNEST

You thinking about that?

JOSH

Thinking about a lot of things, Ernest.

ERNEST

Always were a thinking man, Colonel.

Michael comes out, waves, but comes no closer. He takes more stuff out of the car, starts back to the house.

JOSH

(hand on shoulder)

Don't want him to think the old man's lame.

(heads to car)

Settle up the accounts later?

ERNEST

Roger, Colonel. Just gonna keep on working these beds over here.

Josh waves as Ernest goes back to his work.

CAR

Josh humps out a large trunk clearly beyond his strength.

Suddenly, Michael's hand appears on the grip, and the trunk slides smoothly off the tailgate.

MICHAEL

Got it, Dad.

Josh watches Michael carry the trunk effortlessly.

JOSH
(murmuring)

And the gods in their youth were wondrous to behold.

Josh pulls out several canvas bags filled with fruit and other groceries -- the last of the haul.

JOSH
And then there be us mules.

EXT. SHED

Ernest hanging up some tools, getting others. He looks at the framed picture of a brilliantly smiling woman in work clothes standing in front of the house. She wears one canvas glove and holds up the ungloved thumb of the other hand. The thumb is painted a brilliant green.

ERNEST
That shouldn't be out here.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Josh can just see Michael in his bedroom changing into his running shoes.

JOSH
Hey, do you mind if I join you?

MICHAEL (O.S.)
In training, Dad.

JOSH
(slaps belly)
Could use some of that myself.

MICHAEL'S BEDROOM

Michael pauses with just the briefest of hesitations.

MICHAEL
Sure, Dad -- that would be great.

INT. LIVING ROOM

JOSH

Great.

(sotto voce)

Great.

EXT. YARD

Michael wears a tee-shirt with the Marine Corps logo; under the logo is the slogan "Death Before Dishonor." Michael stretches as Josh comes outside. Josh begins stretching, too, strained where Michael is graceful.

After what is clearly not enough stretching, Josh says --

JOSH

Ready.

Michael, with just the barest tell-tale hint of reluctance, begins a slow trot down Lake Shore Drive. Josh, sucking down air, starts after him.

EXT. ROAD - FROM A DISTANCE

Against the glare of the lake and the heat off the road, Michael and Josh are small silhouettes, Michael far ahead.

EXT. ROAD - CLOSER IN

Josh is can barely see the soles of Michael's sneakers. And between POUNDING blood and RASPY breath, Josh is not sure he can stay upright much longer.

Finally, he pulls to the side and weakly waves to Michael.

JOSH

(breathless)

You go on -- I'll -- catch -- up.

(whisper)

Right.

EXT. ROAD - FURTHER AHEAD

Michael looks back at Josh. He backpedals a bit watching, and only when his father stands up and waves does Michael turn around and put on a kick that speeds him away.

EXT. HOUSE IN THE WOODS

Michael stops when he sees the horse. He hesitates, then crosses the road.

EXT. HORSE

The paint is smooth, uncrackled, new. His hand rests on its arched neck.

Then, he swings a leg over and sits on the saddle. His legs are so long his feet stay firmly planted.

EXT. ROAD

Josh stands in the shade of a tree, now breathing normally.

With a little hitch in his shorts and a clearing of the throat, he leans over to touch his toes -- and with a GRUNT and a SHOVE, he just manages to brush the tips of his sneakers.

JOSH

All right.

Onto the road, barely at a trot -- but dogged.

JOSH

The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong --

He keeps on going.

EXT. SIDE OF HOUSE

Michael scans the driftwood figures that frame the side-door: a duck, a swan, a butterfly.

Ornate initials painted on the side-door, silver outlined in black: "JN."

Just inside the door, through a side window, Michael can see dozens of blue-green glass insulating knobs.

He moves toward the back, cicadas SAWING the air.

EXT. BACK OF HOUSE

As Michael rounds the corner, he sees a flower garden bursting with colors and forms, divided by pathways lined with butterfly mosaics of broken mirror and colored stones.

Sculptures of driftwood, stone, ceramic rise from these flower islands.

EXT. GARDEN PATH

Still as he is, Michael could be one of the statues. Insects dance around him. The air HUMS with silence.

EXT. PORCH ROOF - BACK OF HOUSE

On the porch roof drinking water perches JONATHA NEWCOMB, 95, four-foot-nothing and topped with a shock of white hair cut man-short. Blue chambray shirt, overalls, baseball cap, but wearing a pair of black Chinese slippers. In her right hand, a claw hammer.

A wooden ladder, jury-rigged, leans against the roof edge. Another ladder, equally half-assed, is cleated into the porch roof and goes to the roof peak and chimney.

Aluminum flashing dangles over the eave, half-nailed in.

Jonatha fixes her eyes on the handsome young man.

EXT. GARDEN

As he steps toward a beautiful luscious flower, Michael knocks over a blue-green glass dragon and breaks it.

As Michael backs away, he squashes a profusion of phlox.

Michael continues backing up, then heads back to the road.

EXT. ROAD

Josh is trying to give a good imitation of a power walker -- and not succeeding.

EXT. SIDE OF HOUSE

Michael is just about to escape when a VOICE ropes him in.

JONATHA (O.S.)

I hope you have your glue.

Michael spins but sees nobody behind him.

JONATHA (O.S.)

A heffalump, you know.

TOP OF HOUSE

Michael locates the VOICE: above him, on the roof peak.

JONATHA

Proverbial cat got your tongue?

But before Michael can answer, Jonatha's head disappears, and all he can hear is BREAKING WOOD as the ladder rungs SNAP.

PORCH ROOF - BACK OF HOUSE

Jonatha lands right on her ass, cedar splinters trailing after her. She grabs her right hip in pain.

SIDE OF HOUSE

Jonatha's BARK cuts through the heavy air.

JONATHA (O.S.)

Goddamn, that hurts! Goddamn that hurts like a sonofabitch!

BACK OF HOUSE

Michael rounds the corner and skids to a stop.

Jonatha tries to rise, but no go: her right leg refuses.

Michael backs up until he can see Jonatha.

PORCH ROOF

JONATHA

You gonna help?

MICHAEL

Of course, of course! What do you want me to do?

JONATHA

See that ladder?

MICHAEL

Right. Right.

Michael moves to the ladder.

LADDER

Michael puts a hand on a ladder that is little more than a collection of duct tape, splints, and toed-in screws looking long past dead.

LADDER RUNGS

Michael's foot on the first rung, the second, the third.

PORCH ROOF

Behind her Jonatha hears a CRACK and a CRASH.

LADDER

Michael, on his back, looks at the splintered leftovers of what had been the first three rungs.

PORCH ROOF

JONATHA
You all right?

MICHAEL (O.C.)
Fine.

JONATHA
Good -- I don't have to pay death and dismemberment.
Plan B, then.

MICHAEL (O.C.)
Plan B?

JONATHA
Back up so I can see you.

Michael moves into her view.

Jonatha points downward.

JONATHA
Stand right there --

MICHAEL
Where?

JONATHA
Right there -- the footprints --

BOTTOM OF PORCH

Michael looks down at two painted footprints, with a caption: "Saw The June Bootids, Year of the Tiger." The two footprints are also painted like a tiger, mouth open, fangs bared.

MICHAEL
The tiger.

JONATHA (O.C.)

Exactly.

Michael plants his feet.

MICHAEL

Okay.

JONATHA (O.C.)

Now we're cooking.

EXT. ROAD

Josh now moves along at a good semi-geezer clip, and his face bears a grim smile that says "not defeated."

EXT. PORCH ROOF

JONATHA

Ready?

MICHAEL (O.C.)

Yes.

JONATHA

I'm going to slide --

Michael backs up to see Jonatha.

MICHAEL

You can't do that. Don't you have another ladder?

JONATHA

Don't worry. What's your name?

MICHAEL

Michael.

JONATHA

Michael, I'm going to trust you. -- Damn, that hurts. -- Show me you're ready -- show me your arms.

Michael gives her back a blank look.

Jonathan holds out her arms like a cradle. Michael does the same.

MICHAEL

That's what you want?

JONATHA

That's what I got. Now step on the tiger and get ready.

BOTTOM OF PORCH

Michael steps on the tiger and holds out his cradling arms.

JONATHA (O.C.)

Excellent. Now, follow.

PORCH ROOF

Jonatha lays herself down. The dry cedar shakes splinter, turning into powder as she scoots herself toward the roof edge.

JONATHA

When I get to the edge, I'm going to roll over and you're going to catch me. Got that?

MICHAEL

This is crazy.

JONATHA

That's a good enough "yes" for me.

Jonatha starts to slide all on her own.

JONATHA

Lancelot, you better be ready!

BOTTOM OF PORCH

Blinded by dust, all he can hear is the RIPPING SLIDE of Jonatha's overalls and her VOICE: "You better be ready!"

And then Jonatha slams into his upper chest and slides down into his arms. One of the straps on her overalls pops loose, and the metal button at the end of the strap scores Michael's temple in a shallow cut.

Jonatha's velocity also slams Michael to the ground -- but Jonatha is nicely cushioned by Michael's body.

In the following silence the HISS of settling dust. Then a squirrel CHATTERING. The WHIRR of a hummingbird. Then the rest of the garden and the summer day.

Jonatha flexes her right leg and finds it usable again. She gets up, then looks down at the stunned Michael.

She offers him a hand, and with more strength than he expected, Jonatha helps him up. Standing next to each other, it is Mutt and Jeff.

Jonatha turns his head to see the cut.

JONATHA

Easily mended by the damsel. Jonatha Newcomb. I'd be rich if I had a dime for every "n" added to my name.

MICHAEL

Jonatha.

Jonatha underscores the slogan on Michael's tee-shirt with her finger, in the process flicking off some cedar splinters.

JONATHA

"Death Before Dishonor."

Jonatha gives Michael the same look she would give a new flower in her garden.

JONATHA

Maybe. C'mon.

INT. JONATHA'S KITCHEN

Michael at the kitchen table. On the table, under his hand, a thick pane of glass presses down a red and gold patterned cloth.

The window opens onto the garden. Through it Michael counts at least half a dozen homemade bird-feeders cut from gallon plastic jugs hanging from various trees and poles.

A stump of typewritten paper waits next to an Underwood typewriter. Rolled in the typewriter, a sheet half-filled. Michael reads the title: "Andromeda."

The kitchen bristles with art, from charcoal drawings to more driftwood sculptures to rough brown ceramic tiles with portraits of Mexican peasants.

Even the panels of the drop ceiling are painted: the famous God/Adam scene from the Sistine Chapel, except with the genders reversed. Now it's Goddess/Eve.

Bookshelves bulge with everything from Reader's Digest abridged editions to science books to "Coffee, Tea, Or Me."

Jonatha RUMMAGES in the bathroom.

JONATHA (O.S.)

I've got band aids here somewhere --

Michael presses his finger against the glass and traces the gold filigree while Jonatha BANGS a few more cabinet doors.

KITCHEN DOORWAY

Jonatha holds up an old cigar box emblazoned with a garish picture of two lovers titled "Romeo y Julieta."

JONATHA

It hath been found.

KITCHEN TABLE

Inside the box is the most eclectic First-Aid kit ever imagined, topped off by neon-colored children's band-aids.

Jonatha takes a swab and alcohol. Before she cleans, she puffs on his temple. He flinches, but only just.

JONATHA

So it won't sting.

Michael does not flinch as Jonatha daubs and cleans the cut, but as his fingers tap against the glass, his neck stiffens, and his whole body seems to want to remain still and pull away.

She angles his head to get more light, then unpeels a band-aid. Never once does she take her eyes off him. Never once does Michael meet her gaze directly.

Jonatha lays the band-aid over the cut and smooths it down, and there is a moment when Michael, head cupped in Jonatha's small hand, mimics the picture on the cigar box lid, but with genders reversed.

Then, polite but deliberate, Michael stands, his head dinging a blue-green glass globe with a second red globe nestled inside it.

JONATHA

Did I hurt you?

Michael shakes his head "no," reaches up to stop the globe.

JONATHA

That came from France. Not another like it in Christendom.

But even as Jonatha speaks, Michael edges toward the door.

MICHAEL

I should go.

JONATHA

You're leaving.

Michael keeps edging but also keeps bumping into boxes and paper piles and magazine piles and book piles and small tables with knick-knacks and shelves with crystals so that he cannot make the clean get-a-way he wants.

JONATHA

I don't bite.

MICHAEL

I just should --

JONATHA

At least not people. And you're forgetting something.

Jonatha points to her own temple.

MICHAEL

(touching band-aid)

Thanks. Thank you.

JONATHA

And thank you back for saving my rump.

MICHAEL

No problem.

JONATHA

Jonatha.

MICHAEL

Jonatha. I should just get --

JONATHA

You owe me some repair work.

Michael stops.

JONATHA

Ladders and dragons and such. We can negotiate. But only if you want to.

Jonatha picks up her first-aid kit.

JONATHA

I never force anyone to do anything. Could you pour two glasses of water? I want to show you something.

Jonatha disappears into another room. Michael hesitates, then turns to the cupboards over the sink. He gets two cups -- old mason jars -- and fills them from the tap. He sets them on the kitchen table.

He hesitates again, throws a look at the door to the kitchen, through which he can see the living room and beyond that the road, just glimpseable through the living room window.

Then Michael sits at the table and traces the gold filigree through the glass.

INT. JONATHA'S BEDROOM

The small single-bed is wedged among a neat but crowded archive of drawings and writings.

Jonatha takes a thick binder filled with drawings, each in a protective plastic sleeve, and leafs through it. She finds what she wants to find.

INT. KITCHEN

Every object in the room that can reflect sunlight now does.

Jonatha sets the binder down, gestures for Michael to look.

The drawing is on thick cream paper, all done with a single unbroken ink line. A dancer, body arced, cradles another dancer who has just leapt into the first dancer's arms. The dancers' hands are splayed and grasping.

DRAWING

Michael's finger traces the drawn line.

JONATHA (O.S.)

Two of Katherine Dunham's dancers. The one you're touching -- Syvilla Fort. The other one is Katherine. You don't them, do you? Too young. I knew them in New York. They were people to know. See what they're doing?

MICHAEL (O.S.)

Yes.

JONATHA (O.S.)

You and me, wasn't it?

EXT. HOUSE

Josh YELLS.

JOSH

Hello!

INT. KITCHEN

Both Michael and Jonatha hear the VOICE.

MICHAEL

My father.

JONATHA

Two handsome men in one day -- that hasn't happened in a long time.

EXT. SIDE OF THE HOUSE

JOSH

Hello!

Out comes Michael followed by the most leprechaun-looking person Josh has ever seen. Josh is sweat-soaked wet.

JOSH

Hello.

JONATHA

Hello.

JOSH

Just had a feeling, you know. We stopped to see your horse earlier. Josh Smith. And that is my son Michael.

JONATHA

You look like a thirsty man, Josh Smith.

JOSH

I am exactly what I look like.

JONATHA

Michael -- that water on the table?

MICHAEL

Yes, ma'am.

JONATHA

Ask the table to give it up to your father.

Michael disappears into the house.

JOSH

I hope he hasn't --

JONATHA

Mr. Smith, Michael saved my life.

JOSH

Really.

JONATHA

Yes.

JOSH

He's been busy, then.

INT. KITCHEN

Through the window Michael sees Jonatha lead Josh through the garden, showing him the broken dragon, the snapped ladders, the rescue.

MICHAEL

(softly)

Damn.

Michael grabs both glasses of water and heads back outside.

EXT. GARDEN

Michael hands one glass to his father, who drinks it, then the second, which his father doesn't.

JOSH

It seems you made quite an impression on Ms. Newcomb here.

JONATHA

Bam! I made the impression on him.

Mimics falling into Michael's arms. Without a hesitation, Michael reaches out to catch her, then draws his arms back to his sides as Jonatha LAUGHS.

EXT. DRIVEWAY

A car pulls in -- well-traveled. Out slides BARBARA MORGAN, Josh's age, an Irish colleen with an accent to match. She's heavy but moves with grace. She wears a lab coat with an insignia: "North Country Visiting Nurses Association." She carries an old leather doctor's bag.

BARBARA

Halloo!

EXT. GARDEN

JONATHA

We have ourselves a Round Table. A tertulia. C'mon.

EXT. DRIVEWAY

JONATHA

You just missed my fall from grace.

(pointing to Michael)

Lancelot saved me. And that's Lancelot's father.

JOSH

Josh Smith. My son, Michael.

Barbara give Josh and Michael the once-over.

BARBARA

Ernest Shea told me you were coming, Mr. Smith. Mr. Smiths. Barbara Morgan, RN -- sounds like a soap opera, eh? Why don't you tell me the tale inside, where I can get some water? And Jonatha, where's your hat?

Josh offers Barbara the second glass of water.

JOSH

Here, take this.

BARBARA

Thanks.

Jonatha slips her arm through BARBARA's, and they both start toward the house.

JONATHA

Not like I have brains left to fry.

BARBARA

(to Josh)

She's got more brains left than most start out with.

JOSH

I don't doubt.

(holding the door)

After you.

BARBARA

The first nice thing said to me today.

Barbara disappears into the house.

JOSH

You should stay -- just for a few minutes.

Michael hesitates, then enters. Josh follows.

INT. KITCHEN

Barbara spreads her gear on the table and prepares to put the blood pressure cuff on Jonatha's arm. Michael stays to the side, looks at the art work on the walls. Josh sits, an amazed look on his face. Barbara inflates, then deflates, listening with the stethoscope.

JONATHA

(to Barbara)

Will you still get positive numbers?

BARBARA

As always.

Josh points at the ceiling.

JOSH

I like that.

JONATHA

Pope didn't care much when he visited.

BARBARA

Good.

Barbara takes off the cuff, makes a note in a small journal.

JONATHA

Cadaver's still in good shape, huh?

BARBARA

They're going to love cutting you up. A real cut-up you're going to be.

Barbara preps a syringe.

BARBARA

(prepping syringe)

Vitamins.

JONATHA

Can't stand pills.

JOSH

Cadaver?

Barbara gives Jonatha the shot, then re-packs as she talks.

JONATHA

(ironically)

Ow.

BARBARA

I met this fine young fossil a couple of years ago when she came to me, the head of the nursing program, wanting to donate her body to science.

JONATHA

This body has never taken drugs -- not even aspirin. And meat? Feh!

BARBARA

I will swear to that, as far as I know. So I'm keeping her fresh for the academic slab.

JONATHA

Which could come any day now.

BARBARA

If you keep pitching yourself onto the roof, it will -- really.

JONATHA

Ernest never came by like he said he would.

BY THE WALL

Michael, only half-listening, scans beige-brown clay tiles with pictures of men with sombreros, women with scarves, donkeys, agave, town plazas, hummingbirds, and so on.

BARBARA

Ernest Shea is a man of good intent but short on follow-through. Like most humans.

(twinkle in her eye)

Or is it just most men?

JOSH

He's done all right by us.

BARBARA

(to Michael)

Those are some of my favorites.

Barbara stands and wags a finger at Jonatha in a mock-serious tone.

BARBARA

Give Ernest Shea a call right now and tell him --

JONATHA

Yes, master.

BARBARA

Seriously, Jonatha --

Jonatha gets up from the table.

JONATHA

It's too early in the day for serious.

(to Michael)

I did those in Mexico.

BARBARA

(to Josh)

I forgot -- she only gets serious after nap time.

(to Jonatha)

So go take your nap.

JONATHA

Because I'm 95 she thinks she can boss me around.

BARBARA

Sometimes her age and her IQ match.

JONATHA

That trumps me. I'll go take my nap.

Barbara moves toward the kitchen door.

BARBARA

(to Michael)

I like the one right by your shoulder the best.

MICHAEL

This one?

JONATHA

The child with the star in one eye. That's Barbara's name for it.

Barbara comes back into the room, stands next to Michael, points out the "star" in the eye.

MICHAEL

Yeah.

BARBARA

(to Josh)

Lift? Or do you two want to run back?

JOSH

If it's not out of the way.

BARBARA

Only brave men ride in my rattletrap.

(to Jonatha)

I'll see you tonight for more of the stories.

JONATHA

Hasta luego --

BARBARA

Baby.

They give each a high-five, then a low-five. Josh and Barbara start for the door.

JONATHA

I have a better idea.

BARBARA

Better than?

JONATHA

Ernest Shea. Mr. Smith -- may I borrow Lancelot here? For some repairs.

JOSH

I don't know if I can speak for him -- he is almost eighteen. Michael?

Barbara focuses on Michael, smiles at Jonatha.

MICHAEL

Yeah. Yes. Sure. Yes ma'am.

JONATHA

Then I'll stay off the roof.

BARBARA

You just saved me a mound of headache.

Barbara offers Josh her leather bag.

BARBARA

Would you mind?

JOSH

Not at all.

They head outside, chatting.

JONATHA

Thanks again, Lancelot.

MICHAEL

Nothing to it.

JONATHA

Ah, the wisdom and folly of youth.

MICHAEL

I'll come tomorrow.

JONATHA

Come when you can.

JOSH (O.S.)

Michael!

Jonatha puts her two hands over her heart, then flings her arms wide open. Michael, surprising himself, smiles at the hokey gesture, then turns and leaves.

INT. UPSTAIRS ROOM

Jonatha watches them hump stuff from the back seat to the trunk to make room, their VOICES and LAUGHTER soft and muffled. Then the car pulls away.

Behind her, in a wild but organized profusion, are dozens of canvases being filed into crates. The completed crates bear inventory lists. Jonatha is packing up her life.

One pile stands out by being the only one hidden under burlap.

She walks to a window that looks out onto the garden, and what can be seen from up here but not ground level is that the garden is set up as a spiral.

On the wall are two calendars, not current ones but dated 1913 and 1941 -- and they match day-for-day completely.

CALENDAR PAGES

On the June page of each one, Jonatha has x'd out each day, with the last day circled heavily. Written next to the last day on both calendars: "Meeting The Elephant."

Snaking around the margins of the 1913 calendar Jonatha has written in these lines: "And so these men of Indostan / Disputed loud and long, / Each in his own opinion -- "

She takes the pencil hanging next to the calendar and puts another circle around "Meeting The Elephant." Then adds one more line: "Exceeding stiff and strong."

ROOM

Jonatha slips off her slippers and lays down, crosses her hands and closes her eyes. Rested breathing. Sleep.

EXT. ROAD

Barbara's car passes the sign announcing the Bootids, then follows the road around the lake.

EXT. DRIVEWAY SMITHS' BUNGALOW

Barbara pulls into the driveway.

INT. BARBARA'S CAR

BARBARA

One point five miles exactly.

MICHAEL

Thanks.

BARBARA

Training for something?

MICHAEL

Yes.

JOSH

The Marines.

Barbara looks at Michael, then Josh. Michael gets out.

EXT. CAR

All three out of the car.

BARBARA

The Marines?

JOSH

He wants to enlist in the fall.

BARBARA

Not college?

MICHAEL

No.

BARBARA

Interesting choice.

Ernest trundles his way across the lawn.

BARBARA

Trouble on the hoof.

ERNEST

Hello, Barbara.

BARBARA

Hello, Ernest.

ERNEST

Good to see you.

BARBARA

Likewise, I'm sure.

ERNEST

Really good to see you.

BARBARA

Still just likewise, Ernest.

ERNEST

How did the two of you --

BARBARA

Does flashing at Jonatha's spark anything?

The cogs work behind Ernest's face. Then enlightenment.

ERNEST

She wasn't?

BARBARA

She was.

ERNEST

She didn't?

BARBARA

She did. At least tried.

ERNEST

Damn!

BARBARA

What did you expect? You weren't there the nanosecond she thought you should be there, so --

ERNEST

My ass is grass now.

BARBARA

She's asked Michael for a hand.

ERNEST

I intended to --

BARBARA

Ernest --

ERNEST

It's stopped.

BARBARA

And I have to get going.

JOSH

Water?

BARBARA
(checks watch)

I have time.

JOSH

Would you mind?

MICHAEL
(hesitating)

Sure, Dad.

Michael goes into the bungalow.

BARBARA

"Sure, Dad." A nice voice for someone wanting an in with the Marines.

INT. BUNGALOW

Michael stares at Josh and Barbara through the living room window, then moves into the kitchen.

EXT. DRIVEWAY

Josh, Ernest, and Barbara: a slight awkwardness in the air.

ERNEST

Well -- better get back -- you know, pruning.

BARBARA

You're a fine snipper, Ernest.

Barbara just smiles at him.

BARBARA

Nice seeing you, Ernest.

ERNEST

Likewise, I'm sure.

A look at Josh, a look at Barbara, then off he goes.

JOSH

Pardon me for asking, but is there --

BARBARA

Not on my part.

JOSH

But he --

BARBARA

Ever since high school.

JOSH

So why not -- if you don't mind my asking?

BARBARA

-- your asking.

INT. BUNGALOW

Michael, a troubled look on his face, glass in hand, watches Josh and Barbara talk.

EXT. DRIVEWAY

Josh and Barbara see Michael come out of the house.

BARBARA

Some other time -- maybe.

Michael hands Barbara the glass.

BARBARA

Thanks.

MICHAEL

If it's okay, I'm going to finish.

BARBARA

Michael, thank you again for today.

MICHAEL

It's all right.

BARBARA

You must be very special.

(to Josh)

She doesn't open up to just anybody.

MICHAEL

She's --

BARBARA

Weird.

MICHAEL
(laughing)

Yeah.

BARBARA
Rearrange the letters in "weird" and you get "wired," and she's that, too.

Barbara hands Josh the glass unsipped.

BARBARA
I mean it, though, about being special. She's very picky about who she shares her earth-time with. Did she show you any of her work?

Michael's body language swings between wanting to leave and wanting to talk.

MICHAEL
A drawing.

BARBARA
I knew it. Her dancers, I'll bet.

MICHAEL
Two dancers.

BARBARA
Ah, well, there you are. Just don't let her size fool you.

MICHAEL
I've already figured that.

BARBARA
Michael, 'twas nice meeting you.

MICHAEL
Nice meeting you, Ms. Morgan.

BARBARA
Barbara.

MICHAEL

Barbara.

JOSH

Be careful.

BARBARA

Yes, be careful -- one of those fierce loons may get you on the road!

And then Michael lopes away for his run.

EXT. SIDE OF THE BUNGALOW

Ernest, glancing up from the hedge, stares at Josh and Barbara. He looks as if he's sucking a lemon.

EXT. ROAD

Michael, looking over his shoulder, can just make out Josh and Barbara standing at her car.

EXT. DRIVEWAY

BARBARA

Now off I am to the swift completion of my appointed rounds.

Barbara starts back to her car. Josh opens her door.

BARBARA

We weren't sure, you know, that you were coming back this summer. Glad you came back.

JOSH

So far, seems we've packed three days into one.

BARBARA

Here we slip the surly bonds of earth.

Barbara starts to get in, then hesitates.

JOSH

What?

BARBARA

Is Michael really set on the Marines?

JOSH

Half yes, half no -- hard to say.

BARBARA

Grief --

JOSH

You must see a lot of that in your work.

BARBARA

You don't need my work to see grief. I've pried enough -- if you should want to talk --

JOSH

I'm hoping some silence and rest here will fill in the blanks.

BARBARA

Yes, well --

JOSH

I didn't mean --

BARBARA

(with half-smile)

I know that! Off to my appointed rounds.

Barbara gets in, starts the car.

BARBARA

It's been nice meeting you, Josh Smith.

JOSH

And likewise, Barbara Morgan -- I'm sure.

Barbara gives him a tiny salute, backs out, drives away. Josh sees Ernest.

JOSH

Want to settle up the accounts now?

But Ernest, with the look on his face of being a day late and a dollar short, just waves and retreats.

Glasses in hand, Josh stands alone in the driveway. Then he drinks first one glass, then the other -- and never spills a drop.

EXT. DECK - EVENING

Josh and Michael at the table, eating dinner -- a barbecue, in silence. From the lake they hear the CALL of a loon. Josh LAUGHS.

JOSH

The last time we were here. Your mother stood right there and sang.

Michael stands. Josh leans back in his chair to see him. Michael starts stacking the plates.

JOSH

And then the loon barked. And you howled like a wolf. The critter chorus.

Michael piles on the flatware, napkins.

JOSH

I'll get them.

But Michael continues, then goes into the house.

THROUGH WINDOW

Josh sees Michael lean on the sink, his head bowed.

DECK

Michael returns to get the rest.

MICHAEL

I don't want you to do that again, Dad. All right?

JOSH

Michael, it just came up.

MICHAEL

I have got to keep focused.

JOSH

Michael --

But Michael's hands are full, and he starts back in.

JOSH

She would never want you to go.

MICHAEL

You channeling her now? Then don't make like you know.

JOSH

You don't know, either.

MICHAEL

Something bigger and something better, that's what I know.

JOSH

What are you talking about?

MICHAEL

I'm going to finish the dishes.

Michael leaves. Josh hears the water go on and sees Michael set things up to wash, the night punched with the SOUNDS of dishes and glasses and flatware banged around.

Josh takes the pitcher and pours the water on the coals, watches the steam and smoke rise into the empty night sky.

INT. JONATHA'S KITCHEN - SAME EVENING

Barbara and Jonatha at the kitchen table. Light from an architect's lamp. Jonatha wears her "Bootid" outfit of star-cap and tee-shirt: "Shake your Bootid."

Jonatha TYPES at the Underwood while Barbara waits. Jonatha's face is clear and focused.

Then, with a triumphant gesture, Jonatha pulls the paper from the platen and hands it to Barbara.

JONATHA

New story, hot off the fingers.

As Barbara reads, Jonatha recreates in her mind the memory told in the story: her father, the telescope, and GEORGIA, the family servant, African American, older.

In the memory colors shine and the air is clear, and everyone is what they appear to be, with nothing hidden.

BARBARA (V.O.)

ANDROMEDA -- Papa has his eye glued to the tele skope when Georgia carries me horseride in saying Miss Baby want to say her goodnights but Papa goes "ssssss" until he gets the tele skope in clear fokus for his calcu lations ofasudden he is letting out a skreechy sound that sounds like YOUREEKA again saying beautiful Andromeda and Papa telling Georgia to put the little stool which he has for me to stand up on. My eye is seeing a site it says I can not beleeve because it is looking at a round piece of night cram full of stars winkin and twinkling and one most of all and I surprise myself hearing myself say out loud ANDROMEDA. Papa is moving me down off of the stool and I am wishing that I could leave my eye glued to the pipe at least for a while longer Georgia pulls her eye to the pipe and ANDROMEDA comes out between her teef like the woof of steam from the kettle I say Papa Andromeda will be my name from now on foreverand a day but Papa is saying like he means it that is a very frivlus notion and quite impossible Andromeda is the name of a heavenly body and not for any child yet born But Georgia looks at me look at her and our mouths spit stars when we say quiet outside Papa's ears ANDROMEDA ANDROMEDA

SILENCE stretches. Barbara puts the paper on the table, spins it. Her face fills with sadness and delight.

BARBARA

Andromeda. You certainly were Georgia's Miss Baby, weren't you?

Barbara touches Jonatha's temple softly.

BARBARA

It's a very good story, Andromeda.

JONATHA

(pointing)

There's another new one. Would you --

BARBARA

I'd be honored to read.

Barbara takes the top sheet off the pile, props it up. Jonatha watches her intently.

BARBARA

The Horse Carousel.

EXT. ROAD - FROM A DISTANCE - NEXT MORNING

Against the morning glare off the lake, Michael and Josh are small silhouettes, Michael far ahead of his father.

Josh stops to catch his breath, hands on knees, while Michael runs on without him.

EXT. JONATHA'S HOUSE - NEXT MORNING

Michael, barely winded and sweating, walks onto Jonatha's property. He pets the horse. Against the side door are two empty wooden crates, with a note: "Two more. Ladder around back. Sorry about the roof. Ernest."

At the end of the driveway Michael sees a chair. Each arm has a carved human hand attached. The right hand holds a hammer. The left hand holds a box of roofing nails.

On the seat is a tube of sealant, tin snips, and a putty knife. Across the back of the chair runs a painted phrase: "Get a grip on yourself."

The rest of the chair is painted over with symbols of "grips": a vice, hand-grips, strait-jackets, etc. Michael looks around, but Jonatha doesn't seem to be in sight.

Michael picks up the tools, goes to the back of the house.

EXT. PORCH ROOF

A new aluminum A-frame ladder leans against the eave.

On the ladder, a sign in ornate lettering: "Abandon Dante, all ye who enter here."

Over the bottom rung hangs a tool belt, which Michael straps on, putting everything into its pockets. At the foot of the ladder, new cedar shakes.

Up the ladder and onto the roof, and with an expert eye and hand, Michael squeezes out a bead of sealant, drives home the first nail with one blow, and, with the putty knife, smoothes the extra sealant over the nailhead.

INT. UPPER ROOM

Jonatha, with her crates and pictures, hears the hammer blow. She looks out the window and watches Michael work.

EXT. SMITH BUNGALOW

Josh slides to a stop at the foot of the driveway, hands on knees, breathing deeply.

As he straightens, he hears a HAMMER blow. He moves down the driveway.

At the end of the driveway he peer around the corner of the house and sees Michael on the A-frame. He pulls back.

Josh goes back out to Lake Shore Road and starts running for home.

EXT. ROOF

Nail set, single hit, daub of sealant, then nail set, single hit, daub of sealant, and so on down the line.

Tin snips cut the flashing so that it curls around and under the eave. Several nails tack it home.

Michael calculates, then lays the courses of new cedar.

Michael on the A-frame, tool-belted and sweating, smiles.

EXT. ROAD

Josh skids to a stop. He bends over and huffs heavily. A passing car honks. Josh waves without even looking up.

Then Josh steps back onto the road. With a heroically deep breath, he gears up and shuffles toward home.

INT. JONATHA'S KITCHEN

On the table, a lemonade with a postcard leaning against it. Inscribed in an elaborate hand over a grinning set of Cheshire Cat teeth: "Drink me."

MICHAEL

Ms. Newcomb?

No answer. He drinks. With the glass still to his lips, he turns to see Jonatha in the doorway, which startles him. Lemonade streaks down his tee-shirt.

MICHAEL

Sorry. Slob.

Jonatha's hands hold the fragments of the broken glass dragon. She puts them carefully on the table.

JONATHA

One more thing, then you're paid up. Have a seat.

Michael looks where he can put the glass down, but Jonatha takes it and puts it in the sink.

JONATHA

Sit.

She sits opposite him.

JONATHA

Go ahead.

MICHAEL

What?

JONATHA

Rebuild it.

MICHAEL

Me?

She puts next to him a bottle of clear glue.

JONATHA

Why not you?

Michael picks up one piece, then another, then another, seeing how to fit them together. Jonatha watches intently, says nothing.

EXT. BUNGALOW

Josh once again in his driveway, breathing like a gaffed whale. Ernest, kneeling in the flowerbeds, waves his trowel. Josh can barely manage to return the wave.

A CAR HORN behind him sends him six inches off the ground. He scoots out of the way as Barbara pulls in.

BARBARA

For the next Olympiad?

Barbara gets out of the car.

BARBARA

I'm always seeing you in your running clothes.

ERNEST

Hello, Barbara.

BARBARA

Hello, Ernest.

(to Josh)
A hand with the bags?

JOSH
Bags?

BARBARA
Staples -- for the two men in training.

Barbara grabs a bag, heads into the kitchen. Josh grabs two bags and follows. Ernest watches with a hangdog face.

INT. JONATHA'S KITCHEN

Michael has the base of the dragon glued together, and he's holding two other pieces together until the glue dries.

JONATHA
Barbara tells me you want to join the Marines.

Michael hesitates, then responds.

MICHAEL
Yes, ma'am.

JONATHA
Careful of your pressure -- focus.

Jonatha lays a thin bead of glue along an edge of the already completed bottom. She sets in another piece.

JONATHA
Hold it firm.

She arranges Michael's fingers to hold it in place. Then she peers at those same fingers.

JONATHA
What would convince a young man with such sensitive hands to be a soldier?

Michael's hands tremble slightly.

JONATHA

I'm sure you have a good answer.

Michael looks at Jonatha, and without anything like a preparation, Michael's eyes fill with tears. Jonatha gently lifts his hands away from the glass -- and it holds.

JONATHA

The grace of quick-drying glue.

Jonatha holds his hands, but he gently and firmly slides them away, gets up from the table.

MICHAEL

I can finish it tomorrow.

JONATHA

You're welcome to finish it anytime you want.

MICHAEL

I'm going to go.

JONATHA

Then safe home, Michael. And thank you.

Michael stares at the dragon, then into Jonatha's face.

EXT. HOUSE

Jonatha watches him start his steady run. Then she hefts the two empty crates and takes them inside.

INT. BUNGALOW KITCHEN

Barbara puts down her bag, followed quickly by Josh's two bags. She notices the photo on the counter, the one Ernest had seen in the shed. Josh picks up the photo.

JOSH

Where did this come from?

Barbara says nothing as she takes items from the bags: milk, bread, and other such stuff.

BARBARA
(jar in hand)
Where do you put your --

But she sees Josh staring at the picture and waits. Her own face looks uncertain about the sadness on his face.

JOSH
(sotto voce)
Ernest.

Josh puts the photo on top of the refrigerator, leaning it against a cabinet.

JOSH
Always find Melanda in the kitchen.

Points to the jar.

JOSH
That usually goes up there.

Barbara grabs the jar.

BARBARA
(with a smile and half-salute)
Aye aye, captain.

Josh starts putting things away.

JOSH
Wrong service.

BARBARA
That's right -- Air Force.

JOSH
More often the Air Farce.

Barbara hesitates with a loaf of bread in her hand.

JOSH

Bread in the bread box.

As they finish putting away the groceries and fold the paper bags, they look like any domestic couple.

Work done, a moment of not-quite-awkwardness.

JOSH

How much do we owe you?

BARBARA

Now you've insulted me. I'm kidding! But if you do want to take on a bit of guilt, you can make it up by giving me a hand with Jonatha's bi-weekly offload. That would be nice.

JOSH

Fair exchange. Let me change my shirt.

Josh exits. Barbara looks after him for a moment, then takes down the picture of Melanda. She runs her finger along the frame, touches the green thumb.

BARBARA

"This is the Hour of Lead / Remembered, if outlived -- "

She puts it back, straightens her dress, waits.

INT. JONATHA'S KITCHEN

The half-finished dragon on the table. Jonatha watches it.

From the front doorway.

BARBARA (O.S.)

Yoo-hoo, Lady of Spain.

JONATHA

In here, Lady of Shallot.

Barbara and Josh come into the kitchen with the bags, set them on the counter. They both notice the dragon.

JONATHA

That boy of yours --

She points to the dragon.

JONATHA

-- has steady hands.

Josh with fruit and bananas in his hand.

BARBARA

Fruit, bottom shelf. Bananas, hanging basket.

JOSH

Did he finish the roof?

JONATHA

He did.

JOSH

Where is he?

JONATHA

He went that'a'way. With his training.

Josh and Barbara continue to put away groceries. Jonatha runs her finger over the rough edges of the glass.

JONATHA

A straight question, Mr. Smith.

BARBARA

Beware.

JONATHA

I don't know you directly, so you can tell me to shut up -- but when's the last time Michael got mad?

JOSH

Mad?

JONATHA

Mad.

JOSH

I've never seen him get mad -- I mean, really mad. He gets irritated. Usually with me.

JONATHA

He got mad in front of me.

Josh stops putting away groceries.

JOSH

What did he do?

Jonatha looks up at them both, gives them a once-over, then stands up.

JONATHA

I'm going to check the roof.

EXT. ROOF

Jonatha sits on the roof, inspects the flashing work. Josh climbs onto the A-frame, sees Michael's work. Barbara stays at ground level.

JONATHA

He did excellent work.

JOSH

He was a roofer one summer. You said he got mad.

JONATHA

How long are you here, Mr. Smith?

JOSH

Two weeks.

JONATHA

If he comes back here tomorrow, I'd like your permission to hire Michael. I've got a project.

BARBARA (O.C.)

What project?

JONATHA

One that you don't know about.

BARBARA (O.C.)

And I thought I was in the loop.

JONATHA

Barbara.

Something "no-nonsense" in Jonatha's voice shuts her up.

JONATHA

Mr. Smith?

JOSH

It's not my permission you need, Ms. Newcomb -- it's up to Michael.

JONATHA

I just want you to know that I want to ask him.

She pauses, then looks at them both with a faint smile.

JONATHA

I don't want you to think I'm hitting on your beautiful young son.

A pause as Josh what Jonatha said. BARBARA's LAUGHTER rises up around them.

Jonatha holds out her hand, and Josh, backing down the ladder, helps her descend, as if helping a queen.

BOTTOM OF LADDER

BARBARA

At least this time you didn't have to have someone catch you.

JONATHA

(holding Josh's hand)

I'd say this is a pretty good catch.

JOSH

I am the catch of the day.

EXT. DRIVEWAY

They come around the corner of the house.

JONATHA

Now, go. I have work to do.

JOSH

A straight question to you, Ms. Newcomb.

BARBARA

You owe him one.

JOSH

You said he got mad. What happened?

Instead of answering, Jonatha sits side-saddle on the carousel horse.

CAROUSEL HORSE

JONATHA

Did you know this horse came from San Antonio, Texas? It just followed me, and I took it in.

Jonatha runs her hand over the carved mane.

JONATHA

When Michael was re-building the dragon --

JOSH

Yes.

JONATHA

I asked him about his mother.

JOSH

So you know.

BARBARA

It'd be the rare local who didn't.

JONATHA

And I asked him about soldiering. And I noted how strong his hands were -- he has wonderful hands, Mr. Smith -- and I asked him why.

JOSH

What did he tell you?

JONATHA

His eyes -- the anger right there. His eyes are too young for that.

Jonatha slips off the horse.

JONATHA

I don't think pain builds character -- I really don't. I think pain just makes more pain, and I'm not in favor of more pain in the world. Hands like his don't need it.

Jonatha pats the horse.

JONATHA

If he comes back, he's welcome back.

Josh runs his hand along the horse's rump.

JOSH

All right, Ms. Newcomb.

JONATHA

Now, go, the two of you.

BARBARA

And I've got to get back to the office.

JOSH

Goodbye.

Jonatha watches them get into the car and drive away. She slaps the flank of the carousel horse, as if to send it off on a gallop.

INT. BUNGALOW KITCHEN

Michael, sweat-streaked, holds the picture of his mother. Ernest, wiping his hands and feet, knocks at the door.

ERNEST

Mind if I come in?

Without waiting for an answer, he comes in, sees Michael with the picture.

ERNEST

Found that in the shed -- thought it belonged in here. Do you know when your father's back?

Michael puts the picture down.

MICHAEL

No, I don't.

ERNEST

She was a lively woman, your mother. I remember your father painting that thumb. I'm real sorry.

MICHAEL

I don't know when he'll be back.

EXT. BUNGALOW DRIVEWAY

Barbara's car pulls in.

INT. KITCHEN

ERNEST

Mention the devil and in he rides. Hear you're going into the Marines?

MICHAEL

Is there anything people don't know around here?

The sound of car doors SLAMMING shut.

ERNEST

Plenty. Beg pardon. I'll just go and talk with your dad.

Ernest leaves, letting the screen door bang shut. Michael stares at the door, then goes to it, still holding the picture, and presses his face against the wire mesh.

He watches the three adults talk with one another, then Ernest move back to his garden work, shoulders slumped.

As he turns away from the screen door, he notices the folded paper bags on the counter.

When he turns back, he sees his father holding the car door open for Barbara, the two of them laughing at something Barbara has said.

IN HIS HANDS

The image of his mother laughs up at Michael.

THROUGH THE WINDOW

Josh and Barbara talk and laugh.

KITCHEN

Michael's face sets hard. He stalks out of the kitchen.

EXT. DRIVEWAY

Josh holds open the car door, makes a gallant gesture as Barbara gets ready to slide behind the wheel.

JOSH

You aren't serious.

BARBARA

Oh, when it comes to bingo in the church, I am quite serious.

JOSH

On Friday.

BARBARA

All the colored markers you'll need. And you could take away \$300 -- in the big one.

Barbara's face suddenly blushes in embarrassment.

BARBARA

I'm just being silly. We can --

JOSH

We can go for bingo on Friday night. Who can resist the big one?

Josh closes the door.

JOSH

Friday, then.

BARBARA

Friday it is.

INT. BARBARA'S CAR

She waves to the diminishing figure of Josh Smith in her rearview mirror, then whispers to herself.

BARBARA

Well. Bingo. Of all things.

INT. MICHAEL'S BEDROOM

Michael sits on his bed, barefoot, holding the picture of his mother. Then he places it on the bed. He puts his socks and running shoes back on.

EXT. BUNGALOW

Michael comes out of the house and runs right past Josh without saying a word, heading out onto the road.

JOSH

Michael? Michael?!

EXT. FLOWERBED

Ernest watches Michael disappear, then looks at Josh. For a moment their eyes lock. Then Josh retreats to the house.

Ernest shakes his head, his face sad. He keeps weeding.

EXT. DECK - NIGHT

Josh watches Michael through the kitchen window wash the dishes. Again, he pours water on the barbecue coals, watches the steam rise up.

From off the lake, the CRY of a loon.

JOSH

Michael. Michael!

SINK

Michael shuts off the water, then walks to the back door, drying his hands on a kitchen towel. He looks through the screen door but can't see his father.

JOSH (O.S.)

Michael.

Michael opens the door and steps onto the deck.

DECK

The two of them stand in the light thrown from the kitchen window and open back door.

JOSH

Listen.

The loon's CALLS pierce the darkness.

JOSH

Just listen to that.

They stand there, in silence, not touching but not distant from each other.

JOSH

I talked with Ms. Newcomb today.

MICHAEL

Yeah?

JOSH

I saw the dragon.

MICHAEL

Yeah.

JOSH

She said she invited you to come back.

MICHAEL

She did.

JOSH

Are you going to go? No, wait -- none of my business. Go or not if you want to.

Other NIGHT SOUNDS, then the LOON again.

JOSH

She seems nice enough. She seems to like you.

Michael on the verge of saying something but switches at the last moment.

MICHAEL

I'm going to go inside and finish.

JOSH

Thanks for doing the dishes.

Michael is almost in the house when he turns to his father. He sees his father's broad back, his weight leaning against the railing of the deck. Another CRY of the loon.

MICHAEL

I'm going to go -- finish.

Michael walks back into the house. Through the window Josh watches Michael snap the towel against the air several times as he moves back to the sink.

INT. JONATHA'S KITCHEN - NEXT DAY

MICHAEL'S HANDS

They lay the last piece of blue glass edge to glued edge.

KITCHEN

Michael looks at Jonatha with an expression of "There!"

JONATHA

To finish -- how does it feel?

MICHAEL

I don't know.

Michael strokes the dragon gently.

MICHAEL

I wish I hadn't broken him in the first place -- that's what I feel.

Jonatha stands.

JONATHA

Let's put him back on guard duty.

EXT. GARDEN

Michael nestles the dragon on its former pedestal. The garden BUZZES around them. The SILENCE stretches.

Jonatha starts back to the house.

JONATHA

You've paid back what you need to pay back, Michael.
You're free to go, if you want.

Though he tries not to show it, his face and body show that he doesn't like the offer.

JONATHA

But -- if you're available -- I do have some other work.

A blue jay SQUAWKS at them, then dives away.

JONATHA

A personal project.

MICHAEL

I'm available.

EXT. ROAD

Looking more lively than ever, Josh pushes himself along.

INT. SCHOOL CLASSROOM

Barbara, dressed in a white lab coat with the VNA insignia and a stethoscope dangling out of one pocket, sits with a CROWD of third-graders.

She is going over the anatomy of the heart, which she shows with a plastic model of the "Visible Heart." The TEACHER sits right in the middle of the group.

She points to the veins and arteries as she speaks.

BARBARA

Repeat after me. "Red blood in."

STUDENTS

Red blood in.

BARBARA

Blue blood out.

STUDENTS

Blue blood out.

Barbara makes a big circular gesture around her own body.

BARBARA

Feeds all the little cells.

The STUDENTS also make circles around their bodies.

STUDENTS

Feeds all the little cells.

BARBARA

As it whooshes all about.

STUDENTS

As it whooshes all about.

Barbara puts the model down, places two fingers on her wrist.

BARBARA

Everyone do this.

They do.

BARBARA

Feel that little jumpy thing right there?

Barbara makes a "heartbeat" NOISE.

BARBARA

That's called a pulse.

More HEARTBEAT NOISES, and the kids pick up on it. One GIRL can't seem to find her pulse, so Barbara helps her, and when she's got it, the girl grins broadly.

BARBARA

You guys have got great hearts. Give yourself a big hand.

Everyone applauds.

INT. UPSTAIRS ROOM - JONATHA'S HOUSE

Michael looks at the organized chaos. He walks around and goes to lift the burlap cover on the hidden pile.

JONATHA

Not that.

MICHAEL

Sorry.

JONATHA

Not needed. I'm working on that group over there.

MICHAEL

Okay.

WALL

He sees the calendars, turned to the correct month, with the days carefully x-ed out.

On another wall he sees a poster for the June Bootids, 1998, full of stars and comets. Michael points to it.

MICHAEL

What's that?

JONATHA

I designed the poster -- for the town. And the tee-shirt.

MICHAEL

No, the Bootids.

JONATHA

Celestial visitors. That group?

Michael turns to see a collection of paintings of Mexican peasants and village scenes, done on a material that looks and shines like cellophane.

He goes to them, starts carefully looking through them.

JONATHA

These were tricky.

MICHAEL

You were in Mexico?

JONATHA

Met Trotsky. And Rivera. And Siqueiros.

MICHAEL

They were famous?

JONATHA

A little.

Jonatha takes one painting, props it against the wall.

JONATHA

See how it crinkles? On the backside it's rough cloth, but smooth and shiny on the front side. I picked this up at Macy's, when I worked there as a window-dresser. They were going to throw it out -- never saw a material I couldn't use. Now, here's the trick.

She turns the painting around.

JONATHA

You can't paint from the front because of the cellophane. Which means you have to paint backwards.

Turns the painting face-front again, points to the knee of the peasant.

JONATHA

See that little white patch on his knee, that little bit of sunlight?

MICHAEL

Yes.

JONATHA

That's the closest to you, isn't it? That came first.

MICHAEL

Then from the front to the back.

JONATHA

And you couldn't repaint anything. One chance, one gamble -- that was it. Or throw it away.

MICHAEL

Had to have the whole thing in your head --

JONATHA

In my eye -- head had nothing to do with it. If I "thunk" too much, I'd screw it up. The whole thing would appear, right here, like a dream -- get out the brushes and hack away.

Jonatha gets up and lets out a GROAN that surprises her.

JONATHA

Get me the WD-40. Those crates over there? I'm doing the same with these.

MICHAEL

With everything.

JONATHA

Yep. I'm closing up shop.

MICHAEL

That sounds like going away.

JONATHA

If you can put those pictures in the crates --

MICHAEL

Are you?

JONATHA

If you put those pictures in the crates --

MICHAEL

Going away?

JONATHA

The whole world comes and goes, talking of Michelangelo. If you put those pictures in the crates --

MICHAEL

In the crates --

JONATHA

-- then I will write up the inventory. That's the division of labor here.

MICHAEL

Aye-aye, sir.

Michael starts crating the Mexican pictures.

MICHAEL

Has anybody ever seen these -- you know, like in a gallery?

JONATHA

Just be careful -- watch what you're doing.

Jonatha hunches over her pad of paper, writing. Michael lifts a picture of a mother and two children, boy and girl, and something about its sweetness makes him look closely.

MICHAEL

This is great.

Jonatha looks up to see what he sees.

JONATHA

(reluctant)

She made tortillas out of blue corn.

MICHAEL

How old were you when --

JONATHA

Not much older than you.

MICHAEL

It's not like this now, is it?

JONATHA

Nothing ever is. Just be careful.

Michael slides it into the crate, then picks up a picture of a vibrantly white camellia and stares at it.

Jonatha watches his intense gaze, then speaks.

JONATHA

One day I had a crowd of camellias just like those in my arms --

(pointing)

-- the man in that picture of over there gave 'em to me -- and the smell was so much like a fist that I passed right out.

MICHAEL

Yeah?

JONATHA

(mimicking)

"Yeah." Those were the days when a body knew what to do with beauty.

INT. BUNGALOW KITCHEN

Josh comes in, sweating.

TOP OF THE REFRIGERATOR

Josh sees that the picture of Melanda is not there.

HALLWAY

Josh stands in the doorway of Michael's room. He sees the picture on the bed.

MICHAEL'S ROOM

Josh picks it up, props it against the pillow, then, thinking better of it, lays it back in the rectangle made by the frame on the coverlet, as if no one had ever touched it.

INT. UPSTAIRS ROOM

Michael is tacking home the cover to a crate while Jonatha tapes her inventories to each crate.

JONATHA

C'est tout finis, I'd say.

MICHAEL

All right.

Jonatha goes to the calendar and marks off one more day.

MICHAEL

Why are you doing that?

JONATHA

Because it's one more day.

Michael gets up and reads the calendar.

MICHAEL

What does it mean, "Meet The Elephant."

JONATHA

The one sitting in the middle of the room that no one talks about.

MICHAEL

I don't understand.

Jonatha just touches Michael's arm.

JONATHA

Don't worry. Thank you.

MICHAEL

The pictures are really great.

JONATHA

Lemonade?

MICHAEL

Sure.

JONATHA

Then lead on, Macduff.

As Michael walks down the stairs, Jonatha trails him, keeping a hand on his shoulder and reciting poetry.

JONATHA

It was six men of Indostan / To learning much inclined, /
Who went to see the Elephant / (Though all of them were
blind), / That each by observation / Might satisfy his mind.

EXT. DECK - EVENING

Michael and Josh at the table eating.

MICHAEL

She has me put her pictures in these crates, and she makes
up lists.

JOSH

Storing them?

MICHAEL

I don't know. And she's got these calendars she marks off
-- except that they're 1913 and 1941. Why would she do
that?

JOSH

I don't know. It is strange.

MICHAEL

Even stranger. On the last day of the month, this month,
she's got "Meet The Elephant," like heavily penciled in. And
another thing -- I think --

JOSH

What?

MICHAEL

Dad, I think her pictures are great -- not like I really know,
but I find myself staring and staring at 'em.

Josh smiles at his son.

MICHAEL

But I don't think she's ever shown 'em to anybody, you know, like in a museum.

JOSH

Maybe that's what this is all about.

MICHAEL

Without Ms. Morgan knowing?

JOSH

Good point. You want to keep helping her out?

MICHAEL

She'd like me to.

JOSH

Do you?

MICHAEL

Yeah -- yeah, I think I do.

The air is suddenly filled with bat SQUEAKS as they hunt. Josh rubs his son's buzz cut.

JOSH

Be careful, or they'll get caught in your hair!

MICHAEL

At least I have some.

Josh slaps his belly.

JOSH

Getting smaller.

Michael gets up, gathers the plates.

MICHAEL

We'll see.

JOSH

I'll get those.

MICHAEL

You cooked.

Michael goes into the house, and Josh sees him at the sink. The light from the kitchen shimmers in Josh's eyes.

INT. KITCHEN

Josh comes in holding the glasses, lets the screen door WHOOSH shut. Michael is washing.

EXT. DECK

A young raccoon sidles along the railing, then sits up and looks at the two humans in the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN

Josh brings the glasses to the sink.

JOSH

Here.

MICHAEL

Got'cha.

Michael starts to rinse the glasses.

JOSH

Michael. I've got something to tell you.

For a moment it seems as if the roles have been reversed: Josh, the hesitant teenager, Michael, the patient parent.

JOSH

I've got a -- date. With Ms. Morgan. Barbara.

EXT. DECK

The raccoon moves closer.

INT. KITCHEN

Michael doesn't say anything, just rinses the glasses.

JOSH

Friday. Bingo. At the church.

Michael shuts off the water, dries his hands.

EXT. DECK

The raccoon sits up and leans his forepaws against the window screen.

INT. KITCHEN

Both Michael and Josh hear the SCRATCH of the raccoon's paws on the screen, and for a moment the three creatures look at one another without judgment or fear. Michael looks at Josh, then leaves the kitchen.

Josh trades looks with the raccoon. Michael comes back with the picture of Melanda, puts it back on top of the refrigerator, then turns to Josh. The raccoon watches everything.

Michael approaches the raccoon, who does not move.

MICHAEL

(whispering)

Raccoon, raccoon --

Michael makes a mask around his eyes with his fingers. Moves even closer.

JOSH

(whispering)

Up in a tree --

Josh raises his arms.

JOSH

Raccoon, raccoon --

MICHAEL

You can't see me.

They both cover their eyes, Michael right at the window. The raccoon looks to one, then the other, and without fuss turns and leaves.

Michael faces his father.

MICHAEL

I get 50% of everything you win.

JOSH

Right into the trust fund.

Michael moves to go back to his room. Josh reaches out to give him a hug, but Michael shies away.

MICHAEL

It's okay, Dad.

Michael disappears into his room.

JOSH

(to himself)

Well. Bingo. Of all things.

A CRASH as the raccoon goes for the tomatoes in the salad.

EXT. BARBARA'S DECK - SAME EVENING

Barbara puts down a gin and tonic, then wriggles out of her lab coat and tosses it on the table. The stethoscope makes a solid THUNK.

Sipping, she stares at the shimmering lights from the houses on the other side of the lake.

She fishes out the stethoscope and listens to her own heart and breathing, then puts it down. Takes a long drink, stares into the darkness.

EXT. ROAD - FROM A DISTANCE - NEXT AFTERNOON

Against the afternoon glare, Michael and Josh are small silhouettes, Michael this time not so far ahead.

EXT. ROAD - CLOSER IN

Michael turns to look at his father, who waves to him.

JOSH

Go on! I'm fine!

Michael takes off, but Josh, instead of doubling over to catch his breath, continues steadily, face to the sun.

EXT. JONATHA'S DRIVEWAY

Michael sees Barbara's car.

INT. JONATHA'S LIVING ROOM

Michael pokes his head in.

MICHAEL

Hello.

BARBARA (O.S.)

Come on in.

INT. KITCHEN

Barbara at the table with cuff, syringe, etc.

BARBARA

The 200,000-mile check-up.

JONATHA

That's almost to the moon, but not back.

Barbara collects her instruments.

BARBARA

You'll live long enough to make it back.

(to Michael)

She puts redwoods to shame.

MICHAEL

Ms. Morgan?

BARBARA

Yes, Michael.

But Michael doesn't answer right away. The two women shoot a glance at each other as they read the hesitation in his body.

BARBARA

What is it, Michael?

MICHAEL

Could I talk with you for, like, a moment?

BARBARA

Of course.

Michael points to the living room.

MICHAEL

In there?

BARBARA

Of course. Ms. Newcomb?

JONATHA

I'll just sit here and grow another tree ring.

Jonatha watches intently as they move into the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Michael paces.

MICHAEL

My dad says -- My dad says you two have a -- date tonight.

Barbara doesn't answer right away.

BARBARA

I guess we do, Michael.

MICHAEL

Bingo.

BARBARA

At the church -- yes. Michael, why don't you sit down?

Michael sits next to her as they sit down on the couch.

MICHAEL

You knew my mother?

BARBARA

I knew your mother a little.

MICHAEL

Did you like her?

BARBARA

I heard she had the greenest thumb in town. I envied that.

Barbara holds up her thumb.

BARBARA

No talent in mine whatsoever. What I knew of your mother I liked. Everyone who knew her liked her. A heart like a green thumb. She is missed, Michael.

Michael traces a figure on his knee.

BARBARA

I'm sorry she's gone.

Barbara puts a tender hand on Michael's shoulder.

MICHAEL

I told him -- 50% of everything he wins.

Barbara smiles.

BARBARA

Only fifty percent? I'll make sure he ups it to 75.

MICHAEL

He's not a big gambler.

BARBARA

Neither am I.

Barbara touches the cut on his temple.

BARBARA

Seems to be healing quite nicely.

INT. SIDE DOORWAY

Michael watches Barbara get into her car and drive away.

JONATHA

You okay?

MICHAEL

Can we go work?

JONATHA

In work is salvation. Let's go do that, Michael.

INT. BUNGALOW - LATER

Josh at his dresser. He slips his wallet in his pocket and his cell phone on his belt, pulls at his shirt, hitches up his pants.

Finally he looks up and peers at himself in the mirror for a good ten seconds.

A KNOCK on the kitchen door.

INT. KITCHEN

Josh sees the dumpy silhouette of Ernest at the screen door. Except that Ernest, for Ernest, is dressed up: white shirt, polyester slacks, loafers, hair slicked back.

Josh opens the door for him.

JOSH

Come in.

Which Ernest does -- but with a cane and limp in his left leg.

JOSH

What happened, Ernest?

Ernest tries to stand tall, though clearly in pain.

ERNEST

Ain't nothing much.

JOSH

It's a nothing that's something, Ernest. Come on, sit down.

ERNEST

I can stand just fine.

But Josh pulls out a chair for Ernest. He throws it a defiant look, but the pain begins to win the battle.

ERNEST

Well, maybe for a minute.

Ernest hobbles over to it and sits. Josh sits in a second chair.

JOSH

Ernest, we can settle up the accounts later. I'm about ready
--

ERNEST

I know where you're going. And that's why I'm here.

Ernest tries to appear tough but only looks more hang-dog.

ERNEST

You have a date.

JOSH

And does everybody know this?

ERNEST

"Don't make love by the garden gate / Love is blind, but the neighbors ain't."

JOSH

I see --

Ernest holds up his hand for Josh to stop.

ERNEST

I don't mean disrespect, Colonel, but I have to know.

JOSH

Know what?

ERNEST

I have to know what your intentions are towards Barbara.

Josh half-smiles at the earnestness of Ernest.

ERNEST

Because if you intend to --

JOSH

Ernest, how did you hurt yourself?

ERNEST

Don't change the subject --

JOSH

I'm just curious -- friend to friend.

Ernest fidgets, then speaks.

ERNEST

I started running. Tried to start, that is. Made it to the end of the driveway, then twisted my ankle. On a rock.

JOSH

That's a shame. Running, huh?

ERNEST

Yeah. You know, so that --

JOSH

Yes, Ernest, I know.

The cicadas SAW the air.

JOSH

You've taken good care of the place.

ERNEST

It's a good place.

JOSH

Wouldn't trust it to anyone else.

Josh makes two fists and bangs them gently together.

JOSH

We're a little too old for this, aren't we? With your ankle and my hamstring, we couldn't even get a running start.

ERNEST

Most likely.

JOSH

No big bang for these old bucks, eh?

Ernest fidgets.

ERNEST

But do you intend --

JOSH

I intend to win \$300 tonight. That much I know.

ERNEST

Because if you --

JOSH

I still miss Melanda like there's no tomorrow. Like the twelfth of never. Past that -- I don't have a clue.

Ernest sits up tall, rests his hands on his cane.

ERNEST

That \$300 tonight is mine.

JOSH

Wouldn't have expected anything less from you.

Josh leans over and taps his cane.

JOSH

You even have your sword.

Ernest taps the floor with his cane.

ERNEST

May the best "Bingo!" win.

JOSH

Hoo-wah!

INT. BARBARA'S HOUSE - LATER

Barbara, dressed smartly, cosmetic'd, scoots around unnecessarily moving pillows, dusting off spotless table-tops, and so on.

BARBARA

(whispering)

Slow down -- stay fresh --

When Josh knocks on the front door, she stops, takes a deep breath, then opens it --

FRONT DOOR

To see a nervous Josh smartly dressed.

BARBARA

Come on in, come on in.

Josh enters. Barbara closes the door.

BARBARA

Welcome to the humble abode. Would you like a drink?

JOSH

I would love a drink.

Barbara puts her finger to her temple.

BARBARA

I sense gin and tonics cooling in the refrigerator.

JOSH

Splash of lime juice?

BARBARA

But of course!

They move toward the kitchen. Barbara turns to face Josh.

BARBARA

I am remarkably out of practice at this.

JOSH

I was never even in practice to be so much out of it.

BARBARA

Good -- I'm glad we got that out of the way.

JOSH

Drinks.

BARBARA

Drinks it is.

INT. UPPER ROOM

Michael slides pictures in the crates, the room almost completely organized except for the one untouched pile covered with a rough burlap cloth.

Jonatha draws up her list.

EXT. BARBARA'S DECK

Under a multi-colored umbrella, Josh and Barbara sit sipping gin and tonics, looking out over the lake.

BARBARA

I want to show you something, Josh. Do you mind?

JOSH

No.

Barbara enters the house. Josh, alone, sips, stares, sips again.

Barbara returns with a well-made, polished wooden box. She sets it down, opens it.

Inside is a tightly folded American flag.

On top of the flag is a picture of Barbara's MOTHER, her service portrait.

Barbara nods at it. Josh cradles the photo, careful not to get fingerprints on it.

JOSH

I know about this.

BARBARA

I know you do. "Full military honors," Melanda's obituary said. Flag included.

JOSH

And this?

Barbara sits.

BARBARA

I, too, know about the losing of mothers.

(points to photo)

Pamela Dorothy Morgan. 85th Evac Hospital, Gia Dinh Province, Vietnam. A brave nurse in a stupid war.

Josh hands her the photo. Barbara also cradles it.

JOSH

And now you're a nurse.

BARBARA

With my mother's leather bag at my side, no less. I know what Michael's gone through -- going through. And you, too -- a little, at least.

Barbara replaces the picture in the box, closes the box.

They sit, sip in silence. Barbara points to the box.

BARBARA

Maybe this wasn't --

JOSH

I'm thinking exactly the opposite.

BARBARA

So -- "I-75" still sounds good to you?

They raise their glasses to each other.

JOSH

To Pamela Dorothy Morgan.

BARBARA

And the big one.

INT. UPPER ROOM - JONATHA'S HOUSE

Bare bulb. The windows show the coming of night. Michael nails the crate shut while Jonatha tapes on the list.

Only one group of items remains, covered with the burlap.

Jonatha marks off the days on the calendars. She looks at the untouched pile, then walks around it, fidgety.

MICHAEL

I drew something. A picture.

Michael pulls a folded piece of paper from his pants pocket, hands it over to Jonatha, who unfolds a crude but not bad picture of a raccoon.

JONATHA

A raccoon.

MICHAEL

You can recognize it. Last night, at the kitchen window, my dad and I saw -- that.

Jonatha scans him.

MICHAEL

My mother used to sing to me about a raccoon --

Jonatha pushes the drawing back to him.

JONATHA

Well, that's nice.

MICHAEL

What's the matter?

Jonatha, agitated, moves around the room, skirting close to the covered pile, then away.

MICHAEL

You okay?

JONATHA

That's what your mom did for you?

MICHAEL

Yeah.

JONATHA

Sing?

MICHAEL

All the time.

JONATHA

Sing, read to you --

MICHAEL

Yeah.

JONATHA

Aren't you lucky?

Michael puts the drawing back into his pocket, then walks to the covered pile.

MICHAEL

Okay. So let's just finish this --

JONATHA

Don't touch that, I told you!

Michael turns to her. Anger momentarily washes over his face, then drains away as he sees Jonatha's face and body suddenly livid and fearful and frail all at once.

Then Jonatha faints. Michael manages to catch her before she hits the floor.

INT. JONATHA'S HEAD

Michael's VOICE as if from far away. She tries to answer, but all she hears from her mouth is a raven's CAW.

INT. UPPER ROOM

Michael picks her up.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Michael lays her on the couch. Her breathing is oddly regular, and she looks nothing more than asleep. Michael takes out his cell phone, dials.

INT. BINGO HALL

Josh and Barbara, with what looks like an acre of bingo cards in front of them, are laughing and joking with the people around them, even Ernest.

Josh's cell phone rings. He answers, listens.

JOSH

Here's Barbara.

He quickly hands it to Barbara. Barbara listens intently.

ERNEST

Everything okay?

BARBARA

What's her breathing? Convulsions? We'll be right there.

Barbara hands the phone back.

JOSH

(to Michael)

Are you all right? Okay, we'll be right there.

He disconnects. They prepare to leave.

BARBARA

Looks like we won't be going for the big one.

JOSH

I'll get the car.

Josh leaves.

BARBARA

(to Ernest)

It's Jonatha.

ERNEST

You want I should call the EMTs?

BARBARA

Not yet.

Indicates for Ernest to take their cards.

BARBARA

Ernest, you get the \$300, we split in threes.

EXT. JONATHA'S DRIVEWAY

Josh and Barbara pull in. The car's headlights catch Michael knocking on the door. They get out, Barbara with her leather bag.

BARBARA

What happened?

MICHAEL

Just after I finished talking with you, she woke up.

BARBARA

Woke up.

MICHAEL

Like a jack-in-the-box. I gave her some water, then walked out here to see if you were coming. When I wanted to go back in -- door was locked.

EXT. LIVING ROOM WINDOW

Michael, Josh, and Barbara see Jonatha sitting on the couch, an afghan around her, ignoring the RAPPING on the window to get her attention.

JOSH

How strong can that front door be?

MICHAEL

I have a better idea.

EXT. PORCH ROOF

Michael skips up the A-frame to the roof, then opens the window of the upper room and slips through.

INT. UPPER ROOM

The bulb still burns. Michael sprints down the stairs into the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Michael walks past Jonatha, who stares, her face set. He opens the door.

Barbara, leather bag in hand, hustles to Jonatha, who makes no response to Barbara feeling her forehead, taking a pulse, etc.

BARBARA

I am going to call the EMTs.

Jonatha's voice BARKS out.

JONATHA

No!

BARBARA

And why not?

JONATHA

I'm not leaving!

BARBARA

You fainted, Jonatha. It may have been a stroke.

JONATHA

I am not going!

Jonatha sits there, staring, Barbara's face and voice uncertain.

BARBARA

Then do me a favor, you old coot -- just lie down. Okay?

Jonatha doesn't move. Barbara takes her legs and swings them onto the couch, lays her head to the pillow, tucks the afghan around her. Jonatha doesn't resist, doesn't help. Within seconds she seems sound asleep.

BARBARA

What happened?

Michael points to the kitchen, and Barbara nods.

INT. KITCHEN

MICHAEL

We were talking about my mother -- about Mom -- upstairs
--

(to Josh)

-- I was going to tell her the raccoon song --

(to Barbara)

-- and then she just collapsed. Like a tent.

Barbara walks to the doorway, looks on Jonatha, then turns back to Michael.

BARBARA

Show me.

INT. UPPER ROOM

MICHAEL

Here it is. This is what we've been doing -- "closing up shop."

BARBARA

She said that.

MICHAEL

Called it that. Made some cadaver jokes.

(to Josh)

There're the calendars.

Josh looks at the calendars.

JOSH

Same dates as this year, just different years. And look, here, at the end of the Junes.

MICHAEL

"Meet The Elephant."

Something is also written around the calendar margins. Josh leans in closer to see.

JOSH

And so these men of Indostan / Disputed loud and long,
/ Each in his own opinion / Exceeding stiff and strong, /
Though each was partly in the right, / And all were in the wrong!

BARBARA

(overlapping)

"Though each was partly in the right, / And all were in the wrong!" The six blind men and the elephant.

JOSH

Meet The Elephant.

BARBARA

A favorite of hers. Blindness, fooling yourself --

Michael points to the last group of paintings.

MICHAEL

I kept wanting to get to those, but she yelled at me once not to touch 'em, then yelled at me again just before she -- you know, boom. So I didn't.

The three of them stand by the covered pile.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Jonatha's breathing stays regular, but her eyelids begin to tremble, as if she is dreaming.

INT. UPPER ROOM

BARBARA

I think we have to.

MICHAEL

Let's take 'em downstairs. I don't feel comfortable --

BARBARA

Good idea.

(to Josh)

Keeps a cool head.

INT. KITCHEN

They pile what they've carried downstairs on the table and floor.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Michael looks at Jonatha, her eyes fluttering but her breathing even. He gives the afghan an unnecessary tuck.

INT. KITCHEN

MICHAEL

She's breathing okay.

They begin to unpack the items.

INT. LIVING ROOM - JONATHA'S DREAM

Everything in soft focus -- bright, colorful. Jonatha, now five years old, sits on the carousel horse. Then, carefully, she stands on it, like a bareback circus rider. The strong VOICE of GEORGIA, 40s, African-American, calls out.

GEORGIA

Miss Baby! Miss Baby! Get down!

The scene suddenly shifts to Jonatha, same age, sitting primly in her tree, a rope ladder hanging down.

Georgia appears at the base of the tree. She knows Jonatha is up there but makes believe not to notice.

GEORGIA

Miss Baby -- I got your favorite eats in the kitchen. But I'm giving it to Mugsy if you don't come down.

INT. KITCHEN

All three pore over drawings, paintings, writings, and other items about Georgia.

In the middle, as if framed by all the material, is a photo of Georgia and Jonatha at the age of five. Despite the difference in skin colors, it is clear from their features that they are more than servant and Miss Baby.

BARBARA

Georgia was a servant in the Newcomb house.

Josh holds up an old postcard of San Antonio, Texas.

BARBARA

That's where they lived.

Michael turns the photo over, reads the caption.

MICHAEL

"Georgia's Miss Baby."

JOSH

Stories, poems --

BARBARA

Drawings, paintings --

JOSH

All Georgia, all the time.

JONATHA'S DREAM

Jonatha, hidden in the linen closet, peeks through the crack between the door and the jamb.

Her FATHER, big, beefy, well-suited, comes into the laundry room, Georgia there folding sheets.

Her father puts his hand on Georgia's waist.

GEORGIA

Mr. Newcomb -- please.

FATHER

Please what?

Jonatha, in the closet, begins quietly tapping the letters "S O S" against the jamb -- short-short-short, long-long-long, short-short-short -- as her father spins Georgia to face him. The tapping gets faster and faster.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Jonatha's breathing, still even -- but her eyes dance.

INT. KITCHEN

Barbara holds up a large photo.

BARBARA

Family photo. 1913.

JOSH

(pointing up)

The calendar.

BARBARA

Dated the last day of the month.

Barbara turns the photo over, and then keeps turning it back and forth as she points out people.

BARBARA

Mother. Father. Jonatha on Georgia's lap. Aunt. Uncle, uncle, uncle, uncle. A couple more aunts. Cousins.

Michael holds a document that transfixes him.

JOSH

What?

Michael hands it over to Barbara.

BARBARA

A birth certificate.

JOSH

For?

MICHAEL

A young girl -- born to Georgia.

Barbara looks at the family photo.

BARBARA

I don't see any black girl in the picture.

JOSH

It's unusual they even included Georgia. When's Jonatha's birthday?

BARBARA

February 28.

Josh holds up the birth certificate, his finger under the phrase "February 28."

MICHAEL

Dad?

JOSH

Yeah, I know.

MICHAEL

No --

JOSH

It's been known to happen --

BARBARA

(amazed)

Jesus H. and a dose of Mary.

JONATHA'S DREAM

A funeral. Closed casket, photo of the father on an easel. Georgia supports Jonatha's MOTHER by the arm, but the mother is strangely dry-eyed and the only white woman whose face is not covered by a veil.

Jonatha in the choir loft, watching the patterns made by the heads of the congregation. Beside her, the organist PLAYS. The pastor's VOICE drones.

Jonatha's eye drifts to the dappled sunlight on the windows, to the grain of the wood railing on which her hands rest, these patterns matching the patterns made by the people in the pews. All blending, all swirling.

JOSH (V.O.)

An obituary -- Jonatha's father.

BARBARA (V.O.)

Died from?

JOSH (V.O.)

Something sudden -- apparently healthy one day, gone the next.

The kitchen, father and mother at the table, Georgia at the counter. Father drinks his coffee, reading his newspaper, then suddenly begins to choke as whatever was in the coffee takes effect. Within minutes, dead.

Georgia and mother look at each other.

INT. KITCHEN

JOSH

Whatever it was, it was bad enough to make it a closed casket.

MICHAEL

This is way too weird.

JOSH

And another one.

Barbara takes the second clipping -- a second obituary.

BARBARA

Jonatha's mother.

JOSH

In quotation marks.

MICHAEL

Man.

They all look steadily at each other.

BARBARA

What did Jonatha know?

JOSH

And when did she know it?

JONATHA'S DREAM

Jonatha, now 18, standing in front of her mother and Georgia, screaming without pause because they have finally told her the truth about her past.

Jonatha suddenly climbing up her tree, Georgia underneath calling out to her, then Jonatha suddenly losing her grip and falling, falling, falling, past Georgia into Mexico and sketching the daughter and mother who made tortillas from blue corn, then falling into New York painting the same picture on the cellophane, smiling, energized.

INT. KITCHEN

They sift through drawing after drawing of Georgia -- young, old, in oil, in charcoal, in gouache -- picture after picture after picture.

MICHAEL

I don't think Jonatha's ever had a show.

BARBARA

She's never said to me she wants one.

MICHAEL

And would Jonatha ever say something like that?

JOSH

Listen to this.

Josh holds up a yellowed typewritten page.

JOSH

First of all, signed by --

Turns the letter to them. They can see the logo on the letter: Museum of Modern Art.

JOSH

Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Museum director.

MICHAEL

A show?

JOSH

Apparently very interested.

BARBARA

The date?

JOSH

(looking closely)

Nineteen forty -- last number smudged, maybe 1, maybe 7.

BARBARA

The calendar.

MICHAEL

Bingo.

JONATHA'S DREAM

INT. DINER - 1941

Jonatha, 33, at a table. She's made a tableau from the salt and pepper shakers, ketchup bottle, etc. Her right leg jitters, and she can barely sit in her chair.

On the table in front of her, the letter from the museum, which she spins.

Through the plate glass window Jonatha watches Georgia, now older, come closer, checking an address on a piece of paper until she sees the diner and Jonatha at the window.

Jonatha puts the letter away.

EXT. DINER

Georgia looks at Jonatha, then enters.

INT. DINER - TABLE

Georgia slides into a chair, clutching her large purse. She stares at Jonatha.

GEORGIA

My God. Miss Baby.

JONATHA

What do you want?

GEORGIA

I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

Georgia clicks open her purse, takes out a newspaper clipping: her "mother's" obituary notice.

Georgia slides it across the table. Jonatha reads it but does not touch it.

GEORGIA

I'm sorry.

JONATHA

Stop saying that.

GEORGIA

I didn't know if you knew.

JONATHA

Knew what?

Jonatha blows the clipping back across the table.

JONATHA

You wasted your time.

GEORGIA

Baby. Baby.

Georgia goes to touch her, and Jonatha recoils.

GEORGIA

Come home, Baby.

JONATHA

No thanks.

Jonatha gets up.

JONATHA

My mother is dead. And my mother is dead. From now to
whenever -- both dead.

As hard as Jonatha tries to keep her face like stone, on the last "dead" her
face contorts with anger and pain. But she will not share the grief.

JONATHA

(whispering)

You need to go back to being dead.

EXT. DINER

Jonatha does not want to look back, but she does and sees Georgia alone
at the table.

Georgia puts her hand on the plate glass window, and as soon as she does
the glass and the entire diner, including Georgia, SHATTER into dust.

The force of the BLAST throws Jonatha up and away, and she finds herself
falling, falling, falling until she is caught by a pair of strong brown arms out
in back of her house.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Jonatha's eyes pop open.

INT. KITCHEN

They look up to see Jonatha in the doorway.

They scramble to their feet and go to her, but she waves them away as she
moves to the table.

She touches the photo of her and Georgia.

JONATHA

I am very tired.

Jonatha looks at the three of them.

JONATHA
(to Michael)

I am very ashamed.

She looks at the photo, then right into Michael's eyes.

JONATHA
I want to go home.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NEXT MORNING, GREY DAWN

Vigil. Josh and Michael in chairs, Barbara on the couch -- sleeping.

Michael wakes, extricates himself, wincing as he does, then goes to Jonatha's bedroom and sees that her bed is empty.

INT. KITCHEN

Michael looks out the window, sees Jonatha sitting on the knoll in her garden, wrapped in the afghan, staring.

MICHAEL
(whispering)

Like a ghost.

Josh and Barbara shuffle in, see Jonatha.

JOSH
What?

MICHAEL
A ghost.
(pointing)
I never even heard her go out.

JOSH
What are we going to do? We have a suicidal ghost sitting out there with the flowers. Date marked on the calendars and everything.

MICHAEL
(whispering)

Closing up shop.

BARBARA
Meeting the elephant. I don't know -- she never needs help.
I need help figuring out what help she needs.

JOSH

I have an idea.

They turn to face him.

JOSH

Actually, your idea.

MICHAEL

Mine.

JOSH

A show.

A moment as the idea sinks in.

MICHAEL

Yeah!

BARBARA

She'll never let you.

MICHAEL

She wouldn't have to know.

JOSH

At least about setting it up.

MICHAEL

Right. The show she never had.

JOSH

-- she never had.

BARBARA
You're thinking --

JOSH
Yes.

MICHAEL
Yes!

BARBARA
The Georgia pictures.

JOSH
Yes.

BARBARA
Rest in peace.

JOSH
Exactly.

MICHAEL
We have to do that. We have to do that.

Barbara stares at the lonely figure in the garden.

BARBARA
It means lying to her.

MICHAEL
A little.

JOSH
Call it artistic license.

MICHAEL
Just a little. I mean, only if you agree. You know her best.

BARBARA
I don't know what I know now, knowing what I just learned.

Barbara keeps looking at Jonatha, then nods her head yes.

EXT. GARDEN

Barbara and Michael where Jonatha sits.

BARBARA

Jonatha, I need you to come with me. I need to check out the plumbing.

MICHAEL

Here, I'll give you a hand.

EXT. DRIVEWAY

Balancing things carefully, Josh puts the thick pile of materials into the trunk of the car.

EXT. GARDEN

Michael escorts her. Jonatha puts up her hand to stop him.

JONATHA

You would die for your mother.

MICHAEL

Anybody would.

BARBARA

Jonatha, before you catch something.

JONATHA

But you would die for her.

MICHAEL

C'mon.

They walk a few more steps.

JONATHA

Look at the dragon. It held up.

MICHAEL

Never doubted it.

Jonatha now looks quite frail and scared as she holds on to Michael's arm. Barbara bites her lip in worry.

INT. KITCHEN

Josh ties a length of rope across the stairway up to the room. From it he hangs the sign Jonatha had hung on the A-frame: "Abandon Dante all ye who enter here."

Barbara and Michael come in with Jonatha.

BARBARA

This is one little girl who's going right to bed.

Barbara takes her straight into the bedroom. Josh and Michael look at each other.

MICHAEL

How was your date?

JOSH

It was fine.

Barbara comes back out.

BARBARA

Could you hand me my bag?

Josh takes it from the kitchen table.

BARBARA

Thanks.

Barbara looks at Michael and smiles, then disappears back into Jonatha's room.

MICHAEL

Win anything?

JOSH

How about 50% of some close misses?

MICHAEL

Seventy-five.

JOSH

That's doable.

Barbara comes back out.

BARBARA

She's exhausted -- fell right off by herself.

MICHAEL

I'll stay while you guys, you know, set things up.

Barbara and Josh leave.

INT. JONATHA'S BEDROOM - DOORWAY

Michael watches Jonatha breathe.

EXT. BUNGALOW DRIVEWAY

Barbara's car pulls in.

INT. KITCHEN - BUNGALOW

JOSH

Quite a night.

Barbara takes the picture of Melanda.

BARBARA

May I borrow this?

JOSH

Why?

BARBARA

I have an idea.

JOSH

Just be careful --

BARBARA

The hands of a nurse, remember.

EXT. BUNGALOW DRIVEWAY

Barbara moves to her car.

BARBARA

We'll do it at my house. Familiar territory.

JOSH

When --

BARBARA

Has to be tomorrow night.

JOSH

And why is that?

BARBARA

The night of the Bootids.

JOSH

The what?

BARBARA

The Bootids. Haven't you seen the signs?

Barbara pulls away.

BARBARA

I'll be back!

The car disappears down the road.

EXT. STREET IN TOWN

A banner advertising the town's celebration of the Bootids hangs across Main Street.

EXT. PHOTO SHOP

Through the window: Barbara with the pictures of the three mothers on the counter instructing the clerk to make a copy of each.

EXT. ART ASSOCIATION

Members of the art association, including Ernest, help Barbara load easels into the back seat of her car.

INT. LIBRARY

Josh at the library, looking up "Bootids."

INT. JONATHA'S KITCHEN

Michael with a sketchbook trying to draw some of the Mexican faces on the ceramic tiles.

INT. BARBARA'S HOUSE

Josh and Barbara set up the "show," making Barbara's living room into a gallery: pictures on easels, on the walls, etc.

INT. JONATHA'S KITCHEN

Jonatha peeks around the door jamb at Michael as he draws. Michael senses her and turns.

She comes to the table, sees what he's doing. Taking his drawing hand into her hand, she guides the pencil along a particularly difficult length of cheekbone, and under the guidance, the face seems to leap into focus.

She gets a glass of water, then retreats into her room.

INT. PHOTO SHOP

The clerk slides the three copies across to Barbara, who looks at each of them and nods approval.

INT. BARBARA'S HOUSE

The Georgia "show" is ready.

EXT. ROAD - NEXT AFTERNOON

Michael and Josh running on the road, this time together.

INT. BUNGALOW KITCHEN - NEXT EVENING

Michael fidgets with his tie until Josh comes over and, with sure hands, re-ties the tie.

Michael then returns the favor by straightening Josh's tie.

INT. JONATHA'S LIVING ROOM

Barbara, dressed. Jonatha, not.

BARBARA

Every year we go to my house to see the Bootids.

The sound of a CAR IN THE DRIVEWAY. Barbara gets up to open the front door.

BARBARA

What makes this year any different?

JONATHA

Because I'm dead this year.

Michael and Josh, spiffed and polished, come in.

BARBARA

Lancelot and Galahad.

The three of them stand quietly.

JONATHA

What?

MICHAEL

The Bootids.

JOSH

A periodic meteor shower during the month of June.

JONATHA

Which has sucked the last couple of years.

BARBARA

Piss and vinegar levels rising -- good. Are we going to do this like we always do, or not?

The three wait patiently.

INT. BARBARA'S CAR

Michael in back with Jonatha, who has dressed herself in her "Bootid" outfit of star-cap and tee-shirt: "Shake your Bootid."

EXT. BARBARA'S DRIVEWAY

They get out of the car.

JOSH

Michael, you're on.

MICHAEL

Aye, aye.

JONATHA

Where are you --

Michael lopes ahead and enters the house.

JONATHA

Where's he going?

BARBARA

He knows where he's going. Come on.

With Josh and Barbara on either side of her, her arms through theirs, they make their way into the house.

INT. BARBARA'S KITCHEN

Michael, white towel draped across his arm, holds one tray of glasses filled with champagne and a second tray with little eats on it.

MICHAEL

Would you care for a drink? Something to eat?

JONATHA

What are you doing?

Michael politely ignores her and makes the offer to Josh and Barbara.

JOSH

Don't mind if I do.

BARBARA

Don't mind if I do.

JONATHA

You all lost what few brains you had?

MICHAEL

The gallery is this way, ma'am.

Michael puts the trays down, takes a glass for himself, and offers Jonatha his arm.

MICHAEL

May I?

Jonatha takes his arm, and Michael escorts Jonatha into the living room, now the "gallery."

BARBARA

(whispering)

Here goes.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Jonatha is stunned by what she sees.

She faces them. Barbara hands her a champagne flute. They raise their glasses in a toast, then down the champagne.

Jonatha, looking at her glass, downs it as well, then hands her glass to Michael.

She gives them all a frank stare, then turns and enters "the gallery." She shifts from "exhibit" to "exhibit," and as they watch her, they can almost see the energy pour back into her body, so much so that, without warning, she begins to dance from piece to piece.

BARBARA

Are you shaking your Bootid, Jonatha?

MICHAEL

It's not professional, you know, but -- it's your show.

EXT. DECK

On a small ornate table, a brass bowl. Inside it is a nest of sweetgrass and incense.

In front of each bowl is a white lighted candle, and in front of each candle a copy of the photo of Melanda, Georgia, and Barbara's mother.

The sky is just turning from gold to the bruised purple of night, and in the east, stars have already risen.

BARBARA

It's not just Georgia who needs peace.

Barbara strikes a match to the sweetgrass and incense, and the smoke curls upward.

JONATHA

To all of them.

JONATHA'S VISION

Aerial shot skims low over the New Hampshire landscape. Then it crests over the trees and speeds down across the golden-colored water of the lake. It speeds past Barbara's deck, where four people stand small against the coming night. It speeds past the houses along the shore, their lights like fires in the gathering dark.

In the east, the sky is now completely dark.

The shot rises from the level of the lake into the darkness. A streak of fire across the sky: the first meteor. Several more follow.

The picture of Barbara's mother.

JONATHA (V.O.)

Assuming Our Mothers.

The candle flames dance across the glass covering the picture of Barbara's mother.

JONATHA (V.O.)

out of dreams they come / to hold once more / our desperate
skin and / our hopeful eyes

The picture of Melanda, with the green thumb.

BARBARA (V.O.)

out of dreams they come / to tell us "yes / I have not left you
behind / even though I have left you"

The candle flames dance across the glass covering the picture of Melanda.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

we forgive them for / the mistake they made / in loving us
always / we who have not loved enough

The picture of Georgia and Jonatha.

JOSH (V.O.)

each son and daughter / makes the journey that must be
made

The candle flames dance across the glass covering the picture of Georgia and Jonatha.

JONATHA (V.O.)

each daughter and son / finds home at the end and the
beginning

Sparks fly upward into the darkened sky.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

if we forgive and are forgiven / so much we can do with what
is left us

The night sky fills with meteors.

FADE OUT

The Nun Drops Her Veil

FADE IN:

EXT. PLAZA DE MAYO, BUENOS AIRES

A military parade. ARMED GUARDS and PLAINCLOTHESMEN scan the crowd. Placards about patriotism and honor, the CROWD polite but not enthusiastic. Brief focus on an OLDER WOMAN wearing a white kerchief, crying, holding a laminated photograph of a young man.

Suddenly, a wedge of SOLDIERS burst through the crowd as POLICE drag several YOUNG MEN away. One YOUNG MAN, bloodied face, clutching pamphlets, runs toward a church for safety.

INT. CHURCH

The young man bursts in, falls, blood streaming, and wraps his arms around the legs of a PRIEST. The young man also sees the cassock of another MAN and the black lace shoes and white knee socks of a SCHOOLGIRL.

Police explode in -- the young man sees their polished boots walk slowly toward him. He slips off his watch and holds it up -- a hand takes it.

YOUNG MAN

(voice strained)

My father's -- they'll steal it.

POLICE OFFICER

We're sorry, but --

A gun muzzle points at the young man.

YOUNG MAN

(whispering fiercely)

Don't let them, don't let them --

POLICE OFFICER

Father, we don't want to have to --

A moment, then the priest's hands reach down and unclasp the young man's hands.

PRIEST (O.S.)

It will be all right.

YOUNG MAN

Don't let them, don't let them --

But once the young man's hands are freed, the police drag him out, leaving a trail of blood and pamphlets. The hand of the schoolgirl picks up a pamphlet.

PRIEST (O.S.)

There are laws -- he'll be fine.

The pamphlet falls from the schoolgirl's hand into the blood.

EXT. RIO NEGRO - DAWN TWO YEARS LATER

Establishing shot: houses, plaza, fields, mountains, church, school, sky full of color, people about their business.

EXT. CONVENT

Simple building, crucifix over the doorway, a battered Renault 4 parked outside.

INT. MARIA'S BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

Black lace shoes under a desk tap lightly. They belong to MARIA, who sits at the desk writing in her journal. Around her: a bed, chest of drawers with family picture. On the wall: picture of Mother Teresa with a child, crucifix. In the corner: a statue of the Virgin Mary covered in a rough wool peasant poncho. Maria, wearing a modern jumper and white shirt, finishes writing, her journal nudging a small pot holding a single brilliant yellow flower. She stores the journal behind the statue under the poncho.

After putting on a short grey veil, Maria picks up three colored balls, labeled "Father," "Son," and "Holy Spirit," then juggles them as she murmurs her morning prayers, continuing down the hallway to...

DINING ROOM OF CONVENT HOUSE

FOUR NUNS sit in the simple room while ROSARIO, 50s, the nuns' housekeeper and all-round custodian, serves them simple food. They all watch Maria enter. SISTER JOSEFINA, the MOTHER SUPERIOR, thin-lipped, disapproving. SISTER TERESA, young, hiding a smile. SISTER CRISTINA, 30s, calm. SISTER CARMEN, 40s, shaking her head. Rosario with a big gap-toothed smile. Maria makes her way to her seat, sits, puts the balls on the table, and flashes everyone a smile.

MARIA

Good morning.

Sister Josefina goes to speak, but Maria grabs the hands of Sister Josefina and Sister Teresa and bows her head.

MARIA

Let us give thanks, shall we?

Outmaneuvered, Sister Josefina and the other nuns join hands. Rosario bows her head. Maria looks up, sees them all praying, and gives a quick wink to Rosario, who catches it and smiles.

EXT. CONVENT HOUSE

Maria carries the yellow flower in the small pot. She stops to draw a picture of a bird in the dust on the Renault's windshield, then strides toward the school.

EXT. SCHOOL

Maria watches army helicopters overhead, their propellers THUDDING.

INT. HELICOPTER

SOLDIERS look down on the town, search the mountains.

EXT. MOUNTAINS

Small group of ARMED REBELS, MONTENEROS, watch the helicopter. They wear distinctive bandanas around their necks. They melt away.

INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY

Rosario, imperious with her broom in hand, suddenly softens as Maria brings her the yellow flower.

MARIA

It called out to me that it wanted to belong to you. "Bring me to Rosario."

Rosario grabs Maria in a big two-armed hug and a kiss on each cheek.

EXT. SCHOOL

A gaggle of CHILDREN piles into the school, LAUGHING.

INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY

MARIA

(to Rosario)

Have to go.

Maria stands outside her classroom juggling, greeting her adolescent STUDENTS. Sister Teresa, Sister Cristina, Sister Carmen also greet students. Rosario shooshes them along with her broom.

MARIA'S CLASSROOM

CHATTER, CHATTER, CHATTER until Maria enters juggling, then quiet. They know the routine. Maria juggles two balls and holds the third one out, and they repeat the word.

CLASS

Father!

Another ball.

CLASS

Son!

Another ball.

CLASS
Holy Spirit!

MARIA
Nooooowwww --

CLASS
Aaaaayyyyy-men!

MARIA
Deep breath! Hold it --

In the silence, helicopters again fly over. Maria lets out her breath with a RAZZ. So does everyone else.

MARIA
Now we are ready! Into your groups -- notebooks out so we can work on our essays.

Small chaos as the students scramble into place.

MARIA
Like Noah's ark. Clomp, clomp, clomp. Pablo, over here --

PABLO
But, Peti, I don't like --

MARIA
You'll learn. Life is all about learning to like. Hernán, Raul, Teresa -- begin with your groups.

EXT. ROAD INTO TOWN - SAME TIME

Three armed SOLDIERS in a jeep, with a priest, ERNESTO, 25.

INT. CLASSROOM

Maria sees the jeep pull up to the church. With a shock, she recognizes Ernesto.

MARIA

Teresa. Teresa. Watch the class for me. Class, class -- I want you to follow Teresa.

Everyone looks a bit stunned as Maria leaves. Very unusual. They crowd to the window. LUZ, 13, runs out to follow.

TERESA

Luz Elena!

EXT. CHURCH

Luz catches up and slides her arm through Maria's. Helicopters THUD by again.

MARIA

You have to go back.

But Luz refuses.

MARIA

Too much like me. Come on, then.

Arm in arm, they walk right up to Ernesto.

ERNESTO

A very nice picture, Maria Beatriz.

MARIA

Sister Maria.

ERNESTO

Sister Maria.

MARIA

What are you doing here?

ERNESTO

You're surprised.

MARIA

You're observant.

Maria glances at the soldiers warily.

MARIA
(indicating Luz)
Please introduce yourself.

ERNESTO
My name is Father Ernesto. And yours, linda?

LUZ
Is he your friend?

MARIA
He might say that.

LUZ
(to Ernesto)
Luz Elena, Father.

The soldiers watch. The school windows are crammed with curious faces.

MARIA
What are you doing here with --

ERNESTO
Let's walk a little. How are things going with the school?

MARIA
What are you --

ERNESTO
(sotto voce)
Just answer.

MARIA
The school is doing fine --

Ernesto sees that they are far enough from the soldiers.

ERNESTO
The letter from Gustavo.

MARIA
Letter?

ERNESTO
You didn't get it.

MARIA
What letter?

ERNESTO
I'm here to oversee the parish.

MARIA
Why?

ERNESTO
I have a letter from the bishop --

MARIA
Why?

ERNESTO
Because your name -- is being --

Ernesto indicates Luz.

ERNESTO
We'll talk later.

MARIA
Say what you have to say.

ERNESTO
Sister Maria --

MARIA
Say it.

ERNESTO
Because your name is being discussed.

Maria gives him a hard look.

MARIA

At the back of the church, Father Ernesto -- the door to your room.

ERNESTO

We'll talk --

MARIA

Luz Elena, we have to go.

SOLDIER

Father, are we finished with the festivities?

Ernesto walks back to the soldiers, takes his duffel bag.

SOLDIER

Don't forget your meeting with Colonel Martín.

ERNESTO

I look forward to meeting him.

SOLDIER

That's your own business. Let's go.

As the soldiers leave, Ernesto turns just in time to see Luz and Maria walk back into the school.

INT. SCHOOL - MARIA'S CLASSROOM

Students scramble to their seats and pretend to work.

HALLWAY

Sister Josefina waits, thin-lipped. Maria nods to her but says nothing, enters the classroom.

MARIA'S CLASSROOM

MARIA

Continue working.

Three balls in her hands and she juggles, says nothing to anyone, pacing, thinking.

INT. DINING ROOM - EVENING

Five nuns at dinner, silent, but aching to know the story.

KITCHEN

Rosario peeks through a small slit of open door into the dining room.

DINING ROOM

The CLINK of flatware on plates. Finally...

SISTER JOSEFINA

Maria.

All clattering goes silent except for Maria, who continues to eat. Five pairs of eyes are fixed.

SISTER JOSEFINA

I believe you have something to tell us. About our visitor. Do you know him? Stop eating. Do you know him?

MARIA

I know him -- the way a person might know about a breed of dog.

SISTER CARMEN

Since when do you say anything nasty about anyone?

SISTER CRISTINA

Not like you, Peti.

SISTER JOSEFINA

You will show some respect.

MARIA

Of course.

SISTER JOSEFINA

Well?

MARIA

Father Ernesto. Ernesto Saavedra. His family and my family are old friends. My uncle, Father Gustavo, helped Ernesto prepare for the priesthood.

SISTER JOSEFINA

Is there anything -- well, anything between --

MARIA

(laughing)

Sister Josefina!

SISTER JOSEFINA

Well, why else would you leave your classroom?

MARIA

I am as pure as the snow!

SISTER JOSEFINA

It doesn't snow here.

MARIA

But even if the snow doesn't fall here, it's still pure everywhere else.

SISTER JOSEFINA

Then why --

SISTER CARMEN

(looking at watch)

Sister Josefina -- the evening service? It's getting close.

Sister Josefina resents the interruption of her inquest, but no argument with Sister Carmen. Maria smiles at Sister Carmen for the reprieve, with a smile returned.

KITCHEN

Rosario at the sink as the nuns bring their dishes to her.

SISTER CARMEN

Was there -- anything -- you know?

MARIA

It was worse than that.

Sister Josefina enters. Everyone straightens up.

SISTER JOSEFINA

Sister Carmen, you were worried about the service.

SISTER CARMEN

And I still am, Sister Josefina.

SISTER JOSEFINA

Then all of you -- go. I'll clean.

The four nuns leave.

SISTER JOSEFINA

(to Rosario)

I'll do them. I have washed a dish or two in my life.

Rosario goes to put the food away and watches critically as Sister Josefina rolls up her sleeves and starts to wash the dishes with so much vigor that they fear for their lives.

INT. CHURCH - EVENING

Candlelight. People in prayer, led by Sister Carmen and Sister Cristina. Maria, at the rear, listening deeply when Ernesto enters. In the congregation kneels PEDRO, a rat-faced little man, who though looking like someone praying, keeps darting his glance as if he were looking for food.

ERNESTO

Quite beautiful, Sister Maria.

MARIA

We find that praying for peace is an excellent way to practice being humble.

ERNESTO

We could all use more of that.

Sister Josefina enters behind them.

ERNESTO

Please excuse me, Sister Josefina, for not paying my respects earlier.

SISTER JOSEFINA

You had a long trip.

The door behind them swings open sharply. EDUARDO, a young man in tattered clothes, goes directly to Maria. Pedro watches the scene carefully.

EDUARDO

Sister Peti, Sister Peti -- you have to come -- Belén --

MARIA

Still?

EDUARDO

Worse. Father. Sister.

ERNESTO

What is it?

MARIA

My godchild is sick. Do you want to come?

ERNESTO

I have to meet Colonel Martín.

MARIA

First things first. I have keys, Sister.

SISTER JOSEFINA

Take the car.

MARIA

It'll be faster to walk.

SISTER JOSEFINA

The usual light will be on. Peti, be careful.

Maria and Eduardo leave.

ERNESTO

Peti?

SISTER JOSEFINA

You want to know another one of her nicknames? Terremoto.

ERNESTO

I have no doubt Sister Maria can shake the earth.

SISTER JOSEFINA

Do you know that for a fact, Father?

ERNESTO

That I do.

INT. EDUARDO'S HOUSE - EVENING

Rude cabin, crowded with poverty. Frightened, Luz Elena stands next to her mother, CATALINA. BELÉN, 5, in a disheveled bed, clearly sick, is cared for by Maria.

MARIA

It's very high.

CATALINA

We've got no more medicine!

MARIA

I thought you had bought --

CATALINA

He hasn't worked.

MARIA

Why not?

CATALINA

Tell her! I'll tell her then. Because he's got a big mouth!

MARIA

Eduardito, we talked about this --

CATALINA

No one will take him on.

MARIA

You can't --

EDUARDO

They're bleeding us dry, Peti, they cheat --

MARIA

But you can't go around --

EDUARDO

I'm not the only one talking!

CATALINA

"Justice" and "fairness" while his daughter dies --

MARIA

Catalina --

EDUARDO

But you told me --

MARIA

And I believe all of it in my bones -- you know that -- but your family -- you do justice by them first. Keep her cool -- bathe her -- I'll get the doctor.

CATALINA

Go with her.

MARIA

Catalina, if he squawks again, turn him into a toad.

CATALINA

Then we'd have some food.

EXT. ROAD - EVENING

Bright moonlight, Maria and Eduardo walking, when all of a sudden headlights stab the darkness. Eduardo melts into the darkness just as a jeep with soldiers stops.

SOLDIER

Sister, it's late.

SIDE OF THE ROAD

Eduardo stares at the soldier, breathes shallowly, wondering if they can smell the fear in his sweat.

ROAD

MARIA

It's a short walk.

SOLDIER

The wolves are in the hills, sister. Get in -- we'll take you home.

MARIA

Thank you, no.

SOLDIER

No trouble at all.

MARIA

I'm going to the doctor's.

SOLDIER

Then you'll be there even faster.

Maria reluctantly gets in the jeep, this very small woman surrounded by large armed men.

SIDE OF THE ROAD

Eduardo watches a snake slither away in the silver moonlight.

INT. JEEP

As they pull away, the radio CRACKLES. Soldier answers loudly, over the RUSH of the wind.

SOLDIER

But we have a nun with us. Taking her home. Your name?

MARIA

(shouting)

Sister Maria Beatriz Alvarez.

SOLDIER

Sister -- You got that. Bring her in? You sure? All right.

MARIA

I have to get to the doctor's.

SOLDIER

Sorry, Sister, a small detour first.

MARIA

I have to get to --

But her voice is drowned out by the wind.

EXT. MILITARY GARRISON

The jeep pulls up to one of the buildings. One of the soldiers escorts Maria inside.

INT. COLONEL MARTÍN'S OFFICE

A spare office, maps, etc. COLONEL MARTÍN, the garrison commander, trim, uniformed, 40s, sits with Ernesto as Maria enters. Martín rises to greet Maria.

MARTÍN

Sister Maria Beatriz Alvarez.

MARIA

I was on my way to get the doctor.

MARTÍN

Good evening.

MARIA

I have to get the doctor.

ERNESTO

This is Colonel Martín.

A pause as Maria sees the warning in Ernesto's face.

MARIA

Good evening. Colonel.

MARTÍN

You were on your way to get the doctor.

MARIA

For my godchild. And I would like to continue --

MARTÍN

Eduardo Velez's daughter.

MARIA

(suddenly suspicious)

Yes.

MARTÍN

Father, have you have met Sister Maria Beatriz Alvarez?

ERNESTO

Yes, I have.

MARTÍN

But I mean, have you really met our singular Sister Peti?

Martín flips open a folder.

MARTÍN

We were just taking a look at you. Sister Peti. Sister Terremoto. Good family -- all pharmacists. Scientists, which makes them dependable. Became a nun for --

Flips a few more pages, pauses.

MARTÍN

Well, for reasons that are her own.

MARIA

I really have to get to the doctor's.

Holds up a photo: Eduardo in a group of OTHER MEN from the town. Martín points to Eduardo.

MARTÍN

Of course you know him. Do you know these others?

But Martín doesn't wait for an answer. He puts the photo away, flips through more papers.

MARTÍN

Reports, Sister -- and your name comes up -- talking to the sheep herders, the brick makers. A very active name.

ERNESTO

Colonel Martín? May I have the bishop's letter back?

Martín closes the file and hands the letter to Ernesto.

MARTÍN

Church and country -- an honor to defend them. To defend you both.

ERNESTO

Of course. And I appreciate any more information you can give me about my parish.

MARTÍN

We'll talk again.

ERNESTO

And now I believe Sister Maria really should get to the doctor's.

Martín pushes a button on his intercom. A soldier appears.

MARTÍN

Wherever they wish to go.

EXT. CHURCH

The jeep pulls away, leaving Maria and Ernesto standing. Tense silence between them. From the shadows, Eduardo speaks. They both jump, spooked.

EDUARDO

I got the doctor.

MARIA

Then go home where you belong.

EDUARDO

I'm sorry.

MARIA

Before Catalina turns you into a toad.

EDUARDO

Father.

Eduardo melts into the darkness. Silence stretches. Maria marches toward the convent house.

ERNESTO

Maria.

No response.

ERNESTO

Maria.

She skids to a stop and pivots fiercely.

MARIA

At first, Father Ernesto --

ERNESTO

Ernesto, Maria.

MARIA

At first, Father Ernesto, I couldn't tell the difference between you two.

ERNESTO

Let me explain.

MARIA

The priest and the lord of the castle. Did you have him call me in?

ERNESTO

Of course not.

MARIA

Then why was I there?

ERNESTO

Your file was already open when I got there. Why would you think that I --

MARIA

Because it wouldn't have been your first betrayal.

The word hangs heavy between them.

ERNESTO

It's part of my duty to talk to Martín.

MARIA

I know all about your sense of duty.

ERNESTO

We have to talk about --

But Maria already heads for the light over the front door.

ERNESTO

Maria!

MARIA

Sister Maria Beatriz Alvarez.

Maria stops, then turns back.

MARIA

Here, tomorrow, after morning prayers. You want information about your parish?

EXT. MOUNTAIN PATH - NEXT DAY

Maria confidently hikes up a dusty path trailed by a panting and sweating Ernesto carrying a heavy backpack.

ERNESTO

Can we take a --

But his words trail off as Maria strides on, and he pushes himself to keep up with her.

EXT. CABIN

A run-down yard. Maria KNOCKS on the warped doorframe, and PENELOPE, a small brown nut of a woman, appears, her face open in a toothless smile. They embrace.

PENELOPE

Peti, Peti, my Peti -- oh, oh, oh!

Penelope WHISPERING, pointing at Ernesto.

PENELOPE

The crickets told me all about the mule.

MARIA

I call him Father Ernesto. This is Penelope.

Penelope barely nods to Ernesto -- clearly no use for him.

PENELOPE

Did you bring, did you bring --

MARIA

All of it.

Another broad toothless smile and a HANDCLAP. Penelope and Maria disappear into the house, Ernesto trailing.

INT. CABIN

In the middle of the broken everything hangs an enormous unfinished embroidery on medieval themes -- phoenix, unicorn, apocalypse, fronted by a rough scaffolding. Maria pulls the backpack off Ernesto, almost tumbling him over, and takes out a package full of bundled colored thread.

PENELOPE

Yes, yes!

Penelope begins adding the bundles by color to thread already laid out.

MARIA

My mother sends them to me for her.

PENELOPE

We are getting closer, we are getting closer!

Finished, Penelope suddenly plants herself in front of Ernesto and bows her head.

MARIA

She wants you to give her last rites.

ERNESTO

But she's not dying.

Penelope remains planted, head bowed. Her VOICE, suddenly strong and clear, startles Ernesto.

PENELOPE

It never hurts to be ready.

ERNESTO

But I don't have --

MARIA

It's all right.

Ernesto quickly improvises the ritual, with a sign of the cross on her forehead. Penelope CLAPS her hands.

PENELOPE

Now I am ready.

Penelope climbs the scaffolding and begins her meticulous sewing, ignoring them. Ernesto, transfixed by the scene, traces the various figures with his hand. His amazed look at Maria is met by a silent nod and a reluctant smile.

EXT. CABIN

MARIA

Her son is a "disappeared." One of the first from around here. At night she wanders -- out there -- looking for him.

ERNESTO

The tapestry?

MARIA

A record. Of his soul's journey. A madness. A comfort.

Maria chucks the backpack at him.

MARIA

The crickets talk about the mule.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PATH

Ernesto clammers behind Maria, Penelope's cabin behind them.

ERNESTO

Where are we going now?

MARIA

Thirteen more stops. Just like the stations of the cross.

Maria strides over the crest of the hill, Ernesto trailing.

EXT. CREST OF HILL - LATE AFTERNOON

Maria and Ernesto rest, having made their last visit. They drink water and eat bread, the small town spread below them. Silence at first, then...

MARIA

Welcome to your parish.

ERNESTO

I will soon have enormous calves if my feet don't fall off first.

MARIA

That's entirely your own business. I was just giving you a tour.

ERNESTO

Thank you -- for the tour.

Ernesto wants to reach out to touch her, just as a kind of thanks, but he doesn't.

MARIA

I don't want to trade memories with you. Now would be the time to say what you want to say to me, Father Ernesto, or don't bother.

Ernesto hesitates, then digs into a pocket, pulls out the watch of the young man. Pain and disgust on Maria's face.

ERNESTO

I want to say I'm sorry.

Maria, furious beyond limits, stands, indicates for him to give her the watch.

ERNESTO

I learned what happened to him.

MARIA

Who cares what you did? What you did to him made you one of them.

Still furious, she points to the ground.

MARIA

Prostrate yourself.

ERNESTO

What?

MARIA

Right here! Do it!

Slowly Ernesto lays belly down in the dirt, his arms to the side. Maria puts her feet just a foot from his head.

EXT. ANOTHER CREST

Three Monteneros, with rifles, distinctive bandanas around their necks, crouch with binoculars and watch a priest prostrate himself in the dirt.

EXT. CREST OF HILL

MARIA

Grab my ankles! Listen. "My father's -- they'll steal it." Do you remember? "Don't let them, don't let them -- " Do. You. Remember?

ERNESTO

(into the dust)

Yes.

Maria crouches down and unclasps his hands, throws his arms to the side.

MARIA

He begged you. And all you could say? "There are laws -- he'll be fine."

ERNESTO

I was afraid.

MARIA

I would not have done what you did. Don't!

ERNESTO

I was afraid.

MARIA

And it made you weak. You were tested, and you failed! Failed!

A pause, a shiver of disgust.

MARIA

The bright young star of the seminary -- what good came out of that? I admired you. You taught me so much, you freed my mind.

Ernesto picks himself up, dust on his face.

MARIA

Clean yourself off.

ERNESTO

And now your name is making the rounds. Even as far away as the bishop.

EXT - ANOTHER CREST

The three armed young men see the priest get up.

YOUNG MAN 1

Strangest sex I've ever seen, even for a priest.

YOUNG MAN 2

Let's go.

YOUNG MAN 1

Let's stay.

YOUNG MAN 2

Put your tongue back and let's go!

The three slide down the hill and out of sight.

EXT. CREST OF HILL

Indicates for Maria to return the watch. Which she does.

ERNESTO

One on my conscience is enough. I won't have two.

MARIA

No one is asking you --

ERNESTO

The bishop has heard. Martín has a bead on you. I know the Monteneros are around -- a conversation or two with them, probably?

MARIA

Lots of people pass through town.

ERNESTO

And if I was afraid then, I'm even more afraid now. You've never been afraid? You've never failed?

ERNESTO

I want to do good work here. I want to do what's right.

Maria takes up the backpack and slings it at Ernesto.

MARIA

The corner of the church -- the southwest corner -- it should be repaired.

ERNESTO

All right.

MARIA

Eduardo could use the work.

ERNESTO

I have some funds --

MARIA

Then do it. Sister Josefina will be worried about me.

Maria starts down the path, then turns. Helicopter passes.

MARIA

Don't use me. Don't use any of us.

Pivots and continues on. Ernesto pauses, then follows.

INT. HELICOPTER

Soldiers see a priest and nun trek down the path. To the other side they catch a glimpse of three men sliding through the trees. The PILOT banks the helicopter and the GUNNER rips off several hundred rounds, shattering the branches.

EXT. HILLSIDE

Maria and Ernesto drop to the ground, watching the helicopter slip away over the forest. Eerie SILENCE falls, full of WIND and the RASP of blown sand. Slowly they stand.

ERNESTO

(spitting)

I have eaten quite enough dirt today.

They start back down, and then MARIA turns to face ERNESTO. She wipes some dirt from his cheek.

MARIA

You're not alone in feeling afraid.

She pivots and walks on. He follows.

INT. MARIA'S CLASSROOM -- THREE DAYS LATER

The children file out noisily while Maria, standing by the window, watches Ernesto and Eduardo repair the wall. This is clearly not work Ernesto has ever done, and Maria, watching his clumsiness, cannot keep herself from smiling.

EXT. CHURCH WALL

Maria watches a begrimed Ernesto slopping the cement.

EDUARDO

(gesturing)

Father, a little more --

ERNESTO

Right, right.

Maria, winking at Eduardo, picks up three half bricks and juggles, then tosses them to Eduardo, who neatly fits them into an unfinished course. Hitching up her skirt into her belt, she takes the trowel from Ernesto and smoothly mixes the cement. Eduardo indicates for Ernesto to bring him some bricks, a job he is clearly better suited for.

INT. MARIA'S CLASSROOM

Sisters Josefina, Teresa, Cristina, and Carmen all watch the three of them repair the wall. Rosario hovers over their shoulders.

ROSARIO

She knows how to juggle, eh?

Sister Josefina shoots her a withering look, met with a big gap-toothed smile from Rosario.

EXT. CHURCH WALL

Maria and Ernesto watch Eduardo scratch his name into the drying stucco, punctuated with his handprint. They all smile at each other.

INT. SISTER JOSEFINA'S OFFICE - LATER

A smudged Maria faces a frowning Sister Josefina. Sister Josefina indicates the skirt, which Maria lets fall, then picks off a spot of dried cement from Maria's cheek and taps her cheek lightly. A small smile escapes.

SISTER JOSEFINA

Go.

Maria leaves. SOUND of a helicopter.

INT. DINING ROOM - LATER

Ernesto and the five nuns sit at the dining table, polite and strained. Sister Teresa tries to hide a smile, Sister Cristina tears at a crust of bread, Sister Carmen gives Sister Teresa a hard look.

SISTER JOSEFINA

Father Ernesto?

ERNESTO

Yes.

SISTER JOSEFINA

We have a problem we'd like your advice on.

ERNESTO

I'll offer what I can.

SISTER JOSEFINA

We have many young women in the town under our care.
What do you think is the best way to promote chastity
among them?

Ernesto blushes, and it is only by the grace of God that the other nuns do not burst out laughing -- then they lose that grace altogether.

KITCHEN

Rosario is doubled over, hand over mouth, trying to keep her laughter as muffled as possible.

EXT. CREST OF HILL - NIGHT

Eduardo and several others, including IGNACIO, PABLO, ROBERTO, and Pedro, huddle around a fire, talk and pass around mate, the firelight playing across their faces. Out of the darkness loom ARMED MEN, masked. Everyone escapes, but it is clear they have come for Eduardo, his face jammed into the dust, a gun pressed against his nape. And then the gun FIRED, shattering the air.

INT. MARIA'S ROOM - LATE AT NIGHT

A loud RAPPING on the window tumbles Maria out of sleep. Luz Elena, her face terrified, hands Maria a Polaroid showing the dead Eduardo.

EXT. ERNESTO'S DOOR

Maria, heavy flashlight in her hand, pounds and pounds.

MARIA

Now. Now!

INT. EDUARDO'S HOUSE

Catalina holding Belén, Luz Elena cowering, Maria with flashlight, Ernesto clutching Polaroid.

CATALINA

(indicating picture)

They nailed that -- to the door --

MARIA

We'll find him.

CATALINA

Find him.

MARIA

Just stay here.

EXT. DITCH BY ROAD

A flashlight picks out a body, face down, hands tied. Ernesto rolls him over, but only by his clothing can they identify Eduardo because his face has been skinned to the bone.

Headlights, the GROWL of a jeep, spume of dust when it stops, Maria and Ernesto stark in the glare. Silence, then the CRUNCH of boot on dirt, a soldier kneeling by the ditch.

SOLDIER

Not much left for last rites, eh?

Ernesto kneels in the blaze of light, takes out his stole, kisses it, wears it.

ERNESTO

Go to Catalina. This is one thing I know how to do. Go!

Ernesto proceeds to give the sacrament as Maria follows the flashlight's beam to Eduardo's house.

EXT. EDUARDO'S HOUSE

The small house dwarfed by the darkness and the strangled WAIL of grief from Catalina that SHATTERS the night.

INT. MARTÍN'S OFFICE - NEXT MORNING

The haggard DOCTOR puts a folder on Martín's desk. Martín looks equally haggard. JOSE LUIS, Martín's AIDE, stands to the side.

DOCTOR

I haven't done an autopsy since medical school. I'm a pediatrician, Colonel --

MARTÍN

I'm sure you did the best you could.

DOCTOR

Yes, the best I could, but it isn't anything I want to do again.

MARTÍN

You knew him?

DOCTOR

Eduardo Velez? I just treated his daughter a few days ago for a fever.

MARTÍN

And she's better?

DOCTOR

Yes. Good of you to ask, I guess.

MARTÍN

Go on.

DOCTOR

(touching back of neck)

He died from a common disease these days -- one bullet --

MARTÍN

And the business of the face?

DOCTOR

Probably a gelding knife. Thin, sharp.

MARTÍN

Did Eduardo Velez deserve this? Doctor? It's all right, you can talk to me.

DOCTOR

His -- flaw, Colonel? He didn't like being cheated. But he wasn't a Communist, if that's what you're asking.

MARTÍN

The hands and feet?

DOCTOR

When they pierced them -- alive or dead -- who knows?

MARTÍN

Why make him look crucified?

DOCTOR

A body's sickness I can handle, but that one you'll have to answer on your own. Is there anything else?

MARTÍN

No. Thank you again. I assure you --

DOCTOR

Just assure me that I won't have to do this again.

Soldier escorts the doctor out. From behind Martín, a KNOCK.

MARTÍN

Yes.

JOSE LUIS answers, and a soldier shoves Pedro toward the chair. Pedro quivers as he goes to sit.

MARTÍN

Don't sit!

Martín hovers over him, whispers in his ear.

MARTÍN

Who did this?

Pedro shrugs. Martín taps Pedro on his nape.

MARTÍN

A common disease today. Find out.

Pedro's eyes twitch. A bead of sweat falls off his nose.

INT. EDUARDO'S HOUSE - TWO DAYS LATER

Rough coffin on two trestles, six MEN waiting. Catalina with Belén, Luz Elena by Catalina. ALTAR BOY, with censer, incense rising. A gesture from Maria, and the men shoulder the coffin as the altar boy leads.

INT. CHURCH - SAME TIME

Ernesto directs the nuns to arrange the flowers, light the candles, set the trestles.

DOORWAY

He and Josefina watch the road.

EXT. ROAD

The coffin gathers mourners as it travels. Catalina with Belén, Luz Elena, and Maria lead.

INT. CHURCH

The men set down the coffin. As the people sit, they SOUND like falling leaves. Josefina stands at the back.

EXT. ROAD

Martín and his driver pull into the town square.

INT. CHURCH

Ernesto SINGS the requiem, the people's VOICES in answer. Ernesto sees the driver step into the church and whisper to Josefina. Josefina leaves. Maria does not see this.

INT. JOSEFINA'S OFFICE

MARTÍN

I want to offer my condolences.

JOSEFINA

I have not lost anything.

MARTÍN

To the Velez family.

JOSEFINA

I'll make sure they know. Is there anything else?

MARTÍN

We need to have a talk about Sister Maria.

JOSEFINA

One of my best -- I am always proud to talk about her work.

MARTÍN

I want you to know that what happened to Eduardo Velez --

JOSEFINA

Any civilized person would condemn it.

MARTÍN

And I do.

JOSEFINA

That's good.

Josefina waits.

MARTÍN

Eduardo Velez's death is a dishonor -- to me, to my command --

JOSEFINA

Then the Army officially condemns it?

MARTÍN

My men had nothing to do with it.

JOSEFINA

That's good.

MARTÍN

And we will find out who did.

JOSEFINA

And does that bring us back to Sister Maria?

MARTÍN

Defending ideals shouldn't be a dirty business.

JOSEFINA

In an ideal world, we wouldn't need ideals. And Sister Maria?

MARTÍN

Speak to her. Keep her focused on her duties. She is still a child. No matter what she thinks of herself, she is still a child.

A moment as their eyes lock.

JOSEFINA

Thank you for your condolences.

INT. CHURCH

Maria behind the coffin, facing the congregation, half a broken brick in each hand. Martín and Josefina enter.

MARIA

(holding up brick)

This. This. A broken life. Eduardo Velez's life, somebody you all knew. A simple man. He just wanted to raise his family in dignity, and he was murdered and tortured because he wanted a day's pay for his day's work.

One half, the second half, on top of the coffin. The hard THUD of brick against wood echoes and dies.

MARIA

But he isn't the first, is he?

Question hangs in the air.

MARIA

Is he?

An uneasy stirring.

MARIA

Is he?

Air tense, eyes downcast.

MARIA

"I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me." We know -- and we don't speak out. We know -- and we put the bridle in our mouths. Aren't you angry? Aren't you ashamed at what happened to Eduardo Velez?

Ernesto edges closer, stands at her elbow. Maria senses the warning in his closeness.

ERNESTO

(whispering)

Be careful.

MARIA

"I hold my peace, even from the good; and my sorrow is stirred." What good is peace like that? What truth does that kind of sorrow bring?

Maria chooses to ignore the growing discomfort in the congregation -- or just does not see it.

MARIA

Eduardo was the father of my godchild. My Belén. My family. Family. As we all are -- or should be. Unless we cry out in Christ's voice against those don't hear Christ's

voice, like his murderers, Eduardo Velez will not be the last. There will never even be a last because we will be too busy keeping our mouths shut to fight back.

ERNESTO
(harsh whisper)

That is enough.

MARIA
(ignoring him)

Some of you know who did this -- I know you know -- and yet you sit there --

ERNESTO

Finish.

Startled by his voice, as if coming out of a trance.

MARIA
In Christ our Lord, amen.

A response from the people as Ernesto moves forward to finish the ceremony. Martín leaves.

EXT. CEMETERY

A mound of fresh dirt, flowers scattered across it, the low MOAN of wind.

INT. EDUARDO'S HOUSE

After the funeral: food and mate make the rounds. Maria holds Belén, trying to make her laugh. The air fills with LOW CHAT and GOSSIP.

Suddenly, Ignacio's VOICE rises, and Rosario's VOICE answers him. Maria moves closer.

ROSARIO
Go on, tell her.

IGNACIO
No.

MARIA

Tell me what, Ignacio?

IGNACIO

Nothing.

ROSARIO

My cousin is telling a lie.

IGNACIO

Shut your mouth!

MARIA

Ignacio?

ROSARIO

My cousin doesn't talk so big now!

IGNACIO

All right!

But Ignacio does not speak. Maria looks at the others. Ernesto drifts near. Pedro hovers.

MARIA

Did I miss it?

ROSARIO

My cousin said --

IGNACIO

I can talk for myself!

ROSARIO

So talk!

IGNACIO

You saw Colonel Martín there today -- and yet you said what you said.

MARIA

I only said what we all know.

IGNACIO

Do you want more of us to end up like Eduardo?

MARIA

Of course not!

IGNACIO

Because you don't really know what you're talking about.

Ignacio looks around at the group, all of them attentive yet hanging back.

IGNACIO

You think you know us, but you really don't. Justice, the voice of Christ -- all so pretty.

ROSARIO

That's enough.

IGNACIO

You come from the city and think you know all about how poor people live! Well, you don't!

ROSARIO

That's enough out of you!

IGNACIO

You could get us killed.

ERNESTO

Ignacio.

Suspended moment as everyone in the group realizes that everyone else in the small house hangs on their words. Pedro glances from face to face, nervous, attentive.

ERNESTO

Remember where you are.

MARIA

That's not true, Ignacio.

IGNACIO

More talk like what you did and --

ERNESTO

Remember why we are here. Sister Maria, Catalina could use a hand.

The group cannot meet her eyes.

ERNESTO

Let me take her.

Ernesto takes Belén from Maria.

ERNESTO

Catalina needs your help.

Belén struggles out of Ernesto's arms and runs after Maria. The group hang their heads.

ERNESTO

Ignacio, if you have anything to say, say it to me.

IGNACIO

I don't have anything to say, father.

ERNESTO

You were Eduardo's friend.

IGNACIO

I have nothing to say.

ERNESTO

Then I suggest a change in topics.

IGNACIO

You should talk with her, father.

ERNESTO

It's hard to talk to an earthquake, eh?

Small laughter at the shared joke.

ERNESTO

Give Catalina the respect she deserves and talk about the weather, eh?

EXT. ROAD

Ernesto struggles to keep up with Maria, who rockets along fueled by anger and dismay.

ERNESTO

You can't blame them -- Maria -- Maria --

Maria stops so short that Ernesto runs into her.

MARIA

I am going to find out who killed Eduardo -- what is so hard to understand about that?

ERNESTO

Sister Terremoto, listen to yourself.

MARIA

Are you going to help me? Or are you going to get in my way?

ERNESTO

I came here to help you.

MARIA

You came to protect me because my name is being "discussed." I don't care about that.

ERNESTO

But if you care about them --

MARIA

Of course I care about them!

ERNESTO

Then you won't do this. If you push this, you know exactly what can happen. Ignacio is right -- it's the poor who get it in the neck. And do you think your veil gives you a pass? Did you forget what the army did to the Palatine priests? The two seminarians? Have you? I saw the bodies. What was left of them.

This shuts her up.

ERNESTO

And what did they say or do that was so terrible? "Speak in the voice of Christ." Sound familiar? That was all they said, but that's all it took. I watched Martín today. He's a patient man, but he's not your friend or our friend. He will do what he has to do.

Ernesto pulls out the watch.

ERNESTO

His name, too, was Eduardo. And Ignacio is right -- no one is safe. Between the rebels up there, Martín's gang over there, and whoever killed your godchild's father, none of us is safe.

Then puts the watch away.

ERNESTO

And what if, while you're busy "finding out," Eduardo's killers decide they need to finish the job? What if they take Belén? The disappeared aren't always adults.

Maria, head bowed, does not see Ernesto reach out to touch her, then take his hand away before he does. Maria now walks much more slowly, Ernesto following.

ERNESTO

I will do my best to help you find out -- but we have to be careful.

EXT. OFF ROAD -- SAME TIME

A FEMALE MONTENERO, hidden, tracks Maria and Ernesto. Suddenly, the CRUNCH of a boot. Pedro skulks by, pauses, spies on Maria and Ernesto, then continues, the three now closely watched by the Montenero.

INT. JOSEFINA'S OFFICE - EVENING

Josefina looks at the tired Maria with concern.

JOSEFINA

Obedience has always been your hardest vow.

MARIA

I know.

JOSEFINA

I know you know because I've had to keep reminding you about it.

MARIA

I'm sorry, Sister.

JOSEFINA

Do I also have to remind you to continue your duties? Do I need to repeat them?

MARIA

No.

JOSEFINA

Good. Because Father Ernesto has told me everything. He was right to tell me, so don't look hurt. And I told him that I would make sure that you were completely sure about your real work.

Josefina waits.

MARIA

Yes, Sister.

JOSEFINA

I know you loved Eduardo. We all did. He was a good man. If you come across information while you're doing your real work -- if -- make sure it comes to my ears. Is that clear?

A moment as they link, an understanding between them.

JOSEFINA

Go join the others for evening prayers. And be careful.

INT. CHURCH

The church emptying out as Maria arrives. Warm greetings, embraces, as usual, but her mind is somewhere else, and she seeks a quiet place to pray. Ernesto sees her, and as he walks past, he speaks.

ERNESTO

You have all the help I can give you.

Ernesto passes on, closing windows, locking doors, snuffing candles, then leaves. Maria, alone, and the grief building up all day but kept inside finally breaks. Tears slip down her face like rain on a window.

INT. MARTÍN'S OFFICE

Martín signing, with Jose Luis taking the papers he signs.

MARTÍN

Done! That cabinet?

JOSE LUIS

Yes, sir.

MARTÍN

The scotch -- and two glasses. I wish I had as many men here as I have pieces of paper on this desk.

Jose Luis pours scotch into one glass and hands it to Martín.

MARTÍN

The second glass is for you.

JOSE LUIS

No, thank you, sir.

MARTÍN

You don't drink?

Martín hands his glass, unsipped, to Jose Luis.

MARTÍN

Not alone, then. Let's walk instead.

EXT. GARRISON - NIGHT

They walk through pools of light and dark cast by the floodlights.

MARTÍN

Tell me why you don't drink.

JOSE LUIS

The body is a temple, sir.

MARTÍN

You really believe that?

JOSE LUIS

It's what I was taught by people who love me.

MARTÍN

It's that simple for you?

JOSE LUIS

Isn't it for you, sir?

They walk close to the gate of the garrison. The soldiers on duty snap to attention, then relax as Martín passes.

MARTÍN

I try to make it as simple as possible.

JOSE LUIS

Simple doesn't mean easy, sir.

MARTÍN

So smart so young -- and without scotch.

Standing between two pools of light, they hear MOVEMENTS outside the fence. Instantly pistols in hand.

They wait, light breathing -- and then the SOUNDS of jabalés, wild boars. Martín relaxes, and they laugh.

Then suddenly, a gunshot CRACKS. Martín and Jose Luis hit the dirt. A hail of shots, and instantly searchlights comb the grounds, picking out Monteneros.

Martín is up, running, shouting commands, Jose Luis right beside him. The air FRAGS with gunshots, ROARS with the GROWL of jeeps, SIZZLES with radio voices.

EXT. OUTSIDE GARRISON'S FENCE

Beams of light rip into the darkness as a full firefight blazes. Squad leaders fan out their soldiers, who move in disciplined groups.

Martín, in his element, shows himself every inch the officer. He orders, he decides, he commands.

MARTÍN
(to Jose Luis)
Stay here! Stay here!

Then off Martín goes.

The SHOOTING trails away, and then an eerie calm. The remaining soldiers patrol, secure the perimeter.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE

Harsh glare from one of the floodlights on the back of the jeep. Three Montenero bodies, pulped by bullets.

SQUAD LEADER
Like they usually do -- hit, disappear. They're gone.

MARTÍN
Except for these. Our losses?

SQUAD LEADER
Three.

MARTÍN
(whispering)
Tooth for tooth.

SQUAD LEADER
I can set up patrols --

MARTÍN
I want everyone back. We're blind out here. You know what to do with them.

Bodies laid in the back of the jeep, then a full retreat to the garrison.

INT. CHURCH

Maria praying, when suddenly, muffled but sharp, GUNFIRE.

EXT. PLAZA

Ernesto, Maria, townspeople -- straining to hear where the SHOOTING moves, tense, shallow-breathed. As the sound fades, people relax and move back to their homes. Maria and Ernesto glance at each other, then Maria goes back to the convent.

INT. MARTÍN'S OFFICE - SEVERAL HOURS LATER

Martín sees the untouched scotch, pours it back, caps it, puts it away. At first the cabinet door doesn't latch and swings open. Martín slams it shut -- it still doesn't latch properly. With more force than expected, Martín slams it again, hard. It catches -- but also cracks the panel in a jagged and precise line.

EXT. RIO NÉGRO - DAWN

Landscape filled with golden light. Helicopters fly by in silhouette.

EXT. MOUNTAINS

Face of a Montenero, bandana around his neck.

INT. MARTÍN'S OFFICE

Martín at his desk, awake and staring.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE

Penelope wanders, looking for her son.

INT. HOUSE

Ernesto sitting at the bedside of a dying old woman, holding her hand.

INT. KITCHEN - CONVENT

Rosario preparing breakfast.

INT. MARIA'S BEDROOM

Maria in her room, juggling -- she drops a ball.

INT. MARIA'S CLASSROOM - LATER

Maria is seated at her desk staring off into the distance while the class works on an assignment. RAÚL raises his hand, but Maria does not see him.

RAÚL

Sister Peti? Sister Peti?

When Maria doesn't answer, the other students look at one another, wondering, apprehensive.

RAÚL

Sister Peti?

Maria finally hears Raúl and turns to him.

MARIA

The answer to number six, Raúl --

RAÚL

How did you know?

MARIA

Because I know you. It's in what we talked about yesterday.

Maria spies Luz Elena staring at the paper in front of her, and intense sadness sweeps across Maria's face.

MARIA

Put your pencils down. Bring your chairs.

Maria motions for them to gather around her in a circle.

MARIA

Hold hands. A story. Do any of you know about a man named Job?

RAÚL

Does he live in the mountains?

EXT. IGNACIO'S HOUSE

MARIA (V.O.)

He lived long ago -- Bible times. God treated him very badly -- gave him pimples, headaches -- everything you can imagine -- Job got it.

Two ARMED MEN, not Monteneros, drag the dead body of Ignacio behind them, followed by three other ARMED MEN. IGNACIO'S WIFE screams in horror as they throw his body at her feet.

RAÚL (V.O.)

Why?

MARIA (V.O.)

Because God wanted to test his faith.

RAÚL (V.O.)

Did Job do anything bad?

MARIA (V.O.)

Nothing but get up the morning and live his life, like all of us.

Ignacio's wife drops to her knees, frantic hands trying to pump life back into the corpse.

RAÚL (V.O.)

Then that's not right!

MARIA (V.O.)

That's what Job thought. He shouted at God -- yes. "Why, God, why me?"

One armed man grabs Ignacio's wife by the hair. A boot jammed between her shoulders, and he pulls back, hard.

MARIA (V.O.)

He wanted an answer from God. "Why do we suffer? Tell me, right now! Right now!" Job was confused. He felt betrayed -- you all know what that word means? He wanted justice.

INT. IGNACIO'S HOUSE

A roughened pair of hands grabs a baby from its bed.

EXT. IGNACIO'S HOUSE

Armed man holds the baby overhead, then slams it down in front of the Ignacio's wife. The man pulling her hair lets go, his boot in her back jamming her face into the dust.

RAÚL (V.O.)

Did he get an answer?

MARIA (V.O.)

He got the answer everybody gets.

RAÚL (V.O.)

Not fair that God did all that to him.

Ignacio's wife can only see boots in the dust, in the water overflowing from the pump. She can only see her crying child in the dirt. She can only see the gun pressed against the back of her child's head. She can only feel the gun pressed against the nape of her own neck. Then she sees and feels nothing as the air EXPLODES with gunshots.

MARIA (V.O.)

Raúl, our only hope for justice is in Christ. Christ died for us.

Two men prop the three bodies against the wall of the house.

MARIA (V.O.)

He rose to show us the way, and then he keeps coming back to save us -- he never really leaves.

The bodies arranged as if for a ghoulsh family photograph.

MARIA (V.O.)

There is justice, Raúl, if we keep our faith in Christ.

SNAP of a Polaroid camera, the WHIRR of the spit-out film as a man takes a close-up picture of each corpse. A truck pulls up. Men throw the bodies into the truck bed while one man nails the Polaroids to the front door. A veil of dust, and the truck disappears.

INT. MARIA'S CLASSROOM

MARIA

That's the only way. It's hard -- but it's on the only way.
Let's pray. "Our father" --

Hands held, heads bowed, WHISPERS of prayer -- moment of peace.

EXT. ERNESTO'S DOOR - LATER EVENING

The small nut of Penelope's hand knocks crisply on Ernesto's door. When Ernesto opens it, she holds up the Polaroids, then bows her head. When Ernesto recognizes what they are, he takes his right thumb and makes the sign of the cross on Penelope's forehead.

INT. CONVENT - DINING ROOM

All the nuns. Ernesto. Penelope composed. Rosario, sobbing. The Polaroids in the middle of the table. Cups of tea on the table, untouched.

ROSARIO

I was supposed to see them tomorrow.

JOSEFINA

Take your tea.

ROSARIO

(pointing at picture)

That is not my cousin! He's still alive, I know it!

JOSEFINA

Rosario -- stop. Maria.

MARIA

Penelope, were you looking for your son again?

Two raps on the table from Penelope's hard knuckles.

MARIA

Did you see this happen?

One rap, hard.

MARIA

No one?

One hard rap again.

MARIA

All right. I'll take you home.

One hard rap again. Penelope stands.

PENELOPE

My son's waiting to take me home. And then I have to work
in the threads for the moon.

MARIA

Thank you.

Penelope simply turns and leaves.

ERNESTO

Be careful.

But Penelope has disappeared. The tea remains untouched. The pictures
SCREAM silently.

ROSARIO

The bodies were not there.

The knife of silence in everyone's heart. Ernesto looks at Maria, then nods
"yes." Maria nods "yes" back. They are agreed.

EXT. IGNACIO'S HOUSE - NEXT MORNING

The Renault skids to a stop in a plume of dust.

INT. RENAULT

Before the car finishes rocking, Maria is ready to launch herself. Ernesto grabs her arm.

ERNESTO

Stop! Stop!

MARIA

Let go of me.

ERNESTO

You don't know what you're doing.

MARIA

Let go --

ERNESTO

You want evidence, yes? Yes?

MARIA

Yes!

ERNESTO

Then you have to listen to me. I can't believe I'm doing this again.

MARIA

What?

ERNESTO

Here, take these.

Ernesto hands Maria a pad of paper and a pencil, and a plastic bag.

EXT. RENAULT

Maria and Ernesto close the car's doors.

ERNESTO

When I joined the bishop's office -- thanks to your uncle --

MARIA

What is it?

ERNESTO

His Eminence -- you're not to tell anyone this! He started his own -- investigations.

MARIA

Of the disappeared?

ERNESTO

Of everything.

Ernesto starts moving cautiously toward the house, his eyes scouring the ground. Maria moves slowly behind him.

ERNESTO

I got myself attached to the -- project. I learned -- techniques.

Suddenly, Ernesto kneels. He digs a fingertip into a rusty brown patch. Just below the dry surface blood stains his fingertips. He smells it, then offers it to Maria, who smells its unmistakable metallic tang.

ERNESTO

(pointing)

See -- over there -- and there. This where they must have -- Give me the pencil.

Digging slowly through the stain, Ernesto unearths a shell casing out of the dust, holds it on the end of pencil as if it were a pearl.

ERNESTO

The bag.

The evidence captured. At the other patches, Ernesto digs up two more casings.

ERNESTO

(sotto voce)

One shot, each.

He drops the casings in the bag. They move to the door, see the stains in the wood where the bodies had slumped.

ERNESTO

See that?

INT. IGNACIO'S HOUSE

Everything thrown around, the baby's bed overturned. A life destroyed.

EXT. IGNACIO'S HOUSE

ERNESTO

Look here.

In the damp clay at the foot of the pump is a footprint, not filled with water, not erased by the dry wind.

MARIA

Stay here.

INT. IGNACIO'S SHED

Maria roots around a tangle of tools and other junk until she finds what he wants: a bag of plaster.

EXT. IGNACIO'S HOUSE

A thick white soup of plaster fills the footprint. They both squat, watching, waiting.

ERNESTO

(indicating plaster)

That was a smart move.

MARIA

What next?

ERNESTO

If all such simple questions had simple answers. I don't know.

MARIA

I do.

ERNESTO

All right.

MARIA

Martín. We can't go to the police here -- they're already bought and sold. Like the mayor.

ERNESTO

You hate Martín.

MARIA

I only hate what he represents. But if we're going to walk this road, Ernesto -- who else?

Ernesto rises, paces.

ERNESTO

How do we know it wasn't his people?

MARIA

We don't -- but that should stop us from asking?

Ernesto paces more, agitated.

MARIA

No one should ever die like this.

ERNESTO

The bishop has never released what he's found.

MARIA

So why did he bother finding it?

ERNESTO

He has good reasons.

MARIA

So because he's afraid to talk, we should keep quiet, too?

Maria stands by the cast of the footprint.

ERNESTO

You're going to break that, aren't you?

MARIA

Give me a reason not to.

They face each other, not hostile, not friendly.

ERNESTO

Don't break it.

MARIA

Why?

ERNESTO

Because we have to bring it to Martín.

MARIA

Along with everything else?

ERNESTO

We'll need more evidence.

MARIA

We'll get more evidence.

Ernesto reaches toward Maria's face, and she pulls back.

ERNESTO

Plaster. Right here. That's all.

Maria reaches up to her cheek, feels, picks it off.

MARIA

(hesitating)

Thank you. Look at me.

Maria, up on her toes, picks plaster off Ernesto's face.

MARIA

Now we're even.

EXT. CONVENT

Maria, standing at the Renault, watches Ernesto walk away.

INT. CONVENT - MARIA'S ROOM

Maria is putting the plaster cast and shell casings in a drawer when Josefina enters.

JOSEFINA

Did you find what you needed?

Maria holds up what she has.

JOSEFINA

Let me see.

Josefina, with great pain in her face, examines the artifacts, then hands them back.

JOSEFINA

Put them away. Keep them safe.

Which Maria does. Josefina wets her thumb, rubs it against Maria's cheek.

JOSEFINA

You have plaster on your face.

MARIA

I'll clean up.

JOSEFINA

Then join me for prayers.

Josefina half-leaves, then steps back, goes to say something, then leaves again. Maria sees the three balls on her dresser, touches them with great sadness on her face.

INT. EDUARDO'S HOUSE - NEXT EVENING

Maria and Ernesto sit at Catalina's kitchen table, a huge flashlight on the floor beside them. Luz Elena and Belén in the corner, eyes wide, cautious.

Catalina, at the stove, betrays her anger as she bangs around the pots and pans.

CATALINA

Luz, take your sister into the bedroom. Now!

Luz Elena leads an abashed Belén to the bedroom.

MARIA

Catalina, I thought you wanted us to find out.

CATALINA

I've changed my mind.

MARIA

Why?

CATALINA

I just have! Go.

MARIA

This isn't like you.

Catalina leans against the counter to collect herself.

CATALINA

Not like me.

Catalina throws onto the table a gelding knife, the blade crusted in blood, the THUNK of metal against wood echoing.

CATALINA

On the step the other day. I can read the weather as sharp as anyone.

They stare as if the knife could suddenly come alive. Ernesto takes out a handkerchief.

ERNESTO

May I?

Picked up, wrapped in the handkerchief, it disappears into Ernesto's bag.

ERNESTO

Did the children see it?

CATALINA

They could see it in my face, but they didn't see the knife.

MARIA

Catalina, we need to know -- what was Eduardo doing?

Another long pause, then Catalina puts a wooden cigar box on the table, sits heavily.

CATALINA

Eduardo -- my little half-wit! -- he was going to organize the brick makers into a union. He had even gone to the city to talk to union officials there about how to do it.

Catalina pries the box open, takes out a Montenero bandana, a picture of the dead Che Guevara looking like Christ.

CATALINA

And this.

A sheaf of odd-sized papers scrawled with names and dates.

CATALINA

His own list of the disappeared.

MARIA

Who knew?

CATALINA

Who didn't?

MARIA

I didn't.

CATALINA

You might have been the only one, then. Eduardo -- not known for keeping his mouth shut. The night they murdered him --

EXT. CREST OF HILL - NIGHT

Eduardo and several others, including Ignacio and Pedro, huddle around a fire.

INT. EDUARDO'S HOUSE

CATALINA

He was meeting with some others --

EXT. CREST OF HILL - NIGHT

Fear in their faces as the armed men loom out of the dark.

INT. EDUARDO'S HOUSE

CATALINA

-- to talk about what they could do to organize --

EXT. CREST OF HILL - NIGHT

Eduardo's face jammed into the dust, a gun pressed against his nape.

INT. EDUARDO'S HOUSE

CATALINA

Someone must have known -- those animals knew right where he was!

EXT. CREST OF HILL- NIGHT

The gun FIRED, shattering the air.

INT. EDUARDO'S HOUSE

MARIA

Someone must have known?

CATALINA

How else?

ERNESTO

We need their names.

CATALINA

Well, Ignacio, for all the good it will do you.

ERNESTO

I know this is hard.

CATALINA

Pedro was there -- Eduardo went to get him. Probably Roberto, Pablo -- try them. You should go -- I have to feed my family.

Maria picks up the sheaf of papers.

MARIA

May I?

CATALINA

I'll just use 'em to start the fire. Go.

Ernesto and Maria leave. Catalina puts away Eduardo's mementos in the wooden box, restraining herself from throwing everything against the wall. Luz Elena and Belén creep out of the bedroom and huddle against Catalina, who weeps as she clutches her children to her.

INT. KITCHEN - ROBERTO AND PABLO'S HOUSE - NEXT EVENING

PABLO

Eduardo was a fool.

ROBERTO

He was a fool's fool, yes.

MARIA

Catalina said he wanted to organize a union.

PABLO

That's why I said he's a fool.

ERNESTO

You didn't agree?

ROBERTO

We liked Eduardo, crazy as he was. But organize? About as possible as pissing on the sun to put it out. Sorry.

PABLO

(pointing outward)

He was even in touch with them.

MARIA

The Monteneros?

Pablo and Roberto nod yes.

PABLO

And that's all I want to say to you.

ROBERTO

Me, too.

PABLO

We respect you --

ROBERTO

But we want to keep the skin on our faces attached to our faces.

PABLO

So please leave.

ROBERTO

Now.

EXT. HOUSE OF PABLO AND ROBERTO

MARIA

I feel so stupid for not knowing.

ERNESTO

Do you want to go back?

MARIA

No, I want to talk to Pedro. But I should have known!

ERNESTO

I think he was trying to protect you.

MARIA

So many men trying to protect me doesn't protect me. Don't protect me, all right? Just --

ERNESTO

Just what?

MARIA

Just be honest with me.

ERNESTO

How about, I have no idea where this is going and I'm more scared than I ever was when I did all this for the bishop. Will that do?

MARIA

Are you going to stop?

ERNESTO

No. All the way through.

MARIA

Then me, too. Scared as I am.

ERNESTO

To Pedro's?

MARIA

To Pedro's.

They start off down the path to the road, but Maria puts a hand on Ernesto to stop him.

MARIA

Thank you.

A moment when their eyes lock.

MARIA

I know I can be --

ERNESTO

Never met someone with so many nicknames!

MARIA

But -- I am glad you're here.

ERNESTO

You're welcome.

They continue on the path.

EXT. PEDRO'S HOUSE

Ramshackle cabin, leaky hand-pump, wandering chickens, an outhouse, and so on. The house of a poor and unkempt man.

MARIA

Pedro!

EXT. OUTHOUSE

The door cracked open, Pedro's face pressed to the crack.

INT. PEDRO'S HOUSE

Ernesto and Maria silhouetted in the doorway.

MARIA

Pedro?

The flashlight hits the glass chimney of a lantern. Ernesto lights the lantern, and the room fills with dancing shadows.

MARIA

Look at that.

In one corner is a brand-new boombox, with tapes stacked beside it, and a box full of unused batteries.

ERNESTO

Now, where would our poor little peasant get the money to buy this?

MARIA

And this.

Maria shows Ernesto a brand-new pair of workboots, steel-toed, unscuffed, highly polished.

ERNESTO

He hasn't worn them.

MARIA

At least for work.

ERNESTO

Like a precious sculpture.

They see more and more trinkets items that show Pedro has an income source other than his job at the brick-factory.

EXT. OUTHOUSE

Pedro, agitated, watches the shadows of Ernesto and Maria slide around his house.

EXT. PEDRO'S HOUSE - WINDOW

Like a periscope, Pedro pokes his head over the windowsill. His trademark drop of sweat hangs at the end of his nose.

INT. PEDRO'S HOUSE

ERNESTO

What would a runt like Pedro have to sell that would get him all this?

MARIA

You can't guess?

ERNESTO

I don't want to guess. But I can guess.

Maria grabs the flashlight and beelines out the door. Ernesto blows out the lantern and follows.

EXT. PEDRO'S HOUSE

Maria darts the flashlight's beam around like a sword.

INT. outhouse

Pedro ducks back into the corner.

EXT. PEDRO'S HOUSE

MARIA

If you can hear me, Pedro -- we will be back!

Maria's VOICE sinks into the darkness around her.

MARIA

You should be ashamed!

INT. outhouse

Pedro, cowering, cries as silently as he can, his face smeared, his mouth quivering.

EXT. PEDRO'S HOUSE

The flashlight moves like an accusing finger, Maria breathing heavily in her rage.

MARIA

Pedro! Pedro! You are going to lose your soul!

Ernesto puts a hand on Maria's shoulder, which makes her jump and point the flashlight directly into Ernesto's face. He gently lowers it.

ERNESTO

He's not here. Or if he is, we won't find him. Until he wants to be found. We'll come back.

Maria's breathing flattens, lessens. Suddenly, they are aware of how heavy the quiet feels.

INT. OUTHOUSE

Pedro, breathing shallowly, his face drained. But he makes no move to come out.

EXT. PEDRO'S HOUSE

MARIA

What do we do next?

ERNESTO

Let's not talk here.

The flashlight picks out the path. With the barest of hesitations, Ernesto puts his hand on Maria's back and guides her. For a moment she allows it, then shrugs it off.

MARIA

I'm fine. We talk as we walk. Wait -- look.

The beam flashes off the pool of water at the base of the leaking handpump, and embedded in the clay, neither too muddy-wet or dusty-dry, is a footprint. Maria squats to look more closely, Ernesto right beside her.

MARIA

Same boot.

ERNESTO

Same boot pattern.

MARIA

But it's the same, isn't it?

ERNESTO

Yes.

The water reflects their faces in skewed angles, the boot pattern stares back at them.

MARIA

This makes me sick.

Abruptly, off she goes, Ernesto, as usual, caught following in her wake.

EXT. OUTHOUSE

Pedro emerges in time to see the flashlight beam disappear down the path. Overhead, stars glint like crushed foil. In the distance, a helicopter's THUD-THUD battles with the SCRITCHING of the crickets in the brush. Pedro drops to his knees, the fear in him as sour as his sweat.

INT. MARTÍN'S OFFICE - TWO DAYS LATER

The evidence, laid out on a side table: the plaster cast of the footprint, the shell casings, the Polaroids, the sheaf of papers littered with names and dates. Martín at his desk, Jose Luis standing at attention.

MARTÍN

I have no authority.

MARIA

We've been to the mayor and police -- you can imagine their enthusiasm.

MARTÍN

Didn't want to jeopardize their payoffs?

ERNESTO

Like it or not, Colonel, you are the law and order around here.

MARTÍN

I don't like it. That's your evidence.

ERNESTO

What we could salvage. And the footprint at Pedro's.

MARIA

Along with what we found in his house.

JOSE LUIS

Perhaps Pedro did it.

MARTÍN

Even I don't believe that.

Martín walks to the table, peers at the evidence, traces with his finger a few names on the papers.

MARTÍN

I can tell you one thing -- it's not anybody here. None of my men would do this, or I would know about it.

JOSE LUIS

Yes, sir.

MARTÍN

I'm not the police. If your locals are on the take, it's not my fault.

MARIA

But --

MARTÍN

I can't help you.

MARIA

Won't help us.

ERNESTO

Maria.

MARIA

Is this because my name "comes up" too often?

Martín sits at his desk.

MARTÍN

Do you see that file cabinet there? The top drawer?

JOSE LUIS

Colonel.

MARTÍN

(stopping him)

It's full of reports -- evidence -- shell casings -- Polaroids -- knives.

JOSE LUIS

Colonel, perhaps you shouldn't --

MARTÍN

I've been here longer than you have -- the line in that drawer is longer than what's on that table. You're going to have to get in line.

MARIA

Why haven't you done something?

Martín pauses, his face pained, struggling not to show it.

MARTÍN

You and I are not far apart. We care about justice, we treasure freedom, we hate stupidity. But not everyone.

MARIA

But you do.

MARTÍN

I hate the disorder -- it offends me. In such a beautiful country -- it sickens me.

ERNESTO

The soul of a poet, Colonel?

MARTÍN

You'd be wrong. I'm sorry I won't be able to help you, but I wish you luck. Good day.

INT. MARTÍN'S OFFICE

Martín looks through the window at the retreating figures of Maria and Ernesto.

INT. JOSE LUIS' OFFICE

Jose Luis writes his report, the "To" line listing the name "General Salvador Rios," the last sentence being: "Colonel Martín continues to show an interest in local affairs that seems to interfere with his proper command of the garrison." The signature: Lieutenant Jose Luis Garcia. Then he folds the report, seals it.

JOSE LUIS
(through intercom)

Send in the courier.

Soldier enters, courier bag over his shoulder. Jose Luis hands him the envelope.

JOSE LUIS
The usual delivery.

Jose Luis then digs into a pocket in his tunic, pulls out a clip of bills, hands them to the soldier.

JOSE LUIS
For any tolls you might run into.

Soldier leaves. Jose Luis checks his watch, straightens his tunic, punches the intercom.

JOSE LUIS
Have a driver meet me in ten minutes.

EXT. PEDRO'S HOUSE

Ernesto and Maria crouch behind the outhouse. Along the path comes Pedro, home from work. As soon as he enters his house, Ernesto and Maria bolt to the door.

INT. PEDRO'S HOUSE

MUSIC plays as Ernesto and Maria appear in the doorway. Pedro looks for a way out but knows there isn't one.

MARIA

You know, don't you? About Eduardo. Ignacio.

PEDRO

I don't know anything!

MARIA

What's going on, Pedro?

A moment where Pedro is completely paralyzed. Then he falls at Ernesto's feet, grabs his ankles.

PEDRO

Help me, father. I didn't mean --

Ernesto reaches down, unclasps his hands.

ERNESTO

Stand up, Pedro.

PEDRO

I want to confess.

MARIA

Good.

PEDRO

No, to him. "Bless me, Father -- "

MARIA

No!

PEDRO

Bless me, father!

MARIA

(to Ernesto)

Don't answer him. You will tell us what you know now! No more hiding. You want to confess later, fine! But no more hiding!

PEDRO

Father --

ERNESTO

I agree.

PEDRO

You won't give me confession?

MARIA

Who killed Eduardo? Who killed Ignacio?

PEDRO

(crying)

I want to confess --

MARIA

How many others have you killed besides Eduardo and Ignacio?

PEDRO

I want to confess --

MARIA

How much money have they paid you? Who owns your soul?

PEDRO

I want to confess --

MARIA

Who owns your soul now, Pedro?

By now Pedro is crying hard, body wracked with sobs. Ernesto more or less picks him up and sits him down.

PEDRO

"Bless me, father -- "

ERNESTO

No, Pedro -- I won't bury it in a confession. Out loud, to both of us.

MARIA

Wait.

Maria gets the boombox, grabs a tape, sets it to record. Maria and Ernesto wait, their bodies showing clearly that they will wait for as long as it takes for Pedro to talk.

PEDRO

I work for Martín. I do the same work for Don Morales.

ERNESTO

Don Guillermo Morales?

PEDRO

I don't just make bricks for him.

MARIA

Did Don Morales kill Eduardo?

PEDRO

I set him up. To kill the communists, you see.

MARIA

Communists?

PEDRO

Got me those boots.

EXT. HOUSE OF DON MORALES

The jeep pulls up the sweeping driveway and rocks to a halt. Jose Luis steps out and greets the two ARMED MEN standing at the entrance, then enters the house.

INT. HOUSE OF DON MORALES - PATIO

DON MORALES sits in a large leather winged chair, not unlike a throne, his face unseen, only his VOICE heard. Around him stand several more armed men.

JOSE LUIS

Don Morales.

DON MORALES

My little mole comes up for air.

JOSE LUIS

Have you heard the one about the nun and the priest?

DON MORALES

A new joke?

JOSE LUIS

Sister Maria Beatriz --

DON MORALES

I've heard that one -- you're not my only songbird.

JOSE LUIS

What do you want to do? We can assume Pedro will crack up pretty soon.

DON MORALES

What does it matter what they do? I'm more worried about your boss.

JOSE LUIS

There are plans for him.

DON MORALES

Such as?

JOSE LUIS

I don't know. He's got a lot of connections with big families, so they can't just bounce him around. But something.

DON MORALES

Soon, I hope. Do you admire him?

JOSE LUIS

I do -- excellent soldier. But he's infected. With a sense of justice.

DON MORALES

And you're not.

JOSE LUIS

I'm like you, Don Morales -- I prefer order over justice.

DON MORALES

I prefer profit over everything. This Sister Maria -- Sister Peti -- make sure she understands her place.

JOSE LUIS

And Pedro?

A pause, a gesture from Don Morales that could be interpreted in any number of ways. Jose Luis nods in agreement.

INT. MARTÍN'S OFFICE - EVENING

Maria, Ernesto, Pedro with downcast eyes, Martín, all silent. Boombox. Martín stares at the tape sitting in the exact center of his desk. The door opens, and Jose Luis enters, takes in the scene immediately.

MARTÍN

What should I do with you, Pedro? I was stupid enough to think that you were supposed to report to me, the commander.

Martín gets up, paces, traces his finger along the crack in the panel of the cabinet door.

MARTÍN

But off you go Don Morales, and Don Morales -- arranges things. Eduardo Velez. Ignacio -- I don't even know his last name. And I am out of the loop. Not good. Well.

Martín presses his intercom button. A soldier enters.

MARTÍN

Arrest him.

ERNESTO

Colonel, Pedro --

MARTÍN

You wanted my help before, but now you don't?
(to soldier)

I said arrest him.

The soldier escorts Pedro out of the office.

MARTÍN
(to Jose Luis)
Make sure it's done right.

JOSE LUIS
Yes, sir.

EXT. MARTÍN'S OFFICE

JOSE LUIS
(to soldier)
Go -- I'll be right there.

PEDRO
Lieutenant --

JOSE LUIS
Shut up!

The soldier leads off the frightened Pedro. Jose Luis remains, listening at the office door that he left purposefully ajar.

INT. MARTÍN'S OFFICE

Martín walks to the file cabinet.

MARTÍN
Sister -- now what?

MARIA
Can you arrest Don Morales?

MARTÍN
On his word? It would be easier to arrest the wind.

MARIA
Eduardo had started a list, with stories.

MARTÍN
So that's what you want?

MARIA

Yes. I can do that.

MARTÍN

And then?

MARIA

I want everyone to know them. I want to take them to the bishop.

MARTÍN

(to Ernesto)

You worked for the bishop. I know the bishop -- my family -- everybody knows everybody.

Martín slaps the top file drawer.

MARTÍN

Starting tomorrow -- use what you can.

MARIA

Thank you, Colonel.

MARTÍN

Don't get me wrong, Sister. I'm nothing but what I am. I know very little about the "people." The "people" I know are Don Morales.

EXT. MARTÍN'S OFFICE

Jose Luis listens intently.

INT. MARTÍN'S OFFICE

MARTÍN

But I don't value order over what is wrong -- and your Eduardo, and this Ignacio -- if it won't work for them, then what's the good of fighting for it?

INT. JOSE LUIS' OFFICE

Jose Luis uses a small flashlight to illuminate the telephone as he dials.

JOSE LUIS

General Rios, please. Tell him the wolf has a message.

A pause, Jose Luis TAPPING his fingers nervously.

JOSE LUIS

General? I need to add something else to my report.

EXT. CONVENT - EVENING

Ernesto and Maria stand beside the Renault. Maria boldly holds out her hand to Ernesto.

MARIA

Thank you.

Ernesto, with mock seriousness, shakes her hand.

ERNESTO

You're most welcome.

Ernesto holds onto Maria's hand a bit longer than courtesy requires. Maria slides her hand out of his. A moment both awkward and affectionate.

ERNESTO

I haven't asked you.

MARIA

What?

ERNESTO

How am I doing?

MARIA

I can't answer that, Ernesto.

(touching her heart

That's in here.

ERNESTO

But a hint.

Maria sits on the hood of the Renault.

MARIA

I feel a thousand miles away from all that.

Ernesto joins her.

ERNESTO

That day you made me eat dirt.

MARIA

You wanted to eat dirt. You came to me to eat dirt.

ERNESTO

But we've come somewhere else, haven't we?

Maria gives him her hand. He takes it, holds it for the moment she allows him, then lets it go as she slides off the hood of the car.

MARIA

My rounds tomorrow.

ERNESTO

My homily to prepare.

MARIA

And then Martín's in the evening.

ERNESTO

Pen and paper in hand.

MARIA

Good night.

Ernesto watches Maria walk into the convent.

ERNESTO

Good night, Sister Peti.

INT. CONVENT HALLWAY

Rosario, in the hallway outside Josefina's office, listening to the voices.

INT. JOSEFINA'S OFFICE

Maria paces agitatedly.

JOSEFINA

It's for your own good.

MARIA

Tonight I learned who killed Eduardo. And Ignacio.

JOSEFINA

And I have to think about the welfare of the community. You can't keep going on like this.

MARIA

So you're going to transfer me?

JOSEFINA

I am thinking about transferring you.

MARIA

Why not just have me killed?

JOSEFINA

Maria!

MARIA

Because that's the only way I'll shut up.

JOSEFINA

I don't want you to shut up -- I want you to stay alive.

MARIA

Did someone talk to you about me?

The slightest hesitation on Josefina's part gives her away.

MARIA

Who was it?

JOSEFINA

No one.

MARIA

Who was it?

JOSEFINA

No one!

Which is clearly not true.

MARIA

When?

JOSEFINA

Pray on this with me, Maria.

MARIA

When am I going to be banished?

JOSEFINA

Pray with me.

INT. CONVENT HALLWAY

Rosario, her mouth set in a grim line, listens to the MURMURED PRAYERS.

EXT. CHURCH - NEXT DAY

People coming to the church for Sunday mass.

INT. CHURCH

Ernesto getting ready to begin his homily, but before he speaks, Rosario stands and strides to the front.

ERNESTO

Rosario?

ROSARIO

Excuse me, Father, but I have something I have to say.

Ernesto perplexed but gracious, gestures to begin. Rosario faces the congregation, and her VOICE fills the air.

ROSARIO

You don't have to know who said this, but unless we say something, we are going to lose Sister Peti.

Rosario gives Josefina a sharp straight look in the eye.

ROSARIO

Somebody wants to send her away -- and you all know why. Because she's got a nose, and she follows it. Because she's got a heart, and she listens to it.

A fierce look at everyone, nailing them to their seats.

ROSARIO

She has asked you again and again for your stories, and you sit there like stones. You all already know my story -- my cousin Ignacio --

A CATCH in her voice, deep pain in her face.

ROSARIO

You all have them -- give them to her! Sheep or an eagle, hey? Which one for you? That's all I have to say.

A moment of awkwardness, Rosario's face flushed by her own boldness.

FRONT PEW

Josefina's face tight, her lips pursed. Maria's face troubled and tired.

ALTAR

Ernesto stands next to Rosario.

ERNESTO

If your soul moves you to speak, then you must speak. If Jesus showed us anything, he showed us that.

(to Rosario)

Go, sit.

Ernesto goes to pick up the mass where he left off when someone stands.

ERNESTO

Yes?

VOICE

If what she said, then it's wrong.

Another person stands, then another, and still another, each voicing the same point.

FRONT PEW

Josefina sitting ramrod straight, eyes ahead, Maria beside her, head bowed.

INT. MARIA'S BEDROOM - SUNDAY NIGHT

Maria is reading when a sharp RAP on the window startles her. She opens it.

VOICE

I have something to tell you.

MARIA

Wait.

Maria gets her journal from behind the statue of Mary, grabs a pen, opens it. A hand comes through the open window holding a photograph. Maria takes it.

MARIA

Tell me.

INT. CHURCH - THREE DAYS LATER

Ernesto moves around the church, followed by Maria.

MARIA

I have pages and pages, Ernesto. And with what we've seen at Martin's -- and Eduardo's list -- I think I have enough. The bishop needs to see.

ERNESTO

Let me tell you about the bishop.

MARIA

I don't want to hear about the bishop. I don't want a big dose of your "realistic."

ERNESTO

You don't even have an appointment.

MARIA

I'm used to camping out.

ERNESTO

You don't know what it's like.

MARIA

He's a good man. He will help. Just give me the letter of introduction you said you would write.

Ernesto hands her an envelope.

ERNESTO

What about Josefina?

MARIA

I lied -- I said my father is sick. I'll go to confession.

ERNESTO

Your bus?

MARIA

In an hour.

ERNESTO

Maria --

Ernesto takes her hand -- this time Maria does not pull it away.

ERNESTO

Just -- be careful.

Two breaths more and Ernesto lets her go.

INT. BISHOP'S OFFICES - BUENOS AIRES

Maria seems dwarfed by the refined interior, perched as she is on a large cushioned chair. Beside the chair sits an embroidered cloth bag full of papers. The SECRETARY behind the broad desk gives Maria a look, then another look, annoyed by this little woman.

SECRETARY

There's no telling when he'll be in.

MARIA

Then it could be at any minute. I'll wait.

SECRETARY

We close soon.

MARIA

I'll wait.

INT. BISHOP'S WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

Maria, still on her chair, sitting in the shadows cast by a few wall lights left on. She is eating an apple, the SOUND echoing in the empty room, when she hears the CLATTER of a janitor's cart. One wheel squeals. And then she sees the JANITOR at the same time he sees her.

JANITOR

Who are you?

MARIA

A pebble on a beach.

The janitor pushes his cart closer. Maria holds out the apple core.

MARIA

May I?

He nods. She throws it in his trash can.

JANITOR

You waiting for him? How many years you got?

MARIA

I'm in no hurry.

JANITOR

I pick up the bones each day of the people who'll say they wait.

MARIA

But I've got no bone to pick with you.

JANITOR

Good luck.

MARIA

Could you do me a favor? Where's the bathroom?

JANITOR

You may wait, but there are body parts that won't. It's over there.

MARIA

Thank you.

Maria picks up her bag and goes. The janitor remains, listening to her FOOTSTEPS, the THUNK of the closing door, the FLUSHED WATER, the returning FOOTSTEPS.

MARIA

You're still here.

JANITOR

I was saving your seat for you.

When she's re-seated, the janitor trundles off with his cart.

MARIA

Thank you again.

JANITOR

(over his shoulder)

Easier to get through the eye of a needle than into his office.

INT. BISHOP'S WAITING ROOM - NEXT DAY

The waiting room is busy with visitors going in and out of the bishop's office. The secretary glares at Maria, who simply smiles back serenely.

INT. BISHOP'S WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

Maria alone again, curled up in the chair asleep. The janitor comes by, the one wheel on his car squealing softly. Maria does not wake up. He stops, looks, shakes his head, moves on.

INT. BISHOP'S WAITING ROOM - EARLY NEXT MORNING

Maria wakes up to see a large, well-fed man looking at her, wearing the scarlet skull cap of the bishop. Sunlight slants in through the half-shuttered windows. Just behind him stands the secretary, disapproval pasted on her face.

MARIA

Monsignor Moreno.

Maria realizes how disheveled she must look, tries to straighten her clothes, rub her face into some semblance of alertness.

MONSIGNOR MORENO

You won't go away, will you?

MARIA

The third day, right? Good things come in days of three, right? I'm ready.

MONSIGNOR MORENO

Come in.

The scowl of the secretary follows Maria as she disappears into the bishop's office.

INT. CHURCH - RIO NEGRO - TWO DAYS LATER

A dusty, weary Maria framed in the doorway by the late afternoon light. The church is empty and no one is there to greet her.

INT. JOSEFINA'S OFFICE - LATER

Maria, now showered, but clearly bone-tired, the cloth bag of papers by her feet.

ERNESTO

I'm sorry, Maria.

JOSEFINA

He wouldn't even take copies?

MARIA

He said there was no need.

JOSEFINA

And you waited three days.

MARIA

So, what now?

INT. MARTÍN'S OFFICE - LATER

Maria hands the cloth bag to Martín.

MARIA

Put them in the graveyard.

Martín puts them in the file drawer.

MARTÍN

I can't do anything. Your bishop won't do anything. So, what now, Sister?

INT. MILITARY TRANSPORT PLANE - COCKPIT

Jose Luis SHOUTS over the GROWL of the plane's engines to the pilot as he hands the pilot a form.

JOSE LUIS

This is from General Rios. You know what to do. Over the garrison at Rio Negro, then over the town, all right?

CARGO HOLD

Watched over by half a dozen soldiers are piles of large canvas bags, some moving as what's trapped inside tries to get out.

JOSE LUIS

(to soldiers)

You know what you're supposed to do, right?

The soldiers nod, several smirk.

COCKPIT

JOSE LUIS

Let's go.

EXT. RUNWAY

The plane's engines WHINE as the rpm's increase and the plane takes off into the waning light of evening.

INT. MARTÍN'S OFFICE

MARTÍN

So your precious church refuses to back you up. The noble forces defending your country can kill a man at 300 meters but can't call a spade a spade. The rebels -- feh! What a country.

The CRACK of broken wood as something heavy pummels the roof of the building. Then another. Then one more.

MARTÍN

Lieutenant! What is --

A soldier barges into the office.

SOLDIER

Colonel! Colonel!

EXT. GARRISON

The DRONE of an airplane as it passes overhead, several dozen bags on the ground. A soldier opens one and immediately turns away and vomits. Martín inspects and see the mangled body inside. Maria and Ernesto open other bags, see the same mangled sight.

SOLDIER

Colonel.

The soldier hands Martín a walkie-talkie, out of which comes a GARBLE of frightened voices. Martín hands the walkie-talkie back, his face ashen

MARIA

What?

MARTÍN

(to Maria and Ernesto)

You should get back right now.

EXT. RIO NEGRO

The plane passes overhead, and bodies rain down onto the town square, the buildings, everywhere. Soldiers in a jeep watch the barrage, one speaking into a field radio.

EXT. CONVENT

The nuns gather people as they run by into the safety of the building.

INT. CHURCH

Huddled, fearful, several dozen people listen to the dull THUD of the bodies slamming against the roof.

EXT. MOUNTAINS

Several bodies come crashing through the trees, and several Monteneros, on patrol, inspect the bags, their faces twisted by pain at what they discover.

They heft the bags onto their shoulders and carry them off into the forest.

INT. CONVENT

People huddled around the nuns listen to heavy POUNDING of the bodies.

INT. MILITARY TRANSPORT PLANE - CARGO HOLD

Jose Luis looks at the empty cargo hold, then leans out the cargo bay to survey the disconnected pattern of dots the broken bodies make against the dry earth. Suddenly, THUNDER and heavy dark clouds roll in.

JOSE LUIS
(with joy)

Perfect!

INT. MILITARY TRANSPORT PLANE - COCKPIT

Jose Luis shouts into the ear of the pilot as rain BEATS against the windshield.

JOSE LUIS
Get us out of here.

EXT. MILITARY TRANSPORT PLANE

The plane makes a sharp left turn and disappears into the storm clouds.

EXT. GARRISON

The rain quickly turns the dirt into mud as Martín commands the bodies moved into one of the car pool garages. THUNDER snaps, and the air frags with lightening.

Martín commandeers a solider to drive Maria and Ernesto back to the town.

MARTÍN
Go! Go!

INT. JEEP

The rain POUNDS the metal body of the jeep as the soldier peers through the thick sheet of water on the windshield.

He swerves to avoid the now-soaked corpse-filled bags on the road, slamming Maria and Ernesto against the body.

INT. GARRISON - CAR POOL SHED

Martín soaked, everyone soaked to the skin -- momentarily in shock as the rain HAMMERS the metal roof.

Soldiers lug in bag after bag, picked from the roofs of buildings, trailing mud from the compound.

Bag upon bag as Martín watches until he loses count at a hundred, the bags stacked like cordwood.

MARTÍN

Where is Lieutenant Jose Luis Garcia?

No one answers.

MARTÍN

Where is Lieutenant Jose Luis Garcia?

Again, no answer, the silence punctuated by the rain and the continued HISSING sound of bags being dragged over concrete.

SOLDIER

Colonel!

Martín walks to where a soldier holds open a bag. Inside, the body is clearly not dead and is very much in pain.

SOLDIER

What should I do? What should I do?

EXT. RIO NEGRO

The jeeps skids to a stop, and almost at the same moment Maria and Ernesto tumble out the door. The jeeps spins away and disappears.

All around them can see the bags. Ernesto's face is completely drained of any expression. Thunder CRASHES continually.

MARIA

Ernesto! Ernesto!

He shakes himself, as if waking up, stares at Maria with dull eyes.

MARIA

We have to do something now!

ERNESTO

(dead-voiced)

What? What can anybody do?

MARIA

(screaming)

Ernesto!

Maria slams her hands into his chest, tumbling him back into the mud.

MARIA

(screaming)

Ernesto! Ernesto!

ERNESTO

What should I do?

Maria drags him up from the mud, grabs his arm, pulls him toward the church. THUNDER again and again.

INT. CHURCH

Scared faces greet them as Maria, dragging Ernesto, pushes into the church.

MARIA

Juan, help me.

No one moves. JUAN points overhead.

JUAN

Judgment.

MARIA

On all of us. Help me. Help us.

JUAN

Father?

MARIA
(to Ernesto)

Say something!

ERNESTO

Help me.

EXT. CHURCH

Maria, followed by those huddled inside, wade into the mud of the plaza. They begin turning over the bags.

More and more people join them, coming from the refuge of the houses and buildings, turning over the bags, pulling them to a gathering point. Maria tries to direct the activity.

Ernesto trails, still stunned, inert.

EXT. CONVENT

Josefina, the rest of the nuns, and everyone taking refuge there, including Rosario, leave for the church.

EXT. RIO NEGRO

The rain begins to taper off.

JOSEFINA
(to Maria)
What are we going to do?

JUAN
Sister Peti! Sister Peti!

Maria joins him, followed by Josefina.

JUAN
He's not dead! He's not dead!

MARIA

Juan --

But Juan is already back-pedaling away, terror-stricken.

JUAN

What are we going to do? What are we going to do?

Maria kneels by the bag, watches the man's eyelids flutter, a thin GROAN escaping from his lips.

She puts her hand on his rough unshaven cheek, and unconsciously, without opening his eyes, he kisses the palm of her hand.

Maria looks up at Josefina.

MARIA

There's not a thing I can do.

Maria moves a strand of hair from the man's eyes. The man's breath goes out of him one last time.

INT. CAR POOL SHED

The body in the bag is clearly breathing.

SOLDIER

What should I do?

The question, like a magnet, clumps everyone together, waiting for Martín to answer.

MARTÍN

To one side -- put him to one side. The rest of you -- see if anyone else is alive.

(to soldier)

Get him out of that bag -- make him comfortable. What?

SOLDIER

He's a communist, sir.

MARTÍN

You know that for sure?

SOLDIER

Sir, if he isn't, why is he here?

ERNESTO

Why are any of us here?

SOLDIER

Sir?

ERNESTO

Nothing -- get it done. Now!

OTHER SIDE OF SHED

SOLDIER

This one's pregnant, sir -- and she's breathing.

A HUSH falls -- a dead communist male is one thing, a pregnant woman quite another. Everyone waits, the air filled with the SOUND of drumming rain.

Martín speaks to other soldiers.

MARTÍN

The five of you -- get the trucks here. Go! You -- bring the backhoe.

The soldiers scuttle away.

MARTÍN

(to the rest)

Put the dead on the trucks when they get here. The ones who survived -- over there. Make them as comfortable as you can.

As the soldiers work, one whispers to another.

SOLDIER

Up to me -- kill 'em all.

Martín overhears them, slaps the soldier who spoke. Again, everyone stops, the air tense.

Say it. MARTÍN

What, sir? SOLDIER

Say it. MARTÍN

What? SOLDIER

Say it! MARTÍN

The soldier hesitates, fear on his face, yet also defiance.

SOLDIER
If it was up to me, I'd kill them all.

MARTÍN
That's because you're an animal -- you don't know what it
means to be a soldier. I will remember you.
(to the rest)
Get working -- now!

The double-clutching RUMBLE of the trucks underscores the movements of the men lugging bodies around as if they were simple sacks of grain.

EXT. GARRISON

Heavy trucks pull up and the soldiers toss the bodies into the beds. One truck has a trailer attached hauling a backhoe.

EXT. RIO NEGRO

Maria, the nuns, everyone there brings the bodies into the church, pulling them from the mud, from the roofs. Several men have brought carts. One rusted out but functioning truck. Everyone looks grim, frightened.

INT. CHURCH

Off to one side, Maria has formed a triage area, the doctor already there doing what he can. People have moved the pews and laid the corpses out as neatly as the space allows.

Ernesto still stands stunned amidst the chaos. Maria comes up to him.

MARIA

Ernesto -- now is the time.

But a blank look, no movement.

VOICE

Sister Maria.

She leaves him there, and he turns in slow circles, seeing everything, seeing nothing. His eyes take in the filthy morgue, the bags sliced open to reveal the tortured faces. His ears hear the barely stifled CRIES of the injured, the soft distressed VOICE of the doctor. Grey funeral light fills the church.

Ernesto looks at his own hands, flipping them front to back and front again, as if they were strangers to his own body. His blood POUNDS in his ears, his breath HISSES through clenched teeth.

Through all this, increasing in volume, Ernesto hears the deep GROWL of the military transport trucks ripping the air.

EXT. CHURCH

Just as the trucks roll to a stop, the rain ends, the clouds clear, and the sun bursts out.

Martín jumps out of a truck even before it SCREECHES to a halt. Maria comes from the church, Ernesto following but still dazed. Slowly a crowd gathers around the trucks.

MARTÍN

We have a problem.

Martín points to his trucks, then to the church.

MARTÍN

I'm going to suppose you have more in there.

MARIA

Why are you here?

Martín walks past her towards Ernesto.

MARIA

(louder)

Why are you here?!

Martín ignores her, so she follows him, as does everyone else. Martín suddenly senses the crowd around him.

MARTÍN

Father Ernesto.

Ernesto turns his dull eyes to him.

MARTÍN

Father Ernesto. We do have a problem here.

ERNESTO

Yes.

MARTÍN

Can we talk privately?

MARIA

No!

(to Ernesto)

Ernesto, no!

(to Martín)

Anything you say, you say to us.

MARTÍN

Father --

MARIA

Ernesto, don't!

A moment of hesitation as Ernesto, his eyes glazed, his face blank, peers around him as if lost in a land completely foreign to him.

ERNESTO

What -- what is it you want?

MARTÍN

Do you see that backhoe? You know what that's for, don't you?

ERNESTO

Yes.

MARIA

Ernesto!

MARTÍN

The thing you know how to do best -- that's what I need you to do now.

MARIA

Ernesto!

MARTÍN

Before I bury them.

Ernesto pauses, then turns and goes into the church. Maria starts to follow him.

MARTÍN

(to Maria)

What do you expect me to do?

MARIA

I don't care about you.

MARTÍN

Do you think this was an accident?

Maria almost inside the church.

MARTÍN

Do you think --

MARIA

I don't care.

MARTÍN

You think it's only my life put on the line here?

INT. CHURCH - BY THE FRONT DOOR

Ernesto has retrieved his stole along with an aspergil and a small bucket for holy water. Martín at the door. The doctor, off to the side, tends to the broken bodies, their MOANS and WHIMPERS a commentary on the argument at hand.

MARTÍN

None of us is safe.

MARIA

Ernesto, you can't do this.

ERNESTO

Their souls must be saved.

MARIA

He's going to bury them away.

TRIAGE AREA

One of the survivors SCREAMS as the doctor touches a broken bone. A tight momentary silence, the air taut.

DOCTOR

Without any painkillers, the pain will kill them. Colonel, what are we going to do with them?

BY THE FRONT DOOR

MARTÍN

Not now.

DOCTOR

Then when?

MARTÍN

Not now!

DOCTOR

Shooting them is about the only painkiller we have.

TRIAGE AREA

Martín marches to the doctor, fury etching his face.

MARTÍN

They are not going to be shot!

DOCTOR

Maybe not by you -- but they will be shot. Jet fuel is too expensive for a second go-around.

(to survivors)

It's all in his hands now -- don't you all feel better?

Ernesto walks to the survivors, rains holy water on them as he whispers a prayer for them.

ERNESTO

The dead should be buried.

DOCTOR

(licking water off hand)

Just what I thought -- holy acid.

BY THE FRONT DOOR

Maria SCREAMS a long, despairing howl. All three men stare at her. Even the CRIES of the wounded stop.

TRIAGE AREA

DOCTOR

(sotto voce)

Exactly.

BY THE FRONT DOOR

Ernesto bears down on Maria.

ERNESTO

Their souls must be saved.

MARIA

He doesn't care about their souls!

MARTÍN

That's where you're wrong.

MARIA

He's just getting rid of the garbage!

Ernesto walks past her and out the door. Maria plunges after him.

TRIAGE AREA

DOCTOR

You might as well warm up your bullets now.

EXT. CHURCH

Maria hurries after Ernesto, desperate, pleading.

MARIA

Don't do this! You do this, it makes you as bad as they are.
It makes you one of them. Again! Again! Think about your
own soul, think about your own --

ERNESTO

(ignoring Maria)

All of you -- pray with me for the souls of these unfortunates.

Martín exits the church.

Maria frantically rushes from person to person, begging them not to pray, not to collaborate. She speaks especially hard to her fellow sisters, but they only look away. First one or two, then more and more, join in the prayer, faces scared, tight, ashamed.

ERNESTO

"Our Father, who art in heaven -- "

MARTÍN

(to soldiers)

Hats off! Now!

ERNESTO

" -- hallowed be thy name -- "

MARTÍN

(to soldiers)

Pray!

MARIA

Nooooo!

Only Penelope, who has wandered in, remains mute. Instead, she stands next to Maria and slips her arm through Maria's arm.

Once the prayer is done, Ernesto, murmuring his own blessings, sprays holy water over the trucks and their grisly cargo.

Maria watches everything with a look of astonished betrayal on her face.

INT. CHURCH

Ernesto continues blessing the corpses as the soldiers cart them out.

EXT. CHURCH

Bodies being thrown into the trucks.

INT. CHURCH - TRIAGE AREA

The doctor stands defiantly by his triage area. The soldiers try to take the wounded away.

DOCTOR

Get away -- get away!

MARTÍN

(to soldiers)

Leave them -- go on. Go on! You've more than enough to do over there.

The soldiers leave. The doctor looks dagger-straight into Martín's eyes.

MARTÍN

We'll be back.

Maria stands nearby, Penelope still fixed to her side. Martín wants to say something to her, realizes nothing he could say would ever bridge the abyss between them, and so simply walks away, directing his men to hurry up.

EXT. CHURCH

Martín orders everyone back into the trucks, and the air fills with their diesel ROAR. A moment where Maria, Ernesto, and Martín catch each other's eyes, then Martín leaves. The crowd slowly disperses.

MARIA

Penelope, go home.

PENELOPE

What about you?

MARIA

Go home.

PENELOPE

I am never going to find my son-- but I can't stop looking.

MARIA

I know. Go home.

PENELOPE

What about you?

MARIA

Go. Home.

Penelope turns to leave, then turns back.

PENELOPE
(pointing)

That face --

She makes the motion of sewing.

PENELOPE
That face --

Penelope leaves, keeping up the motion of sewing.

Maria and Ernesto look at each other, covered in dirt, covered in sunlight, and can say nothing to each other.

Maria looks straight into the sun, its hot white light fills her eyes, and she sways as if in a trance while her face twists in grief. Her whole brain, her whole body, fills with the scorching white light, and the last thing she can hear is her own VOICE WAILING with infinite sorrow.

INT. ALVAREZ HOME - SEVERAL MONTHS LATER

The hot white sunlight glares off the window as Belén looks outside at the tree swaying in the wind. She sits on a comfortable couch singing a song and reading a book.

MARIA'S MOTHER, BEATRIZ, brings in a sparkling glass of lemonade.

BEATRIZ
Something sweet for my Belén.

Belén tastes it, scrunches up her face, but doesn't put it down. She holds up the glass, question on her face.

BEATRIZ
Lemonade.

BELÉN
I've never had this.

BEATRIZ
Something new every day, yes? Maria is in the backyard.

Belén shakes her head "no."

BEATRIZ

You want to stay inside?

Belén shakes her head "yes."

BEATRIZ

You stay right here where it's safe.

EXT. ALVAREZ HOME - BACKYARD

Maria, now in civilian clothes, sits in a chair in the shade by the jasmine bush. In her hands she holds her veil.

Beatriz comes out of the house, two glasses of lemonade on a tray, sits in the empty chair beside her, hands Maria a glass, takes one herself, and sets the tray neatly underneath her chair.

BEATRIZ

Belén is reading.

MARIA

And singing, probably.

BEATRIZ

She seems happy.

MARIA

Seems, mother, it's only "seems."

BEATRIZ

Well, she seems happy, and that's a start. She still won't come outside.

MARIA

I can barely keep myself inside the house.

BEATRIZ

With you, mind wanders, body wanders.

MARIA

I'll go read with her in a minute.

Beatriz looks at her watch closely, then sits very still.

MARIA

I know what you're thinking.

BEATRIZ

No you don't -- not this time.

MARIA

You're thinking --

BEATRIZ

I was thinking about that -- but now it's something else.

MARIA

You're being very mysterious.

BEATRIZ

No -- I'm just scared to death for you. And her.

MARIA

At least we share that.

Maria gets up and lies down on the grass. She lays the veil across her chest. She presses one of the fallen jasmine blooms to her nose.

MARIA

I heard from the bishop.

BEATRIZ

And?

MARIA

He said he'll act on my request for a leave from the order.

BEATRIZ

That's nice of him.

MARIA

And I heard from the other bishop.

BEATRIZ

And?

MARIA

He wants me to work for him -- but as Sister Maria from Rio Negro of the Falling Bodies. He's invited the international organizations to take up house with him.

BEATRIZ

And the generals are spitting at him?

MARIA

He calls it the rain from heaven.

BEATRIZ

More like acid. Will you go?

MARIA

As Sister Maria?

Maria hesitates, throws away the blossom, picks up another. She sits up and lays her head on her mother's knee, her veil in her hand.

MARIA

The truth?

BEATRIZ

Ever anything else from you?

MARIA

I can't even smell the jasmine anymore.

Beatriz gently rubs her daughter's temple.

BEATRIZ

Your favorite smell.

MARIA

Gone.

Beatriz rubs for a few seconds more, then checks her watch again. Maria sits up.

MARIA

All right -- who's the secret lover?

BEATRIZ

No one.

Maria, in a comic way, mimics Beatriz looking at her watch.

BEATRIZ

Are you willing to try to get back your sense of smell?

MARIA

What are you up to?

BEATRIZ

And not a word to your father?

MARIA

Not a vowel or a consonant. What?

BEATRIZ

Say yes.

MARIA

Yes.

EXT. PLAZA DE MAYO, BUENOS AIRES

Dozens and dozens and dozens of woman, all clutching some memento -- a laminated photograph, a diploma, anything that marks an identify -- arrayed in ranks, the brash white of their kerchiefs glaring in the sunlight. Silently, with only the SHUFFLE of their feet to add to the slight RUSTLE of wind, they march in witness. Placards, signs spike about their heads.

Soldiers and police ring the Plaza.

IN THE CROWD

Maria, one hand clutching Belén's hand and the other her mother's, watches with astonishment the silent ranks of women pass by, unafraid of the guns arrayed against them.

BEATRIZ

(looking at Belén)

Keep her close. I come here, every Thursday.

MARIA

Does Papa --

BEATRIZ

Not a vowel. But I can't stay away. I have to come.

Beatriz pulls a small white kerchief from her pocket, nods towards Belén. Maria takes the kerchief, kneels down.

MARIA

Belén?

BELÉN

Yes?

MARIA

Are you afraid?

Belén nods yes.

MARIA

So am I. Do you know who they are?

Belén nods yes again.

BELÉN

My mama.

MARIA

Do you want to go home?

Belén points to her own head, and Maria quickly fixes the kerchief to her hair. Beatriz pulls out another kerchief, puts it on her own head, then a third one for Maria.

Instead, Maria pulls out her veil and puts it on. Hand in hand, they join the moving phalanx of women.

WITH THE MARCHING WOMEN

An OLDER WOMAN, looking very much like Penelope, slips her arm through Maria's.

OLDER WOMAN

Thank you very much for joining us, sister --

MARIA

Sister Maria.

OLDER WOMAN

Sister Maria.

The sun bounces off the sea of white kerchiefs with a clean white glare as the women march on inexorably.

FADE OUT

About Block & Tackle Productions

After more than a decade of projects together, Michael Bettencourt and Elfin Frederick Vogel joined forces to form Block & Tackle Productions. In addition to producing Michael's plays with Elfin directing, B&T Productions also looks to collaborate with other playwrights and directors and explore different media for dramatic narrative, such as live-streaming theatrical productions, recording radio-play podcasts, and creating short films.

Whichever project B&T Productions pursues, it will create theatre narratives focused on our present times and where every part of the production - design (set, lighting, sound, media), performance, script, the brand of beer sold in the lobby, and the pre-show music - relates to and nourishes every other part. As often as possible, B&T Productions will do this in collaboration or conjunction with like-minded theatre-makers.

Elfin Frederick Vogel (Producer/Director) -- Elfin has directed over thirty productions in New York City and regional theatres, from classical plays (among others, *Othello*, *As You Like It*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Measure for Measure*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Three Sisters*, *The Cherry Orchard*) to 20th-century plays (*Six Characters in Search of an Author*, *The Real Thing*, *Exit the King*) and new plays, among them *Only the Dead Know Brooklyn*, *Excerpts from the Lost Letters of Hester Prynne*, *No Great Loss*, *Four Plays*, *The Sin Eater* (all by Michael Bettencourt), and *Moral and Political Lessons on "Wyoming"* and *Reckless Abandon* (by Vincent Sessa).

Michael Bettencourt (Producer/Writer) -- Michael is an award-winning playwright and screenwriter. As always, special thanks to María Beatriz. All his work can be seen at www.m-bettencourt.com

**Block
&Tackle**
PRODUCTIONS

www.blockandtackleproductions.com

