

HIGH FIDELITY

By

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Based on the novel by Nick Hornby

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FADE IN:

INT. ROB'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

STEREO

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

ROB (V.O.)

What came first? The music or the misery? People worry about kids playing with guns and watching violent videos, we're scared that some sort of culture of violence is taking them over...

RECORDS

Big thin LPs. Fields of them. We move across them, slowly... they seem to come to rest in an end of a few books... but then the CD's start, and go on, faster and faster, forever then the singles, then the tapes...

ROB (V.O.)

But nobody worries about kids listening to thousands -- literally thousands -- of songs about broken hearts and rejection and pain and misery and loss.

It seems the records, tapes, and CD's will never end until... we come to ROB -- always a hair out of place, a face that grows on you. He sits in an oversized beanbag chair and addresses us, the wall of music behind him.

ROB

Did I listen to pop music because I was miserable, or was I miserable because I listened to pop music?

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Group of bags huddled next to the door. Not the go-on-vacation set, but the clothes-to-coffee-maker moving out variety. Rob stares at them, his face unreadable, his head gripped by a big pair Boudokan headphones. We hear what he is hearing, something foreboding and upbeat at the same time.

LAURA, Rob's girlfriend, enters the room, and he immediately pulls the headphones off.

She clocks him for a moment, catching him in what seems to be an old and repeated moment of nonpresence. She begins to heft the bags, Rob goes to her, a little tardy for his big goodbye. Laura begins to cry a bit.

LAURA

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

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

ROB

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

LAURA

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

ROB

Well stay for tonight, then.

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

STEREO

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

ROB

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

INT. APARTMENT STAIRWELL

Laura drags her bags, banging down the stairs --

INT. ROB'S APARTMENT

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

ROB

Those were the ones that really
hurt.

(MORE)

ROB (cont'd)

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

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

ROB

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

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

ROB

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

CUT TO:

EXT. SUBURBAN PARK - DUSK -

Rob and Alison sit on the bench, kissing awkwardly.

ROB (V.O.)

Which brings us to number one.
Alison Ashworth.

PARK BENCH - DUSK

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

ROB (V.O.)

My relationship with Alison Ashworth
lasted six hours.

PARK BENCH - DUSK

...Next night...

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

SAME PARK BENCH

...And the fourth night...

ROB (V.O.)
 Kevin Bannister.

Alison and another boy, KEVIN BANNISTER. Kissing. In the background, Rob approaches and stops. He implodes with self-consciousness and humiliation and attempts to affect a casual gait as he mopes away.

ROB (V.O.)
 It would be nice to think that since I was fourteen, times have changed, relationships have become more sophisticated, females less cruel, skins thicker, but there still seems to be an element of that afternoon in everything that has happened to me since. All my other romantic stories seem to be a scrambled version of that first one.

INT. ROB'S APARTMENT

Rob sits in his chair, a cord leading from the stereo to headphones draped around his neck. Behind him is the wall of music.

ROB
 Number two. Penny Hardwick. Penny was great-looking, and her top five recording artists were Carly Simon, Carole King, James Taylor, Cat Stevens, and Elton John...

He lets the needle down on the turntable next to him.

"Nobody Does It Better" by Carly Simon begins to play as

PRESENCE...

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL LAWN - FLASHBACK - MOS

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

ROB (V.O.)
 Everybody liked her. She was nice.
 Nice manners. Nice grades. Nice-
 looking.

INT. PENNY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

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

ROB (V.O.)
 She was so nice, in fact, that she
 wouldn't let me put my hand
 underneath, or even on top of, her
 bra.

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

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

"Nobody Does It Better" continues as Rob walks Penny to her front door. She is smiling, he seems distant.

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

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

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

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

CUT TO:

INT. "EL" TRAIN CAR - MORNING - PRESENT

Rob sways with the other commuters.

ROB
 She cried, and I hated her for it,
 because she made me feel bad. I
 started dating a girl who everybody
 said would put out, and Penny went
 with this asshole Chris Thompson who
 told me that he had sex with her
 after something like three dates.
 (MORE)

ROB (cont'd)

How had Penny gone from a girl who wouldn't do anything to a girl who would do everything?

A BUSINESSMAN looks up from his paper at Rob, then back down.

EXT. CLARK STREET - DAY

An old Chicago block of local merchants, on a busy street.

Rob makes his way down the street, jangling a set of keys and talking to us.

ROB

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

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

ROB

I get by because of the people who make a special effort to shop here on Saturday young men, always young men, who spend a disproportionate amount of their time looking for deleted Smiths singles and "original not rereleased" underline Frank Zappa albums.

INT. RECORD STORE - DAY

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

But as Rob opens the door, enters, and flips a switch causing the fluorescents to sputter, we see in his eyes the reverence and earnestness of a football coach gazing across an empty field or a priest drawn at midnight to his empty church.

ROB

The fetish properties are not unlike porn. I would feel guilty taking their money if I wasn't, kind of, well, one of them.

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

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

ROB
'Morning, Dick.

DICK
Oh, hi. Hi, Rob.

ROB
Good weekend?

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

ROB
Great.

DICK
I'll tape it for you.

ROB
No, that's okay. Really.

DICK
'Cause you like their second one, you said, Pop, Girls. etc. The one with Cheryl Ladd on the cover. You didn't see the cover though.

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

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

ROB
(resigned)
Okay.

CUT TO:

INT. RECORD STORE - LATER

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

ROB
(re: music)
What's this?

DICK
The new Belle and Sebastian. Like
it?

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

BARRY
BAA! BA BA DANG!

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

BARRY
Holy Shiite! What the fuck's this?

DICK
It's the new --

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

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

BARRY
Well that's problematic because it
sucks ass.

He pops the CD out and frisbees it to Dick.

BARRY
(re: the CD)
Yours, I assume...

Barry pulls a tape out of his jacket and jams it in. "How to Kill a Radio Consultant" by Public Enemy comes through at through the red levels.

ROB
(over the blare)
TURN IT OFF, BARRY.

BARRY
IT WON'T GO ANY LOUDER.

Barry walks in rhythm toward the stockroom and disappears.

Rob goes behind the counter and stops the tape. Barry's head pops out of the stockroom.

BARRY
What are you doing?

ROB
I don't want to hear Public Enemy right now.

BARRY
Public Enemy! All I'm trying to do is cheer us up. Go ahead and put on some old sad bastard music see if I care.

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

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

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

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

ROB
What's next?

BARRY
Play it.

ROB
Say it.

BARRY
(sighs)
"Little Latin Lupe Lu."

Rob groans.

DICK
Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels?

BARRY
(defensive)
No. The Righteous Brothers.

DICK
Oh well. Nevermind.

Barry bristles and moves slowly in on Dick.

BARRY
What?

DICK
Nothing.

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

DICK
Nothing. I just prefer the other
one.

BARRY
Bullshit.

ROB
How can it be bullshit to state a
preference?

BARRY
Since when did this shop become a
fascist regime?

ROB
Since you brought that bullshit tape
in.

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

ROB

We'll do it next Monday.

BARRY

Well what's the point in that?

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

The SOUND gets closer, then stops. The door swings open to admit VINCE and JUSTIN, two fifteen-year-old skate punks.

Vince's hair is post-apocalyptically hacked to different lengths, Justin's is uniformly shaven with leopard spots dyed browse. Rob follows them, watching their every move.

Dick counters from his perch, getting another angle. Barry cracks his knuckles threateningly. Vince and Justin do their best browser impersonations. Finally Justin plucks a CD, and the two move to the counter.

ROB

Hey. Didn't you steal that one already?

DICK

Can I help you?

JUSTIN

Just this.

DICK

That'll be fifteen-twenty-seven.

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

VINCE

Isn't your name Dick?

DICK

Yes.

VINCE

That sucks. Get it?

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

CUT TO:

INT. RECORD STORE - STOCK ROOM - LATER

Rob is on his knees, opening boxes with a razor knife. He talks to us as he works.

ROB

I'm sick of the sight of this place,
to be honest. Some days I'm
afraid --

Dick sticks his head in the door, looks at Rob, looks where Rob is looking (camera), and retreats back through the door.

Rob continues.

ROB

I'm afraid I'll go berserk, rip the
Elvis Costello mobile from the
ceiling, throw the "Country Artists
Male A-K" rack out onto the streets,
go off to work in a Virgin Megastore
and never come back --

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

CUSTOMER (O.S.)

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

BARRY (O.S.)

Oh yeah. We got it.

Rob relaxes and goes back to work.

CUSTOMER (O.S.)

Great. Can I have it then?

BARRY (O.S.)

No, you can't.

Rob deflates, shaking his head.

STORE FLOOR

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

CUSTOMER

Why not?

BARRY

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

CUSTOMER

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

BARRY

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

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

CUSTOMER

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

He steps out of the door.

BARRY

B'Bye!

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

CUSTOMER

FUCK YOU!

-- and bolts. Barry smiles and turns to see

ROB

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

ROB

Nice, Barry.

BARRY

Rob. Top five musical crimes
perpetrated by Stevie Wonder in the
'80's and '90's. Subquestion -- is
it in fact unfair to criticize a
formerly great artist for his
latter-day sins? "Is it better to
burn out than to fade away?"

ROB

You just drove a fucking customer away, Barry.

BARRY

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

ROB

Not the point.

BARRY

Oh, so what's the point then?

ROB

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

BARRY

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

Rob's face begins to redden with anger.

ROB

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

BARRY

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

ROB

What did he ever do to you?

BARRY

He offended me with his terrible taste.

ROB

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

BARRY

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

(sarcastic)

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

Rob is red and seething.

BARRY

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

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

DICK

Hey, guys... Hey.

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

BARRY

(extremely shaken)

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

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

DICK

Are you all right?

ROB

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

DICK

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

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

DICK

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

ROB

Fine.

DICK

I'll start with your news before I tell him mine, obviously. Mine isn't much, really, just about Marie LaSalle (flashes CD of pretty woman) playing at Lounge Ax tonight. I like her, you know, she's kind of Sheryl Crowish... but, you know, good. So I'll tell him before that. Good news and bad news kind of thing.

Dick laughs nervously.

DICK

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

ROB

I understand, Dick.

DICK

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

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

ROB

No. Thanks though, Dick.

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

CUT TO:

ROB IN HIS CHAIR

Rob to camera.

ROB

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

CUT TO:

EXT. COLLEGE QUAD - DAY - FLASHBACK

About twenty feet away we see a tall, thin beauty, bleach-blonde hair cropped short in darling '80's new-wave asymmetry.

She is speaking animatedly to a PAMPHLETEER, driving her points home with a forefinger.

ROB (V.O.)

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

INT. CAFE - DAY

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

ROB (V.O.)

(over her talking)

...so we didn't have those terrible, strained sentences, that seemed to characterized most of my relationships. And she liked me. She liked me. She liked me.

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

EXT. STREET - AFTERNOON

Rob and Charlie walk arm in arm, Rob in cool clothes and sunglasses trying to look cool, Charlie making a point about something.

Rob checks out how cool he looks with her as they walk by a store window REFLECTION.

ROB (V.O.)

We went out for two years, and for every single minute I felt as though I was standing on a dangerously narrow ledge. I couldn't get comfortable, couldn't ever stretch out and relax. Why would a girl -- no, a woman -- like Charlie go out with someone who only a few years ago sewed a Foghat patch on his jacket? I felt like all those people who suddenly shaved their heads and said they'd always been punks. I felt like a fraud. And I was depressed by the lack of flamboyance in my wardrobe...

INT. CHARLIE'S APARTMENT - DAY

The fabulous sophomore design student's studio apartment:

White wood floor, white walls, overvarnished door, Doisneaux print on the wall, futon on the floor. Rob lies back on his elbows, watching Charlie in uncomfortable, worried awe. She stands, her back to him, wearing only her underwear and pulling on a T-shirt -- a heartbreaking image to look back on.

ROB (V.O.)

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

Charlie turns around and looks at Rob with naked ambivalence.

ROB (V.O.)

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

EXT. CHARLIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

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

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

ROB (V.O.)
 And I lost it. I lost it all.
 Dignity, faith, fifteen pounds...

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Rob wandering through the rain.

ROB (V.O.)
 Any small idea of personal identity
 that I had acquired up to that
 point.

INT. SOME RECORD STORE - DAY

A younger and catatonic Rob listlessly sorts through a stack of records.

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

INT. ROB'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Rob stands in front of his wall of music, shifting LPs around between the shelves and piles on the floor as he talks to us.

ROB
 What I really learned from the
 Charlie Debacle is that you gotta
 punch your weight. Charlie was out
 of my Class: too pretty, too smart,
 too witty, too much. What am I?
 Average. A middleweight. Not the
 smartest guy in the world, but
 certainly not the dumbest. I've
 read books like The Unbearable
 Lightness of Being, Angela's Ashes,
 and Love in the Time of Cholera, and
 understood them, I think -- they're
 about girls, right? -- just
 kidding -- but I don't like them
 very much. My all time top five
 favorite books are Johnny Cash's
 autobiography, Snow Crash by Neil
 Stevenson, Zen and the Art of
 Motorcycle Maintenance, The Trouser
 Press Guides to Rock, and, I don't
 know, probably something by Kurt
 Vonnegut.

(MORE)

ROB (cont'd)

I look through the New Yorker when my neighbor's done with it, and I'm not averse to going down to the Fine Arts to watch subtitled films, although on the whole I prefer American films. Top five being Blade Runner, Cool Hand Luke, the first two Godfathers which we'll count as one, Taxi Driver, and The Shining. I'm okay looking, average height, not skinny, not fat. My genius, if I can call it that, is to combine a whole load of averageness into one compact frame. You might say there were millions like me, but there aren't, really: A lot of guys have impeccable music taste but don't read, a lot of guys read but are really fat, a lot of guys are sympathetic to women but have stupid beards, a lot of guys have a Woody Allen sense of humor but look like Woody Allen. Some drink too much, some drive like assholes, some get into fights, or show off money, or do drugs. I don't do any of these things, really. If I do okay with women it's not because of the virtues I have, but because of the ugly flaws I don't have... So. Charlie and I didn't match. After her I was determined to never get out of my league again.

INT. ROB'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Rob presses play on the answering machine. A pleasant, older female voice is heard. It's JANET, Laura's mother.

JANET

(on machine)

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

Beep.

LIZ

(on machine)

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

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

EXT. LAKE MICHIGAN WATERFRONT - MOS - THE PAST

The MUSIC becomes SOUNDTRACK to the following scenes. Rob and SARAH, a thin, modestly attractive young woman, SARAH, walk and talk. They seem to be emphatically complaining together.

ROB (V.O.)

Charlie and I didn't match. Marco and Charlie matched. Me and Sarah, number four on the all time break-ups list, matched. She wore more or less the same clothes as mine, had an acceptable working knowledge of music, and she had been dumped by some asshole named Michael. He was her moment, Charlie was mine. Sarah had sworn off men. I had sworn off women. It made sense to pool our loathing of the opposite sex, swear them off together, and get to share a bed with someone at the same time.

INT. SARAH'S APARTMENT - MOS - NIGHT

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

ROB (V.O.)

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

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

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

ROB (V.O.)

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

ROB IN HIS CHAIR

The MUSIC becomes PRESENCE again, and Rob takes the needle off the record.

ROB

You run the risk of losing anyone who is worth spending time with. But I didn't know that at the time. All I saw was that I'd moved down a division and that it still hadn't worked out, and this seemed cause for a great deal of misery and self-pity. And that's when Laura came along.

INT. ROB'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Rob is surrounded by stacks of records on the floor. He looks to camera.

ROB

I'm reorganizing my records tonight. It's something I do in times of emotional distress. When Laura was here I had them in alphabetical order, before that, chronologically. Tonight, though, I'm trying to put them in the order in which I bought them. That way I can write my own autobiography without picking up a pen. Pull them all off the shelves, look for Revolver and go from there. I'll be able to see how I got from Deep Purple to The Soft Boys in twenty-five moves. What I really like about my new system is that it makes me more complicated than I am. To find anything you have to be me, or at the very least a doctor in Rob-ology. If you wanna find Landslide by Fleetwood Mac you have to know that I bought it for someone in the fall of 1983 and then didn't give it to them for personal reasons. But you don't know any of that, do you? You would have to ask me to--

The phone rings again. Rob picks it up.

ROB

Yeah?

MOM
Hi, Rob. It's your mother.

Rob deflates a bit.

ROB
Hi, Mom.

MOM
Everything all right?

ROB
Great. Super-fantastic.

MOM
How's the store?

ROB
So so. Up and down.

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

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

ROB
She left. She's gone.

MOM
What do you mean? Where did she go?

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

MOM
Well call her mother.

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

Silence.

ROB
There'll be another mom and another
Christmas. Right?

Silence... More silence.

ROB
Hello? Anybody there?

THE SOUND OF SOFT CRYING

ROB
I'm all right, if that's what's
upsetting you.

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

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

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

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

MOM
And after that?

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

MOM
I knew this was going to happen.

ROB
Then what are you getting so upset
about?

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

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

MOM

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

ROB

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

MOM

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

Silence. Rob busted.

ROB

Shut up, Mom.

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

CUT TO:

EXT. LOUNGE AX CLUB - LINCOLN AVE. - NIGHT

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

Rob smiles at first, but begins to darken as the verse continues. He steps out of line and leans against the outside wall, listening. Is he beginning to cry? Yes, he is...

CUT TO:

ROB IN HIS CHAIR

ROB

Peter. Frampton. That perm! "Show Me the Way"! A phenomenon based on a live album that was actually recorded in a studio! What is happening?

(MORE)

ROB (cont'd)

I am getting misty, choked up at a song that I had the good sense at twelve to realize was so saccharine and stupid as to be inarticulatable, until Michael Bolton, that is.

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. LOUNGE AX CLUB - LINCOLN AVE.

He looks around self-consciously, and paces a bit, deciding whether or not to stay. He takes a deep breath, and heads in the door.

INT. LOUNGE AX - NIGHT

As Rob enters he looks to the stage, where MARIE LASALLE is standing alone with her acoustic guitar, heading toward the song's finish. Rob's expression begins to shift from the melancholy to something else altogether. Marie is beautiful, and Marie has touched his heart. Rob navigates toward her through the small crowd as if pulled by something unseen. He addresses us over his shoulder.

ROB

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

As he gets closer to the stage --

DICK

ROB!

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

ROB

I always hated this song.

DICK

Yeah.

BARRY

Yeah.

ROB

But now I kind of like it.

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

DICK
She shouldn't done it on "The Number
Four With a Smile."

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

DICK
That's what I said.

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

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

BARRY
You can be and are wrong.

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

BARRY
I wanna date a musician...

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

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

DICK
Just in the background somewhere.

MARIE

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

MARIE

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

ROB, DICK, AND BARRY

BARRY

Let's go get one.

ROB

Let's not.

DICK

I want a tape.

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

ROB

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

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

FOOT OF THE STAGE

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

MARIE

Enjoying yourselves?

They dart eyes to each other, then nod.

MARIE

Good. 'Cause I'm enjoying myself.

ROB

Good.

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

ROB

So you live in Chicago now?

MARIE

Yup. Not far from here, actually.

BARRY

You like it?

MARIE

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

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

DICK

He's got one!

BARRY

On Clark Street!

DICK

A couple blocks! About six!

BARRY

We work there!

DICK

You'd love it!

Marie laughs.

MARIE

What do you sell?

BARRY

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

MARIE

Sounds great.

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

ROB

What did you tell her about the shop for?

BARRY

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

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

CUT TO:

INT. RECORD STORE - STOCK ROOM - LATER

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

BARRY (O.S.)

ROB! PHONE!

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

ROB

Rob here.

LIZ (O.S.)

Hey. It's Liz.

ROB

What's happenin'.

LIZ

You called this morning?

ROB

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

LIZ

How're you holding up?

ROB

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

LIZ

Yeah. Like I said, I don't want to take sides. And I like Laura with you. She's more fun, more open. You guys are good together.

(MORE)

LIZ (cont'd)
 I just wish you two could, I don't
 know. I don't think much of this
 Ian guy --

-- Dick bursts in, huge-faced --

DICK
 Rob.

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

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

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

ROB
 Liz, can you hold for a second?

He hits hold.

ROB
 (to Dick)
 I'll be out there! Go!
 (picks up the phone)
 Hey, Liz, I gotta go... Tomorrow
 night? Great. Green Mill. Fine.
 Seven? Done. Thanks. Right. Bye.

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

FRONT ROOM

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

ROB
 Oh. Hi.

Marie smiles.

MARIE
 (re: music)
 Don't you like that?

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

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

STOCK ROOM

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

ROB
 WHAT FUCKING IAN GUY?!!

Dick comes in --

DICK
 Rob --!

ROB
 -- FUCK OFF!

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

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

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

BARRY
 We can take your car.

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

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

BARRY
 Jaggoff...

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

ROB
Who the fuck is Ian?!

CUT TO:

INT. ROB'S BUILDING'S LOBBY - NIGHT

Rob enters and walks to the mail table, looking like shit.
He starts sifting through envelopes for his.

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

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

CLOSE-UP: LETTER

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

ROB

as he looks at it, divining.

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

CUT TO:

ROB IN HIS CHAIR

Rob to camera.

ROB
Mr. I Raymond. "Ray" to his friends, and, more importantly, to his neighbors. The guy who up until about six weeks ago lived upstairs. I knew it was him the moment I saw the letter. I start to remember things now: His stupid clothing, his music -- Latin, Bulgarian, whatever fucking world music was trendy that week--stupid laugh, awful cooking smells. I can't remember anything good about him at all.

(MORE)

ROB (cont'd)

I never liked him much then, and I fucking hate him now... I manage to block out the worst, most painful, most disturbing memory of him until I go to bed.

INT. ROB'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

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

JUMP CUT

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

ROB

Jeez. He goes on long enough.

LAURA

I should be so lucky.

They turn to each other and laugh.

JUMP CUT BACK

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

ROB

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

ROB'S IAN-LAURA SEX NIGHTMARE - QUICK CUTS

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

BACK TO ROB IN BED,

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

ROB

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

INT. RECORD STORE - DAY

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

FEMALE VOICE

Hey.

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

GIRL

Do you have soul?

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

ROB

That all depends.

She kind of backs away and goes back to browsing. The phone rings and Rob picks it up.

ROB

Record Exchange... How many records... Right, well if you could bring them -- okay, well, where do you live? Right... how about now? I can come right over...

(Rob scribbles)

Okay.

He hangs up and grabs his jacket. Dick emerges from the back.

ROB

(to Dick)

Some lady's got some singles to sell. I'll be back in a half-hour.

Rob walks out.

EXT./INT. FANCY LINCOLN PARK TOWNHOUSE - DAY

Rob mounts the stairs and rings the doorbell. The door opens, revealing a too-tan WOMAN in her late forties, in designer jeans and a T-shirt bearing a rhinestone peace sign.

She says nothing.

ROB

Hi. You called about the records?

She turns and walks into the house, leaving the door open for him. He follows her in and through a fabulous first floor, packed with big-bucks bourgeois: Rugs, art, and antiques:

She ushers Rob into a large study, and turns the light on. He misses a breath. The walls are lined with mahogany cases custom-built for CDs, albums, epicurean stereo components, a couple priceless vintage guitars -- every one of the thousands of items bear a little numbered sticker, like a museum. She points to several boxes on the floor, full of hundreds of singles.

WOMAN

Those.

Rob steps into the room like an Undeserving, and carefully drops to his knees to examine the singles, each pristine in a plastic sleeve: the original God Save the Queen by the Sex Pistols, original Otis Reddings, Elvis Presleys, James Browns, Jerry Lee Lewises, Beatles... on and on. The mother lode. Rob is doing the best to control the onset of hyperventilation. He dares a glance over his shoulder to her to see if this is a joke.

WOMAN

What do you think?

ROB

It's the best collection I've ever seen.

WOMAN

Give me fifty bucks and they're all yours.

Rob's face goes funny. He looks around for a hidden camera.

ROB

These are worth at least, I don't know --

WOMAN

I know what they're worth. Give me fifty and get them out.

ROB

But you must have --

WOMAN

I must have nothing. Their my husband's.

ROB

And you must not be getting along too well right now, huh?

WOMAN

He's in Jamaica with a twenty-three-year-old. A friend of my daughter's. He had the fucking nerve to call me and ask me to borrow some money and I told him to fuck off, so he asked me to sell his singles collection and send him a check for whatever I go, minus a ten percent commission. Which reminds me. Can you make sure you give me a five? I want to frame it and put it on the wall.

ROB

It must have taken him a long time to get them together.

WOMAN

Years. This collection is as close as he's ever come to an achievement.

Rob looks back at the records but avoids the trance.

ROB

Look. Can I pay you properly? You don't have to tell him what you got. Send him forty-five bucks and blow the rest. Give it to charity. Or something.

WOMAN

That wasn't part of the deal. I want to be poisonous but fair.

ROB

(looking back at the records)
Look... I... I'm sorry. I don't want to be any part of this.

WOMAN

Suit yourself. There are plenty of others who will.

ROB

That's why I'm trying to compromise. What about fifteen-hundred? They're worth five times that.

WOMAN

Sixty.

ROB

Thirteen hundred.

WOMAN

Seventy-five.

ROB

Eleven-hundred. That's my lowest offer.

WOMAN

And I won't take a penny over ninety.

They start smiling at each other.

WOMAN

With eleven hundred he could come home, and that's the last thing I want.

ROB

I'm sorry but I think you better talk to someone else.

WOMAN

Fine.

Rob half stands, then drops again for one last lingering look.

ROB

Can I buy this Otis Redding single off you?

WOMAN

Sure. Ten cents.

ROB

Oh, come on! Let me give you ten dollars for this, and you can give the rest away for all I care.

WOMAN

Okay. Because you took the trouble to come up here. And because you've got principles. But that's it. I'm not selling them to you one by one.

CUT TO:

EXT. FANCY LINCOLN PARK TOWNHOUSE - DAY

Rob comes down the stairs holding his single, and walks down the street talking to camera.

ROB

How come I end up siding with the bad guy, the man who ran off to Jamaica with some nymphette? I just got left for someone else, so why can't I bring myself to feel whatever it is his wife is feeling? All I can see is that guy's face when he gets that pathetic check in the mail for those records, and I can't help but feel desperately, painfully sorry for him.

CUT TO:

INT. GREEN MILL - NIGHT

The bar where Al Capone used to party, and it looks about the same: colored lightbulbs, shadowboxes, deep plush booths and a stage for jazz. Rob slumps back in a booth, stirring a drink with his finger. After a beat, we hear a DOOR SLAM off camera, and Rob looks up with a bit of fear.

Heavy footsteps get louder and closer, until a shadow shrouds Rob -- LIZ stands in front of him.

LIZ

MOTHERFUCKER.

She is enormous, and she is mad as hell. Rob reflexively shrinks.

ROB

What's the -- hey, Liz --

LIZ

-- No, no, no, don't even. I talked to Laura, Rob. I talked to her and she gave me a little background. And you're a fucking ASSHOLE.

She turns and stomps toward the door. Rob gets up and follows.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Rob comes out of the club and follows Liz. She hears him and turns on him, punctuating with a finger in his chest.

LIZ

To think I sympathized with you for two seconds! Poor Rob! Laura left him out of nowhere for the schmuck upstairs. You let me believe that!

ROB

It's true!

LIZ

Rob! Two years ago you got Laura pregnant; you then proceeded to cheat on her! You borrowed money from her and never paid a dime back! And then, just a few weeks ago, you told her you were unhappy with her and were "kind of looking around for somebody else!"

ROB

Well she --

She turns again and keeps walking, holding a defiant middle finger over her shoulder as she fades down the street.

INT. SUBWAY CAR - NIGHT

Rob sits, rocking slightly with the movement of the train.

He stares at an OLD COUPLE who do not speak to each other.

ROB

She's right, of course. I am a fucking asshole. I did and said those things. But before you judge, although you've probably already done so, go off for a minute and write down the top five worst things that you have done to your partner, even if -- especially if -- your partner doesn't know about them. Don't dress things up or try to explain them. Just write them down in the plainest language possible...

A LONG BEAT, even five or ten seconds.

ROB
Pencils down. Okay, so who's the
asshole now?

CUT TO:

INT. RECORD STORE - DAY

Saturday. For the first time we see the place kind of busy. Rob watches the room. Barry is toward the back, talking to a CUSTOMER. "Cruel to Be Kind" by Nick Lowe plays.

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

CUSTOMER
I have all of the others.

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

CUSTOMER
They always seemed...

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

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

CUSTOMER
Well what about the new Echo --

BARRY
Do not get ahead of yourself.

DICK

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

CUSTOMER - DICK'S POV

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

DICK

thinking, calculating...

DICK

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

FEMALE CUSTOMER

The Clash.

DICK

Correct. The Clash. But also the Stranglers.

FEMALE CUSTOMER

Who?

DICK

I think you would love the Stranglers...

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

FEMALE CUSTOMER

This sounds great.

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

CUSTOMER

Is this the new Green Day?

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

BARRY

That is perverse. Do not tell anyone you don't own fucking Blonde on Blonde. What about Television?

CUSTOMER

I have a television.

BARRY

NO--!

Barry adds more records to the Customer's stack.

A FEW MINUTES LATER - ROB AND DICK

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

ROB
I will now sell four copies of Cats
and Dogs by the Royal Trux.

DICK
Do it. Do it.

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

CUSTOMER
(re: music)
What is this?

ROB
It's the Royal Trux.

CUSTOMER
It's great.

ROB
I know.

ROB'S POV

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

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

ROB
Dick, ring the man up...

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

He sees Rob now, and he and Justin bolt for the door. Rob doubles back.

ROB
DICK! THE DOOR!

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

EXT. RECORD STORE - DAY

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

ROB

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

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

ROB

(to Vince)

And what about you, dork?

Vince pulls about six, and puts them down in a neutral spot.

Rob picks all of them up and starts looking through them.

Dicks pokes his head out of the door.

ROB

Dick, call the police, please.

Vince and Justin look at each other.

ROB

(looking through the CD's) Eno import. Sigue Sigue Sputnik. Break beats. Serge Gainsbourg. Ryuchi Sakamoto, Syd Barrett... What's going on here? Are you guys stealing for other people now?

VINCE

Naw. Those are for us.

ROB

Oh really. You two are slamming to Nico now?

JUSTIN

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

VINCE

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

ROB
I think you have more.

VINCE
Well we don't.

ROB
I can't frisk you but the cops can.

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

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

VINCE
No, we...

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

Rob snorts.

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

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

ROB
Uh, yes I, like, do... It's simple. You make the tracks -- recording studio -- deliver them to the pressing plant where a master is cut, the master is then dubbed to submasters, which are the "mothers," as their called, for each press in the plant. You press the CD's or records, put in your cover art, and that's it.

VINCE
Records are those big round black things, right?

ROB
Fuck off.

Rob turns to go back in the store.

VINCE

Hey, can I have my board?

Rob drops it and enters the store.

CUT TO:

INT. RECORD STORE - NIGHT - QUICK CUTS:

Barry emerges from the back with three opened bottles of beer as the last customer goes out the door... The three lean against the bins, tired and smiling.

BARRY

(to Rob)

What?

ROB

What do you mean, "what?"

BARRY

What are you snickering about?

ROB

I'm not snickering. I'm smiling.
Because I'm happy.

BARRY

What am I missing? What do you have
to be happy about?

DICK

Well we rang \$900 today.

ROB

Yeah but more than that. I'm happy
because I'm proud of us. Because
although our talents are small and
peculiar, we use them to their best
advantage.

Dick and Barry look at each other. They almost know how to take a compliment.

EXT. RECORD STORE - NIGHT

Rob, now alone, turns the sign from "open" to "closed" shuts the door behind him, and pulls the gate across. Laura appears from the next doorway. He jumps.

ROB

Shit!

LAURA
Hi.

ROB
Hi.

LAURA
I thought I could give you a lift
back.

ROB
Are you coming home?

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

ROB
My house?

Laura turns and begins walking. Rob looks at camera.

ROB
First of all: The money. The money
is easy to explain: She had it and I
didn't, and she wanted to give it to
me. If she hadn't, I would have
gone under. I've never paid her
back because I've never been able
to, and just because she's took off
and moved in with some Supertramp
fan doesn't make me five grand
richer. So that's the money --

Laura's CAR HORN is heard. He heads off.

CUT TO:

INT. LAURA'S CAR - NIGHT

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

LAURA
You can make all the faces you want.
My car. My car stereo. My
compilation tape.

Rob tries not to speak, but --

ROB
How can you like Art Garfunkel and
Marvin Gaye?
(MORE)

ROB (cont'd)

It's like saying you support the
Israelis and the Palestinians.

LAURA

It's not like saying that at all,
actually, Rob. Art Garfunkel and
Marvin Gaye make pop records --

ROB

-- Made. Made. Marvin Gaye is
dead, his father shot him in --

LAURA

-- whatever, and the Israelis and
the Palestinians don't. Art
Garfunkel and Marvin Gaye are not
engaged in a bitter territorial
dispute, and the Israelis and the
Palestinians are. Art Garfunkel and
Marvin Gaye --

ROB

-- Alright, alright but --

LAURA

-- and who says I like Marvin Gaye,
anyway?

He reels on her.

ROB

Hey! Marvin Gaye! "Got to Give It
Up!" That's our song! Marvin Gaye
is responsible for our entire
relationship!

LAURA

Is that right? I'd like a word with
him.

ROB

But don't you remember?

LAURA

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

Rob shakes his head in disbelief.

LAURA

I can see why you prefer Gaye to
Garfunkel. I get it, really. But
there are so many other things to
worry about.

(MORE)

LAURA (cont'd)

They're only records, and if one is better than the other, well, who cares, besides you and Barry and Dick? I mean really, who gives a flying fuck?

Silence.

ROB

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

LAURA

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

ROB

So you weren't interested in music at all?

LAURA

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

The car slows, and Laura parks.

ROB

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

LAURA

You really believe that?

Laura turns the engine off and unbuckles her seat belt.

ROB

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

LAURA

And do you like it that way?

ROB

Not really.

She half smiles.

LAURA

Let's go in.

She gets out of the car. Rob turns to camera, speaking quietly and urgently.

ROB

Okay, Number two: The stuff I told her about being unhappy in the relationship, about half looking around for someone else: She tricked me into saying it. We were having this state of the union type conversation and she said, quite matter-of-factly, that we were pretty unhappy at the moment, and did I agree, and I said yes, and she asked whether I ever thought about meeting someone else. So I asked her if she ever thought about it, and she said of course, so I admitted that I daydream about it from time to time. Now I see that what we were really talking about was her and Ian, and she suckered me into absolving her. It was a sneaky lawyer's trick, and I fell for it, because she's much smarter than me.

He scrambles out of the car.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

The lock turns and Rob enters, holding the door for Laura who slips by, her coat in her hands. She glances down at the table by the door and sees Ian's envelope.

ROB

You can take it with you if you want.

She slips it into her purse. He stands facing her for a moment, then crosses to her, takes her coat and tosses it on a chair. She opens the closet and takes out a big laundry sack.

LAURA

Have you tackled the Great Reorganization yet?

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

She begins putting books and other things into the bag...

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

Having no comeback, Rob goes for the moral high ground.

ROB
So. Where have you been staying for
the last week?

LAURA
I think you know that.

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

Laura looks suddenly tired and sad, and looks away.

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

ROB
Good.
(beat)
So. Is it my job?

LAURA
What? Gimme a fucking break. Is
that what you think? That your not
big enough a deal for me? Jesus,
gimme a little credit, Rob.

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

LAURA
What were the others?

ROB
Just the obvious stuff.

LAURA
What's the obvious stuff?

ROB
I don't know.

She stands and walks toward the bathroom.

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

ROB
No.

As soon as she shuts the door behind her, he turns to camera.

ROB
And number three: The Pregnancy. I didn't know she was pregnant. Of course I didn't. She hadn't told me because I had told her I was... sort of... seeing somebody else. We thought we were being very grown-up, but we were being preposterously naive, childish even, to think that one of us could fuck around and then own up to it while we were living together. So -- I didn't find out about it 'til way later. We were going through a good period and I made a crack about having kids and she burst into tears. I made her tell me what it was all about, and she did. I felt guilty and so I got angry. She told me that at the time I didn't look like a very good long-term bet. That it was a hard decision and she didn't see any point in consulting me about it... When the whole sorry tale comes out in a great big --

We hear the bathroom door open.

LAURA (O.S.)
What?

ROB
(covering)
What, what?

Laura comes out with a toiletry bag and places it by the door.

LAURA

Did you say something?

ROB

No. So. Is it working out with Ian?

LAURA

Rob. Don't be childish.

ROB

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

LAURA

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

ROB

Well then why don't you quit it while you seem to not be ahead?

Laura rolls her eyes and head off into the bedroom with the laundry bag. Rob turns back to camera.

ROB

-- When the whole sorry tale comes out in a great big lump like that, even the most shortsighted jerk, even the most self-deluding and self pitying of jilted, wounded lovers can see that there is some cause and effect going on here, that abortions and Ian and money and affairs all belong to, all deserve each other.

Laura reappears, her bag half-filled with clothes, and goes to the book shelves next to the records. She starts topping off the bag with books.

LAURA

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

ROB

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

LAURA

I don't know.

ROB

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

LAURA

I suppose so.

ROB

So we have a chance of getting back together again.

LAURA

Oh, Rob, shut up.

ROB

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

LAURA

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

She abandons her attempt at packing.

ROB

Well if you could tell me roughly it would help.

LAURA

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

ROB

Yeah. Great.

LAURA

(shaking her head)

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

ROB

No problem. If I can ask one question.

LAURA

Fine. One.

ROB

It sounds stupid.

LAURA

Nevermind.

ROB

You won't like it.

LAURA

Just ask it!

ROB

Is it better?

LAURA

Is what better? Better than what?

ROB

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

LAURA

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

ROB

Of course it is.

LAURA
You really think it would make a
difference either way?

ROB
I don't know.

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

ROB
Never?

LAURA
I haven't felt like it.

ROB
But not even before, when he was
living upstairs?

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

ROB
(trying not to smile)
The sleeping together is better but
not the sex because you haven't done
it was him yet.

LAURA
Will you please just go?

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - NIGHT

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

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Rob bounces along, a smile wider than we have seen yet.

Maybe even jumping to touch an awning. He lands and tells
us:

ROB
I feel good! I feel great! I feel
like a new man. I feel so much
better, in fact --

INT. WEEDS BAR - NIGHT

Rob moves through the room, still grinning a bit like a proud new father, toward the table where Barry, Dick, Marie and T- Bone sit, listening to a story T-Bone is telling.

Marie turns to him.

ROB
Hi, Marie.

MARIE
Everything go alright?

Rob glances at Barry, who averts his gaze.

ROB
She just wanted to pick up some
stuff. No big thing. A relief,
actually.

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

ROB
It's a great song.

MARIE
Thank you.

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

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

MARIE
Yup.

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

ROB

You share a place with T-Bone?

MARIE

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

ROB

I understand completely.

SERIES OF CUTS - ELAPSED TIME

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

ROB (V.O.)

Awhile back, Dick and Barry and I agreed that what really matters is what you like, not what you are like...

ROB AND MARIE - LATER

MARIE

Yeah, but if you heard this band called the Crumblers, you'd --

ROB

What do you mean, the Crumblers? You know the Crumblers? Nobody's heard the Crumblers. Except me.

MARIE

Yeah, I know the Crumblers! I bought a used Blasters album in New York about ten years ago and somebody left a Crumblers single in it. My everything changed for a couple of weeks.

Rob glows --

ROB (V.O.)

Books, records, films -- these things matter. Call me shallow but it's the damn truth, and by this measure I was having one of the best dates of my life.

ROB AND MARIE

ROB

Yeah, but you know what's his best film and nobody's even seen it?

MARIE

The Conformist.

ROB

Exactly! Fucking ex-actly!

MARIE

(laughs)

You haven't even seen it!

ROB

Nor have you!

They just laugh and laugh --

ROB (V.O.)

References, titles, lyrics, flew and met each other in mid-air embraces. The evening goes with breathtaking precision.

INT. MARIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Rob and Marie are kissing standing up.

MARIE

Are you okay?

ROB

(nodding)

Yes. You?

MARIE

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

ROB

I'm sure it isn't.

MARIE

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

ROB

Whiskey.

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

MARIE

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

ROB

I'd better go. I gotta get up early. Go over to my parents'.

MARIE

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

She plants the whiskeys firmly on the coffee table.

MARIE

I'd like it if you could stay the night.

ROB

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

MARIE

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

ROB

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

MARIE

So you'll stay?

ROB

Yeah.

MARIE

Good.

Marie picks up the drinks again and exits to the bedroom.

Rob just stands there... and the LIGHTING CHANGES.

ROB

(to camera)

Over nine million men in this country have slept with ten or more women. And do they all look like Richard Gere? Are they all as rich as Bill Gates? Charming as Oscar Wilde? Hell no. Nothing to do with any of that. Maybe fifty or so have one or more of these attributes, but that still leaves... well, about nine million, give or take fifty. And they're just men. Regular guys. We're just guys, because I, even I, am a member of this exclusive, nine million member club. In fact, Marie is my seventeenth lover. "How does he do it?" you ask. "He wears bad sweaters, he's grumpy, he's broke, he hangs out with the Musical Moron Twins, and he gets to go to bed with a recording artist who looks like Susan Dey-slash-Meg Ryan. What's going on? Listen up, because I think I can explain, with all modesty aside: I ask questions. That's it. That's my secret. It works precisely because that isn't how you're supposed to do it, if you listen to the collective male wisdom. There are still enough old-style, big-mouthed, egomaniacs running around to make someone like me appear to be refreshingly different. If you can't hack this simple strategy, there are some women out there, of course, who want to get pushed around, ignored and mowed over, but do you really want to be with them anyway?

...he goes through a door into the bedroom. Marie is taking off her earrings.

ROB

Would you like me to turn the lights out? Or would you like them on?

MARIE

God, you ask a lot of questions.

INT. MARIE'S BEDROOM - MORNING

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

ROB (V.O.)

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

Rob looks to the camera.

ROB

Sex is about the only grown-up thing that I know how to do; It's weird, then, that it's the only thing that can make me feel like a ten-year-old.

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. MARIE'S APARTMENT - MORNING

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

ROB

Which way are you going?

MARIE

(points left)
That way. You?

ROB

(points right)
That way.

MARIE

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

ROB

I'll call you.

MARIE

(smiles)
Right.

INT. RECORD STORE - DAY

Empty. Dick prices records out on the floor. Rob leans against the register. Barry sits on a stool next to him.

They're top-fiving it. Rob's heart isn't in it.

ROB

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

BARRY

Ehh.

ROB

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

BARRY

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

ROB

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

BARRY

(sarcastic)

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

DICK

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

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

ROB

Hi.

LAURA - INTERCUT

LAURA

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

ROB

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

LAURA

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

ROB

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

LAURA

We'll talk some other time.

ROB

Great... That's great.

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

BARRY

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

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

ROB (V.O.)

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

SFX: BACK TO THE ROOM.

BARRY

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

ROB

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

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

ROB

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

BARRY

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

ROB

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

Barry shuts off the Game Boy.

BARRY

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

ROB

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

BARRY

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

ROB

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

BARRY

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

ROB

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

BARRY

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

Rob brightens. Barry finally considers.

BARRY

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

ROB

But in your opinion, would I definitely go?

BARRY

How the fuck am I supposed to know that? You might get sick of people telling you you've really gotta go see the movie.

Rob darkens.

ROB

Why would they care?

BARRY

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

They look at each other for a strange moment.

BARRY

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

ROB

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

Barry stands.

BARRY

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

ROB

Ha.

DICK

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

BARRY

Why?

Dick smiles sheepishly.

BARRY

Who are you going to see?

DICK

Nobody.

Barry's eyes widen.

BARRY

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

Silence.

BARRY

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

ROB

How do you know about that?

BARRY

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

Barry is going a little hard. Dick shrinks back.

DICK

Anna.

BARRY

Anna who? Anna Green Gables? Anna Conda?

DICK

Anna Moss.

BARRY

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

ROB

Shut the fuck up, Barry.

BARRY

Yeah, you would say that, wouldn't you?

(MORE)

BARRY (cont'd)
 You two have to stick together now.
 Boners United. United in getting
 some.

Barry picks up his bag and heads for the door.

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

BARRY
 Suck my ass.

ROB
 Terrific.

Rob looks to Dick, who looks guilty.

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

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

Dick exits. Rob watches the door close behind him, and looks out over the empty store. He TALKS TO CAMERA as he goes to the light switches and begins shutting them off, one by one...

ROB
 Why does it bother Barry that much
 that Dick is seeing someone? He's
 worried about how his life is
 turning out, and he's lonely, and
 lonely people are the bitterest of
 them all.

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

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

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

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

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING

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

ROB (V.O.)

Laura looks different. Less stress-out, more in control. Something has happened, maybe something real, or maybe something in her head.

Whatever it is, you can see that she thinks she's started out on some new stage in her life. She hasn't. I'm not going to let her.

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

INT. OLDE TOWNE ALE HOUSE - NIGHT

Rob and Laura have just sat down in a booth.

LAURA

So, how are you?

ROB

Have you slept with him yet?

LAURA

I told you I slept with him.

ROB

No, not -- I mean have you, you know --

LAURA

Is that why you wanted to see me?

ROB

I guess.

LAURA

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

ROB

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

She looks past him.

LAURA

I can't do that.

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

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

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

INT. ROB'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Rob is soaking, slumped in his chair, his headphones on and the stereo lit up behind him. He talks a little loud, due to the headphones.

ROB

Tonight we're gonna figure out the five best angry songs about women. Let's go...

He holds up a stack of records and CDs.

ROB

You kind of have to start with Elvis Costello, but where? "Motel Matches?" "I Want You?" "I Hope You're Happy Now?" "Green Shirt?" His records should be sealed in cases that say "in case of vicious betrayal, smash glass." "Where Did You Sleep Last Night," sure, but by Robert Johnson or by Nirvana? Maybe a Liz Phair track. There are a couple to get angry at instead of being angry with. Some devil's advocate stuff. The Silver Jews could be good when you're ready to start putting it all behind you... But I think we're getting ahead of ourselves there. Ah. Dylan. Bob fucking Dylan. Now Bob Dylan would --The phone rings. He pulls off his headphones and picks it up but says nothing.

LAURA (O.S.)

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

She laughs a bit nervously.

LAURA (O.S.)

(machine)

And anyway, I keep trying to tell you, that's not really the point, is it?

(MORE)

LAURA (O.S.) (cont'd)
The point is we got ourselves into
an awful mess, Rob... Are you
there? What are you thinking?

ROB
(barely a whisper)
Nothing.

LAURA (O.S.)
We can meet for another drink if you
want. So I can explain it better. I
owe you that much.

ROB
Look, I gotta go. I work too, you
know.

LAURA (O.S.)
Will you call me?

ROB
I don't have your number.

LAURA (O.S.)
Call me at work. We can arrange to
meet properly. I don't want this to
be the last conversation we have. I
know what you're like.

ROB
You do, huh.

He hangs up and stares at the wall for awhile. He gets a
beer from the fridge and sits back down. He picks up the
phone and dials.

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

He writes down a number and hangs up, then looks to camera.

ROB
You know the worst thing about being
rejected? The complete lack of
control due to loss of control.

He picks up the phone and dials, while continuing to talk to
us --

ROB
If I could only control the when and
how of being dumped by somebody then
it wouldn't seem as bad. But then,
of course --

He hangs up quickly --

ROB

-- it wouldn't be rejection, would it? It would be mutual consent. It would be musical differences. I would be pursuing a solo career.

CUT TO:

EXT. IAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Rob is tucked into a phone booth across the street. He can see the silhouettes of Laura and Ian in the window. He picks up the phone, drops a quarter, and hits the numbers hard as he dials... a muffled male "hello?" is heard and Rob hangs up. He does it again. And again. And again. Until --

INT. IAN'S APARTMENT - INTERCUT

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

She picks up the phone --

LAURA

Hello.

ROB

It's me.

LAURA

I figured it was.
(re: traffic noise)
Where are you?

ROB

I think the big question here is where are you, if you don't mind my saying so, and I think I know where you are. You're running. On the run.

(MORE)

ROB (cont'd)

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

LAURA

I'm not -- hold on...

She walks into another room, shutting the door behind her.

On a bookshelf is a picture of a younger Ian in a tunic, emoting on some college stage. She turns it face down.

LAURA

I'm not in love with Ian, okay?

She wanders over to the window, looking out absently. She sees Rob down there at the phone booth.

ROB

Are you still in love with me?

LAURA

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

ROB

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

LAURA

(indignant)

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

ROB

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

LAURA

You don't ever think about other people?

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

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

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

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

IAN
 Are you sure you're okay?

She moves past him back into the apartment.

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

IAN
 You look upset.

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

IAN
 Maybe I should talk to him.

LAURA
 Mmmm, no. Not a good idea.

IAN
 Conflict resolution is my job,
 Laura.

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

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

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

EXT. IAN'S APARTMENT

Rob stands on the sidewalk in the rain, Ian's building behind him and down a few doors.

ROB

I wish I could be one of those guys who doesn't call, the kind of guy that gets broken up with and appears not to give a shit. He doesn't make an ass out of himself, or frighten anybody, and this week I've done both of those things. One day Laura's sorry and guilty, and the next she's scared and angry, and I'm entirely responsible for the transformation, and it doesn't do my case any good at all. I'd stop if I could but I --

His head turns at the sharp SOUND of a door opening -- Ian and Laura are coming out of the building. He jumps behind a tree, peering around it as they fade down the street.

INT. GREEN MILL - NIGHT

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

ROB

Do I know you?

ALISON'S MOM

I don't know.

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

ROB

You're Mrs. Ashworth. I'm Rob. An old boyfriend of you're daughter's.

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

ROB

Alison's.

ALISON'S MOM

Really.

ROB

Long time ago. I was just thinking about her. I was her first boyfriend.

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

ROB

Rob. Rob Gordon. Circa junior high...

ALISON'S MOM

I hate to quibble with you Rob, but she married her first boyfriend. Kevin Bannister.

ROB

You gotta be kidding me.

ALISON'S MOM

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

She doesn't seem too happy that Alison lives in Australia.

Rob is thrilled.

ROB

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

ALISON'S MOM

I beg your pardon?

ROB

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

She stands.

ALISON'S MOM

Well Rob, I'll tell her you said hello. If she remembers you.

Alison's Mom strolls out.

ROB

(calling after her)

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

Rob turns to the bartender, smiling giddily.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Rob walks through Uptown toward the train.

ROB

And suddenly I am fine. For the moment there is not one extra pound on my chest. This is fate. Alison married Kevin. You get it? That's fate. That's got nothing to do with me, that is beyond my control, beyond my fault...

CUT TO:

ROB IN HIS CHAIR

Rob into camera, digging through a box, fishing through pictures and letters, concert tickets and other mementos.

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

ROB

I want to see the others on the Big Top Five. Penny, who wouldn't let me touch her and then went and had sex with that bastard Chris Thompson. Sarah, my partner in rejection who rejected me, and Charlie, who I have to thank for everything: my great job, my sexual self-confidence, the works. There's this Springsteen song, "Bobby Jean," off Born in the USA. About a girl who's left town years before and he's pissed off because he didn't know about it, and he wanted to say goodbye, tell her that he missed her, and wish her good luck. Well, I'd like my life to be like a Springsteen song. Just once. I know I'm not born to run, and it's clear that Halsted Street is nothing like Thunder Road, but feelings can't be that different, can they? I'd like to call up all those people and ask them how they are and whether they've forgiven me, and tell them that I have forgiven them. And say good luck, goodbye. No hard feelings. And then they'd feel good and I'd feel good. We'd all feel good. I'd feel clean, and calm, and ready to start again. That'd be good. Great even.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. ROB'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Rob holds an old crumpled address book in one hand and the phone in the other.

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

EXT. MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT

Rob and Penny walk out of the theater mid-conversation.

They look happy as they walk down the street.

ROB (V.O.)
Penny is as beautiful as she was in
high school when I broke it off with
her because she wouldn't sleep with
me. In fact she's even more
beautiful, and really grown into
herself.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

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

ROB (V.O.)
She tells me about her life, and I
get it. And I tell about mine, and
she's interested.

CLOSE-UP -- ROB TALKING

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

ROB
...and you wanted to sleep with
Chris Thompson instead of me, and...
and I thought you could help me
understand why it keeps happening,
why I'm doomed to be left, doomed to
be rejected and...

He slows to a stop. We see Penny as she goes from happy to livid.

PENNY

Rob. I was crazy about you. I wanted to sleep with you, one day, but not when I was sixteen. When you broke up with me -- when you broke up with me -- because I was, to use your charming expression, tight, I cried and cried and I hated you. And then that little shitbag asked me out, and I was too tired to fight him off, and it wasn't rape because I said okay, but it wasn't far off. And I didn't have sex with anyone else until after college because I hated it so much. And now you want to have a chat about rejection? Well, fuck you, Rob.

Penny stands and leaves. Rob just sits.

ROB

(cheerful)

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

Rob indicates to an off-screen waiter.

ROB

Check...

ROB IN HIS CHAIR

Rob to camera.

ROB

Sarah's easy to find. She still sends me Christmas cards with her address and phone number on them. They never say anything else, except for "Merry Christmas, Love Sarah." I send her equally blank ones back.

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

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

INT. CARMEN'S PIZZA - NIGHT

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

SARAH

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

Sarah looks down at her plate, shaking her head, blushing.

Rob looks uncomfortable. This is more than he was looking
for.

ROB

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

She looks up again...

SARAH

Probably. I can't remember why,
though.

...and back down again.

ROB (V.O.)

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

INT./EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING HALLWAY - NIGHT

Sarah, in the doorway, smiles painfully. It's clear she
doesn't want to shut the door, but she does. Rob turns and
walks down the hall toward the door to the street as he
talks TO CAMERA.

ROB

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

INT. ROB'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

CLOSE-UP: PHONE BOOK

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

Rob looks up with a little shock, almost recoiling from the
phone book.

CUT TO:

ROB IN HIS CHAIR

Rob to camera.

ROB

Charlie's in the fucking phone book. She has come to assume such an importance, I feel she should be living on Mars. She's an extraterrestrial, a ghost, a myth, not a person with an answering machine, in the phone book... I call and hang up on her voice mail a couple of times, then I leave my name and number and throw in a "long time-no- see..." I don't hear anything back from her for a few days. Now that's more like it, if you're talking about rejection: someone who won't even return your phone messages a decade after she rejected you.

INT. RECORD STORE - DAY

Rob hears the door open as he stocks shelves, and turns.

It's Ian. Rob reacts, gunfighter eyes.

ROB

Can I help you?

IAN

Hello, Rob. Remember me? I'm Ray.
Ian.

Rob says nothing.

IAN

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

Rob is disoriented on the way to angry. Dick and Barry's
ears perk up.

ROB

What needs sorting out?

IAN

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

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

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

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

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

ROB
Yeah.

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

ROB
I dunno.

IAN
Think about it, Rob.

CUT TO FANTASY #1:

Rob looking sure of himself, righteous.

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

ROB
I've already left it, you pathetic
rebound fuck! Now get your
patchouli stink out of my store.

Ian leaves, rattled.

CUT TO FANTASY #2:

Same thing.

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

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

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

DICK
Don't do it, Rob!

BARRY
He's not worth it!

Rob reaches a pointed finger over Barry's shoulder.

ROB
Leave town. Leave the country, you little bitch, because you're gonna look back on walks by the house and ten phone calls a night as a golden age. Get ready, mutherfucker.

Ian trips backward and scurries out the door.

CUT TO FANTASY #3:

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

CUT BACK TO REALITY

IAN
So shall we leave it at that then?

ROB
I dunno.

IAN
Think about it, Rob.

Ian walks out. Rob looks spent. He shuffles toward the back of the store.

INT. RECORD STORE - BACK ROOM - DAY

Rob is laying on his back, staring at the ceiling. Dick sticks his head in the door.

DICK

Phone, Rob. Somebody named Charlie.

Rob pulls the phone into the bathroom and shuts the door.

BATHROOM

Rob curls up with the phone.

ROB

Hello?

INT. CHARLIE'S HOUSE - INTERCUT

Charlie looks even better than when we saw her in college.

CHARLIE

Rob, hi, so sorry I missed your call. In LA on business. You know how it gets.

ROB

Yeah, sure...

CHARLIE

Good. Great. Yeah... Wow. Rob Gordon. Seems like a 100 million years ago now.

ROB

Yeah. A billion. Right... How are you?

CHARLIE

Fantastic but I'm a little busy right now. Listen. Do you want to come to dinner Saturday? I'm having some friends over and I need a spare man. Are you a spare man?

ROB

Uh...yes, at the moment.

CHARLIE

Great. Gotta go. See you then.

INT. CHARLIE'S DINING ROOM

SERIES OF SHOTS OVER THE COURSE OF DINNER

Sexy version of a hip wine commercial: a small mid-thirties crowd of successful, beautiful people. Rob sits at the table silently as the other guests talk and eat. Rob's central activities are working his way through maybe a few too many wines making sure his cigarette smoke doesn't get in anyone's face. His eyes occasionally dart around the table, but he says nothing to anyone.

CUT TO:

INT. CHARLIE'S LIVING ROOM - LATER

Rob is a little too settled into the couch, somewhat bleary.

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

ROB

Hey Charlie.

CHARLIE

Hey Rob.

ROB

Why did you break up with me for Marco?

CHARLIE

(on her feet)

Fuck! I knew it! You're going through one of those what-does-it-all-mean things.

ROB

Huh?

CHARLIE

There's been a rash of them, recently. I find it a little unnerving. In fact Marco called a few months back, and he wanted to see me, and rehash the past as they say, and I wasn't really up for it. Do all men go through this?

ROB

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

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

CHARLIE

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

(pause)

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

(pause)

A little sunnier. Sparkier.

(pause)

I don't know. You know what people are like at that age. They make very superficial judgements. Do you think that's superficial? He was a clown, if it's any consolation.

ROB

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

CHARLIE

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

CUT TO:

ROB IN HIS CHAIR

Rob to camera.

ROB

I wanted the works and I got it. None of Alison Ashworth's fate, none of Sarah's rewriting of history, and no reminder that I'd got all the rejection stuff a little backward, like I did about Penny.

(MORE)

ROB (cont'd)

Just a perfectly clear explanation of why some people have it and some don't. All I've learned from Charlie is that maybe my one talent, my genius for being normal, is a little overrated.

CUT TO:

INT. RECORD STORE - DAY

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

"BARRYTOWN/appearing Saturday night/Bucktown Pub"

BARRY

Hey.

ROB

What the fuck is that?

BARRY

My band.

ROB

What band?

BARRY

The band that found me and asked me to join.

ROB

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

BARRY

Thanks for your support, Rob. Really appreciate it.

ROB

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

BARRY

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

ROB

You can't be called Barry and sing in a group called Barrytown.

BARRY

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

ROB

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

Barry says nothing.

ROB

Isn't it?

BARRY

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

ROB

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

BARRY

How many tickets can I put you down for?

ROB

None. Christ!

BARRY

You're not even coming?

ROB

Of course I'm not coming. Do I look like I'd want to listen to some terrible experimental racket played in some hideous cave? Where is it?
(looks at the poster)
The fucking Bucktown Pub? Ha!

BARRY

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

ROB

Bitter? Because I'm not in Barrytown? You should be shot like a lame horse, you jerk.
(re: the poster)
Just keep that out of my window.

INT. ROB'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Rob opens the door to find Laura filling a duffel bag in the living room.

LAURA

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

ROB

Is that the last of it?

LAURA

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

ROB

Those look heavy. Where's Ian?

LAURA

He's at home. Listen, I can't believe he went to the store. I'm mortified, actually. I'm really sorry. He had no right to do that, and I told him so.

ROB

It was kind of funny.

They smile.

LAURA

I'm sure.

ROB

You still together? Going all right?

LAURA

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

ROB

That bad, eh?

LAURA

You know what I mean.

Rob flops onto the couch and surveys the room.

ROB

It's a dump, isn't it?

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

LAURA

Fix it up. It'll make you feel better.

ROB

I'll bet you can't remember what you were doing here, can you? I mean, how much are you making now? Sixty? Seventy? And you were living in this shitty place.

LAURA

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

ROB

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

LAURA

Ray. I hate Ian.

ROB

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

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

ROB

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

LAURA

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

ROB

You know I'm a good person.

LAURA

Mmm hmm.

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

LAURA
Oh ho, so very infrequently.

He moves a little closer.

ROB
You know my favorite beverage is
your bath water.

She laughs. He moves in, not really trying to kiss her but leaving the door open for her... She almost goes for it, but instead gets to her feet.

LAURA
Time to go.

She goes to her bags. Rob points to a pile of CDs.

ROB
Don't forget your CDs.

LAURA
Those aren't mine.

ROB
Sure they are.

LAURA
They're not really, though, are they? I know you bought them for me, and that was really sweet of you, but that was when you were trying to turn me into you. I can't take them, I know they'd just sit around staring at me, and I'd feel embarrassed by them and... they don't fit in with the rest of what's mine, do you understand? That Sting record you bought for me... that was a present for me. I like Sting and you hate him. But the rest of this stuff... (bending down to the pile) Who the hell is Nick Lowe? Or Gram Parsons? Or the Boredoms? I don't know these people. I...

ROB
Okay, okay. I get the picture.

LAURA

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

ROB

I got it. You like Sting but you don't like Gram Parsons, because you've never heard of him.

LAURA

You're being deliberately obtuse.

ROB

I guess I am.

LAURA

Well, think about it.

She hefts the duffel bag, opens the door and exits.

ROB

Fuck.

CUT TO:

ROB IN HIS CHAIR

Rob to the camera.

ROB

What's the point in thinking about it? If I ever have another relationship, I'll buy her, whoever she is, stuff that she oughta like but doesn't know about -- that's what new boyfriends are for. And hopefully I won't borrow money from her, or have an affair, and she won't need to have an abortion or run away with the neighborhood, and then there won't be anything to think about. Laura didn't run off with Ian because I bought her CDs she wasn't that keen on, and to pretend otherwise is just... just... psychowank. If she thinks that, then she's missing the Brazilian rainforest for the twigs. If I can't buy the Plastic People of the Universe's first album for new girlfriends, then I might as well give up, because I'm not sure I know how to do anything else.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - MORNING

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

INT. RECORD STORE - BACK ROOM - DAY

Rob tosses his coat down and picks up the phone and dials...

LAURA (O.S.)
(muffled, almost a whisper) Hello.

ROB
Hey, how ya doin'?

No answer.

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

LAURA (O.S.)
I can't talk right now.

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

No response.

ROB
Are you alright?

LAURA (O.S.)
Pigsty.

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

LAURA (O.S.)
Pig died.

ROB
Who the fuck's Pig?

LAURA (O.S.)
(louder)
My dad died. My dad, my dad.

She hangs up.

FRONT ROOM

Rob comes out of the back, in a daze. Dick and Barry notice.

BARRY

What's up?

ROB

Laura. Her dad died.

BARRY

Ooh. Drag.

Barry goes back to his comic book and burrito.

DICK

I'm sorry, Rob, that's, it's --

ROB

You're a horrible person, Barry. I mean it.

Barry looks up at him, shrugs, then gets an idea.

BARRY

Hey. Top five songs about death. A Laura's Dad Tribute list.

Nobody can help thinking about it.

BARRY

Okay, okay -- "Leader of the Pack." The guy fucking cracks up on a cycle and dies right? "Dead Man's Curve," Jan and Dean...

DICK

Did you know that after that song was recorded, Jan himself crashed his --

BARRY

-- It was Dean, you fucking idiot.

ROB

It was Jan, and it was a long time after--

BARRY

Whatever. Okay. "Tell Laura I Love Her." That'd bring the house down. Laura's mom could sing it.

ROB
Fuck off, Barry.

BARRY
I'd want "One Step Beyond" by
Madness. And "You Can't Always Get
What You Want."

ROB
Because it's in The Big Chill.

BARRY
Haven't seen it.

ROB
Liar. We saw it in the Lawrence
Kasdan double-bill with Body Heat.

BARRY
Oh. Right. But I'd forgotten about
that. I wasn't biting the idea.

ROB
Not really.

The phone RINGS. Rob picks it up.

ROB
Record Exchange.

INTERCUT - IAN'S APARTMENT

Laura is curled up on the couch. Dick and Barry keep
listing.

LAURA
I'm sorry.

ROB
No, no. When are you going home?

LAURA
In a minute. When I get it
together.

BARRY
(to Dick)
What about Sabbath? Or Nirvana?
They're into death.

Rob tries to signal to them to shut up but they don't see
him. He moves as far away as the cord will let me.

ROB
Can I do anything?

DICK

"Abraham, Martin, and John." That's a nice one.

BARRY

"Somebody's Gonna Die" by Blitz.
"Bella Lugosi's Dead," Bauhaus. It's got that creepy Halloween feeling.

LAURA

No. No. Mom wants you to come to the funeral. It's on Friday.

ROB

Me?

LAURA

My dad liked you. And Mom never told him we'd split, because he wasn't up to it and... oh, I don't know. I don't really understand it. I think she thinks he'll be able to see what's going on. It's like...
(small laugh)

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

ROB

Do you want me to be there?

LAURA

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

Rob is silent.

LAURA

Look, are you coming or not?

ROB

Yes, of course.

LAURA

Liz'll give you a lift. She knows where to go and everything... I don't have time to talk, Rob. I've got too much to do.

ROB

Sure. I'll see you on Friday.

She hangs up.

BARRY

(to the tune of "Candle In the
Wind") "Goodbye Laura's dad/blah
blah la di da di da/
(belting it out)
Seems to me/you lived your life/like
a dentist in the wind...

Rob stomps toward Barry, who jumps over the counter to keep singing --

INT. LIZ'S CAR - DAY

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

ROB

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

LIZ

It's a crematorium.

ROB

You're kidding. A crematorium?
Jesus.

LIZ

What difference does it make?

ROB

Is Ray going?

LIZ

No. They don't know him. And Ken
liked you. Rob, Ken didn't die for
your benefit, you know. It's like
everybody's a supporting actor in
the film of your life story.

ROB

Isn't that how it is for everybody?

INT. CHAPEL TWO

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

MINISTER

...Now and forever, Amen.

He nods "offstage," and a muffled mechanical noise is heard.

The coffin begins to lower through a trap door beneath it.

A low, baleful human HOWL is heard, starting quietly but gaining in volume.

ROB (V.O.)

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

INT. CHAPEL PARLOR

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

ROB (V.O.)

...And when she let's go of me, I feel I don't need to become a different person. It's happened already.

INT. LAURA'S PARENTS' HOUSE - AFTERNOON

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

LIZ

(to Jo)
How are you?

JO

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

LIZ

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

She glances at Rob, embarrassed.

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

Jo smiles, Liz gives him a look.

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

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

ROB
Enough, Liz.

LIZ
Enough of what?

ROB
(getting louder)
I know I can't speak now because Laura's father died, and I just have to take it because otherwise I'm a bad guy, with the emphasis on guy, self-centered. Well, I'm fucking not, not all the time, anyway, I'm really sorry Jo.

(lowering his voice)
But you know, Liz... I can either stick up for myself or believe everything you say about me and end up hating myself. And maybe you think I should, but it's not much of a life, you know?

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

ROB
Only because it's never the time. I can't go on apologizing my whole life, you know?

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

Rob looks around the room, beginning to hyperventilate and near tears.

He sees Laura in a corner of the room surrounded by four or five mourners. He crosses to them and breaks through to her.

ROB

I'm sorry.

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

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - AFTERNOON

So darkened by weather that it is almost night, raining torrents and big sheets. Rob emerges from the front door of Laura's parents' house and begins walking down the street, hands thrust into his pockets. The rain almost immediately soaks him.

EXT. ANOTHER STREET

In the distance, Rob runs toward us. As he gets to us we move with him down the street. He is drenched. We hear the rain, and his ragged breath. Headlights appear behind him and backlight him, getting brighter as the sound of an engine gets louder. Rob takes a look over his shoulder, looks desperately left and right, and vaults himself over a small brick wall and into a flower bed, landing on his back in the black wet earth.

The big drops of rain splash mud on his face, and he burrows deeper into the dirt and flowers with his back, panting and staring up at the sky. Off-camera the car engine catches up, and a door opens and shuts. He sighs and shuts his eyes...

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

LAURA

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

ROB

Uh... No.

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

LAURA

You're soaking.

ROB

Mmn.

LAURA

You're also an idiot.

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

ROB

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

LAURA

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

ROB

What do you mean?

LAURA

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

ROB

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

LAURA

I don't want to go back.

ROB

What do you want to do?

LAURA

C'mon.

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

INT. LAURA'S CAR - NIGHT

They drive sort of aimlessly through Laura's old neighborhood. Laura sees something on her left, and makes a sudden turn up a narrow road through some overgrown trees.

They come to a stop in a formerly paved clearing, looking out on a field with an old abandoned school on the other side. Laura shuts down the engine.

ROB

When are you going back?

LAURA

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

ROB

What?

LAURA

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

ROB

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

LAURA

It'll have to be sex, then.

She pulls herself over him, staddling him in the passenger seat and kissing his neck. She pauses and regards him from above.

LAURA

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

ROB

Hi.

LAURA

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

Laura reaches down and unzips his pants, as they keep kissing.

ROB

You know, with Ray...

LAURA

Oh, Rob, we're not going to go through that again.

ROB
No, no. It's not... are you still
on the pill?

LAURA
Yes, of course. There's nothing to
worry about.

ROB
I didn't mean that. I mean... was
that all you used?

Laura looks at him, motionless, then begins to cry.

ROB
Look, we can do other things.

LAURA
I lived with you. You were my
partner just a few weeks ago and now
you're worried I might kill you, and
you're entitled to worry. Isn't
that a terrible thing? Isn't that
sad?

She rolls off of him into her seat. They sit there in
silence, watching the rain run down the windshield.

CUT TO:

ROB IN HIS CHAIR

Rob to camera.

ROB
Later, I wonder if I was really
worried about where Ian has been. I
have no idea where he's been, and
that gives me every right to insist
on protection. But in truth, it was
the power that interested me more
than the fear. I wanted to hurt
her, on this day of all days, just
because it's the first time since
she's left that I've been able to.

INT. BAR - LATER

Rob and Laura lean back in a booth, facing each other. We
get that feeling that not another word has been spoken since
we last saw them.

ROB
Laura...

LAURA

I'm too tired not to go out with you.

Rob leans forward.

ROB

So if you had a bit more energy we'd stay split. But things being how they are, what with you wiped out, you'd like us to get back together.

LAURA

(nodding)

Everything's too hard. Maybe another time I would have the guts to be on my own, but not now I don't.

ROB

What about Ian?

LAURA

Ray's a disaster. I don't know what that was all about, except that sometimes you need someone to lob into the middle of a bad relationship like a hand grenade, I guess, and blow it all apart.

ROB

Mission accomplished.

LAURA

I know it's not very romantic, but there will be romance again at some stage, I'm sure. I just... I need you, Rob. That's it. And we know each other and we care for each other, and you've made it clear that you want me back, so...

She looks up at him.

LAURA

Let's go home. Okay?

ROB

Okay.

CUT TO:

ROB IN HIS CHAIR

Rob to camera.

ROB
But wouldn't you know it? Suddenly
I feel panicky, and sick, and I want
to run around and sleep with female
recording artists...

CUT TO:

INT. ROB AND LAURA'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Post-lovemaking. Rob and Laura lie on their backs.

ROB
C'mon. I want to know.

LAURA
Want to know what, exactly?

ROB
What it was like.

LAURA
It was like sex. What else could it
be like?

ROB
Was it like good sex or was it like
bad sex?

LAURA
What's the difference?

ROB
You know the difference.

LAURA
Look, we're okay now. We just had a
nice time. Let's leave it at that.

ROB
Okay, that's cool, okay. But the
nice time we just had... was it
nicer, as nice, or less nice than
the nice times you were having a
couple of weeks ago?

Laura is silent.

ROB
Oh, c'mon, Laura. Just say
something. Lie, if you want. It'd
stop me asking you questions and
it'd make me feel better.

LAURA

Well I was gonna lie and now I can't, because you'd know I was lying.

ROB

Well why the fuck would you want to lie, anyway?

LAURA

To make you feel better.

ROB

Oh, great...

Rob begins to get out of bed. She grabs his hand and pulls him back down.

LAURA

Look, Rob. If great sex was as important as you think it is, and if I was having great sex with him, then we wouldn't be lying here now. And that is my last word on the subject, okay?

ROB

Okay.

She pulls him close and they lie there, the matter seemingly settled.

LAURA

I wish your penis was as big as his, though.

He turns slowly to her. A giggle from her turns into a laugh, then a howl, a roar --

EXT. LAKEFRONT - TWILIGHT

Rob and Laura walk the cement breakfront.

LAURA

... Like Mexico. Or Jamaica. Or New York, even.

ROB

Hey, great idea. What I'll do is, tomorrow I'll get a hold of a box full of mint Elvis Presley 78s on the Sub label, and I'll pay for it that way.

LAURA

I'll pay for you. Even though you owe me money. We have to do something with the money I earn. I need to. I deserve it. You can just think of it as winning the lottery.

ROB

Fantastic. The Girlfriend Lottery.

LAURA

Money does not matter. I do not care how much you earn. I'd just like you to be a little happier in your work, but beyond that you can do what you like.

ROB

But it wasn't supposed to be like this. When I met you we were the same people and now we're not, and...

LAURA

How? How were we the same people?

ROB

Well, you were the kind of person who came to the Artful Dodger and I was the kind of person who deejayed at the Artful Dodger. You wore jeans and T-shirts, and so did I. And I still do, and you don't.

LAURA

Because I'm not allowed to. I still do, after work. So, what? Should we just break up? Is that what you're saying? Because if you are, I'm going to run out of patience.

ROB

No, but...

LAURA

But what?

ROB

But why doesn't it matter that we're not the same people we used to be?

LAURA

You haven't changed so much as a pair of socks in the years I've known you.

(MORE)

LAURA (cont'd)

If we've grown apart, then I'm the one who's done the growing, and all I've done is change jobs.

ROB

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

LAURA

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

ROB

You're tougher.

LAURA

More confident, maybe.

ROB

Harder.

LAURA

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

ROB

I'm alright.

LAURA

Yeah, you're alright. But you're certainly not happy. So what happens if you get happy? And yes I know that's the title of an Elvis Costello album, I use the reference deliberately to catch your attention. Should we split up because I'm used to you being miserable? What happens if you, I don't know, start your own record label, and it's a success? Time for a new girlfriend?

ROB

You're being stupid.

LAURA

How? What would be the difference between you having a record label and me going from legal aid to private practice?

Rob is silent.

LAURA

All I'm saying is, you have to allow for things to happen to people, most of all to yourself. Otherwise, what's the use?

ROB

No use.

INT./EXT. RECORD STORE - DAY

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

ROB

What is this.

DICK

It's Vince and Justin.

ROB

Who's that?

BARRY

The little skate-fuckers.

ROB

No way.

BARRY

Yes way. It's really...

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

BARRY

(pained to say it)

It's really fucking good.

Dick and Barry look to Rob, who continues to just listen...

He takes a deep breath and walks to the front door and out, seemingly with a mission.

Vince and Justin are doing noisy skate tricks against the curb across the street. When they see Rob they stop, get ready to flee. He walks across to them. Dick comes out and hovers in the background.

ROB

Your tape. It's good.

They mumble thanks.

ROB

It's rough. But it shows promise. We record a couple of songs right, in a studio. I'll take care of the rest. I'll put out your record. Any profits after recouping expenses get split down the middle, between us and you guys.

VINCE

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

ROB

We're not there yet, Justin.

VINCE

I'm Vince.

ROB

Whatever.

He begins to move toward the store. Vince and Justin look at each other. Rob gets to the door but stops and turns.

ROB

Hey. What's the name of your band?

JUSTIN

The Kinky Wizards.

ROB

What?

VINCE

We saw this ad in the personals for two swingers lookin' for a Renaissance fair.

ROB

Nice.

VINCE

What's the name of your label?

Rob looks at them. Then at Dick. Then through the window at Barry, inside looking out. Then at his own reflection in the window. Then back at them.

ROB

Broken Records. Welcome aboard.

Rob walks back inside. He seems to be shaking a little.

BARRY
What the fuck is that?

ROB
What?

BARRY
I heard you, man. Don't give me that "what" shit. You just told them that you're gonna put out a record with them.

ROB
So? You even said they're good.

BARRY
HELLO. DO YOU SEE ANYONE ELSE around here with a band, Mr. Branson? Mr. Phil Spector?

Rob waves him off and disappears into the stock room. Laura enters.

LAURA
Hey, Barry.

BARRY
Oh, hi.

LAURA
Where's Rob?

BARRY
The Malcolm McClaren of Clark Street is in his executive suite. Do you have an appointment?

LAURA
What are you talking about?

BARRY
Just that Rob seems to think it would be wiser to start a record label by putting out a record with business- crippling Nazi Youth shoplifters than with someone he knows in his bitter jealous heart is a musical visionary. That's all.

Laura puts it together, and smiles. She goes to the back and crack the door, finding Rob sitting on a box, thinking.

ROB

Hi.

LAURA

Hi. What are you doing?

ROB

Nothing.

LAURA

Wanna go to dinner?

ROB

Where?

LAURA

At Paul and Miranda's. Paul from work.

ROB

Oh. Well. We don't really get along. Paul and I.

LAURA

I know. But you've never met. It just seems like a stone unturned in your relationship with him.

ROB

Ha.

CUT TO:

ROB IN HIS CHAIR

Rob to camera.

ROB

We're at a point where I can't really walk away from gauntlets she might throw down, and so I go. And wouldn't you know it, I sort of fall in love with Paul and Miranda -- with what they have, and the way they treat each other, and the way they make me feel as if I'm the new center of their world. I think they're great, and I want to see them twice a week, every week, for the rest of my life. Only right at the end of the evening do I realize I've been set up.

INT. PAUL AND MIRANDA'S LIVING ROOM - LATER

After dinner. Rob ambles in from the dining room. Laura close behind. He looks through the bookshelves until he finds a meager little grouping of CDs. He moves up to them and scans the titles: Tina Turner. Billy Joel. Kate Bush. Pink Floyd. Simply Red. The Beatles. The Windham Hill Sampler...

PAUL
Lame, right?

Rob turns around to see PAUL behind him.

ROB
Oh, I don't know. The Beatles are okay.

Paul laughs.

PAUL
We're kinda out of date.

ROB
Hey, to each his own, I say.

PAUL
Maybe we can come by your store and you can hook us up.

ROB
Sure, sure. Any time.

LAURA
Better hurry, though, Paul. Rob started a record label, so he's gonna be in the shop less and less.

Rob looks at her.

CUT TO:

INT. ROB AND LAURA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

as they come in the door.

LAURA
..."To each his own!" Unbelievable!
You! Rob Gordon said that. You even sounded like you meant it.

They throw their jackets over a chair. Rob turns on the CD player and "Call Me A Liar" by Palace begins to play.

ROB

(smiling)

You did that deliberately. You knew all along I'd like them. It was a trick.

LAURA

I tricked you into meeting some people you'd think were great. I thought it would be fun to introduce you to someone with a Tina Turner album and then see whether you still felt the same way.

She moves to Rob and wraps her arms around him. They look deeply at each other. She breaks away from him and walks into the bedroom. He turns off the stereo and follows her.

EXT. CLARK STREET - MORNING

Rob walks to work, drinking his coffee. He stops and backs up a few feet, and stares at a poster on a plywood board-up.

"I SOLD MY MOM'S WHEELCHAIR"/the debut single from The Kinky Wizards/on Broken Records/Record release party July 20 at The Artful Dodger/Featuring the triumphant return of DJ ROB GORDON/"Dance Music For Old People"

Rob scowls, and storms off.

INT. ROB AND LAURA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Rob paces, Laura sits on the couch, smiling.

LAURA

I called Dan Koretzky because he --

ROB

Has Drag City Records, I know, I know. You told Dan Koretzky about this?

LAURA

Yeah, and he said it's a good way to break out a record. Especially for what he said, and I quote, "would be a highly anticipated event, locally." He helped me put out a press release.

ROB

WHAT?

LAURA

Just local, of course.

ROB

And the "triumphant return of DJ Rob Gordon?" "Triumphant?" "Return?"

LAURA

I had that idea when I was living with Ian and it was such a good idea that I was annoyed we weren't together anymore. It might even be why I came back.

ROB

You had no right. Supposing I was doing something that couldn't be cancelled?

LAURA

What do you ever do that can't be cancelled?

ROB

That's not the point. I mean, what if the single isn't done in time?

LAURA

Barry said its done.

ROB

Barry? Barry knows about this?

LAURA

Yeah. His band is playing a set.

Rob wheels on her.

INT. RECORD STORE - DAY

Rob and Barry.

ROB

Like fuck you are.

BARRY

Laura said we could. If we helped out with the posters and stuff. And we did. And we are.

ROB

I'll give you 10% of the door if you don't play.

BARRY

We're getting that anyway.

ROB
What is she doing? Okay, 20%.

BARRY
No. We need the gig.

ROB
110%. That's my final offer. I'm not kidding. That's how much it means to me not to hear you play.

BARRY
We're not as bad as you think, Rob.

ROB
You couldn't be. Look, Barry. There's going to be people from Laura's work there, people who own dogs and babies and Tina Turner albums. How are you going to cope with them?

BARRY
We're not called Barrytown anymore, by the by. They got sick of the Barry/Barrytown thing. We're called SDM. Sonic Death Monkey.

ROB
Sonic Death Monkey.

BARRY
What do you think? Dick likes it.

ROB
Barry, you're over thirty years old. You owe it to yourself and your friends and to your parents not to sing in a group called Sonic Death Monkey.

BARRY
I owe it to myself to go right to the edge, Rob, and this group does exactly that. Over the edge, in fact.

ROB
You'll be going over the fucking edge if you come anywhere near me next Friday night.

BARRY

That's what we want. Reaction. And if Laura's bourgeois lawyer friends can't take it, then fuck 'em. Let 'em riot, we can handle it. We'll be ready.

Barry wanders off laughing.

CUT TO:

INT. ROB AND LAURA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Rob and Laura.

LAURA

They'll go on early. Nobody will even be there yet and I told them they can't play for more than a half hour.

ROB

It's no joke. I'm responsible for what happens, you know. Embarrassment aside, there's a lot of money and effort in this, at least by my standards. I have to put down a deposit for the room. I have to pay the pressing plant for the records, sleeve them, sticker them --

LAURA

We took care of that.

Rob's brow furrows.

LAURA

Barry and Dick and me. Look in the bedroom.

Rob goes to the bedroom door and opens it. It's sort of like Christmas: hundreds of Kinky Wizards CD singles, painstakingly packaged and stacked on the bed.

CUT TO:

ROB IN HIS CHAIR

Rob to camera.

ROB

I suddenly feel choked up. It's not the money, it's the way she's thought of everything: one morning I woke up to find her going through my records, pulling out things that she remembered me playing when I deejayed and putting them into the little carrying cases that I used to use and put away in a closet somewhere years ago. She knew I needed a kick in the ass. She also knew how happy I was when I used to deejay. From which every angle I examine it, it still looks as though she's done all of this because she loves me.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. ROB AND LAURA'S APARTMENT

Rob turns from the bedroom and goes to Laura, putting his arms around her.

ROB

I'm sorry I've been acting like a jerk. I do appreciate what you've done for me, and I know you've done it for the best possible reasons, and I do love you, even though I act like I don't.

LAURA

That's okay. You seem pissed off all the time, though.

ROB

I know. I don't get it.

CUT TO:

ROB IN HIS CHAIR

Rob to camera.

ROB

But if I had to take a wild guess, I'd say that I'm pissed because I know I'm stuck with Laura, bound to her, and I don't like it.

(MORE)

ROB (cont'd)

That dreamy anticipation you have when you're fifteen or twenty or thirty even, that the most perfect person in the world might walk into your store or office or friend's party at any moment... That's all gone, I think, and that's enough to piss anybody off. Laura is who I am now, and it's no good pretending otherwise...

CUT TO:

INT. RECORD STORE - DAY

Rob is standing shelves. A very pretty young woman, CAROLINE, comes through the door and looks around. She sees Rob.

CAROLINE

Excuse me?

Rob looks up and takes her in like a dish in a window.

ROB

May I help you?

CAROLINE

I'm looking for DeeJay Rob Gordon.

ROB

Uh. That's me.

CAROLINE

I'm Caroline Fortis from The Reader. I want to do a story on you.

ROB

Right. Why?

CAROLINE

Well, I used to go to the Dodger on your nights, and I saw you're doing it again and that your putting out a record, and it's sort of a then-and-now story against the backdrop of the Chicago music scene with the emphasis on now.

ROB

Oh. Okay.

CAROLINE

I thought I would ask you a few questions if that's okay.

ROB

Huh. You used to come to the club?
I shouldn't have let you in. You
must have only been about sixteen.

Rob realizes what he must be sounding like. He blushes and retreats.

ROB

What I mean is, I didn't mean you
look young. You don't. You don't
look old either. You look just as
old as you are. A bit younger
maybe, but not a lot. Not much.
Just right.

CAROLINE

So. Is now a good time?

Rob looks around: there is absolutely nothing going on in the store. He nods. She pulls out a pad and pencil.

CAROLINE

Right. So. You must have an
enormous record collection.

ROB

Yeah. I could show it to you if you
want to come over and see it.

He winces immediately.

CAROLINE

Yeah, well... Let's see... What are
you're all-time top five records?

ROB

Pardon me?

CAROLINE

Your desert island top-five.

ROB

Oh boy... In the club, or at home?

CAROLINE

Is there a difference?

ROB

(a little too shrill)
OF COURSE... Well yeah, a bit. "Sin
City" by the Flying Burrito Brothers
is an all-time top five, but I
wouldn't play it at the club.

(MORE)

ROB (cont'd)
It's a country-rock ballad.
Everybody'd go home.

CAROLINE
Nevermind. Any five. So four more.

ROB
What do you mean, four more?

CAROLINE
Well if one of them is this "Sin
City" thing --

ROB
Can I go home and work this out and
let you know? In a week or so?

CAROLINE
Look if you can't think of anything,
it doesn't matter. I'll do one. My
five favorite from the old days at
the Dodger.

Rob is aghast, humiliated, quietly outraged.

ROB
Oh, I'm sure I can manage
something... "Sin City." "New Rose,"
by The Damned. "Hit It and Quit It"
by Funkadelic. "Shipbuilding," Elvis
Costello, Japanese import, no horns,
or different horns, anyway... um...
"Mystery Train" by Elvis Presley...
And... "Spaced Cowboy" by Sly and
the Family Stone. A bit
controversial, I know, but...

CAROLINE
Fine. That's great.

ROB
Is that it?

CAROLINE
Well, I wouldn't mind a quick chat,
if you got the time.

ROB
Sure, but is that it for the list?

CAROLINE
That's five. So. Why did you
decide to deejay again?

ROB

Well it was a friend's idea, really, and the record release party seemed like a good place to do it. So... (looking over her pad at the list) I should really put a James Brown in there --

CAROLINE

Nice friend.

ROB

Yeah.

CAROLINE

What's his name?

ROB

Who? Oh. My friend. My friend is Laura. A girl. A friend who's a girl.

CAROLINE

"Music for Old People." What does that mean?

ROB

Look, I'm sorry about this, but I'd like "the Upsetter" by Lee "Scratch" Perry, in there. Instead of "Sin City."

She scribbles and writes.

CAROLINE

Okay. "Dance Music For Old People?"

ROB

Oh, you know... a lot of people aren't too old for clubs but they're too old for acid jazz and garage and ambient and all that. They want to hear old funk and Stax and New Wave and Old School Hip Hop and some new stuff all together and there's nowhere for them.

CAROLINE

And the new label? And the Kinky Wizards?

ROB

Oh, well, the Kinky Wizards are -- you know what? Why don't I just make you a tape?

CAROLINE

Would you? Really? Wow. I could have deejay Rob Gordon play in my own home.

ROB

Haha. Right. It's no problem. I love making tapes.

CUT TO:

ROB IN HIS CHAIR

Rob to camera.

ROB

A good compilation tape, like breaking up, is hard to do and takes ages longer than it might seem. You gotta kick off with a killer, to hold the attention. Then you have to take it up a notch, but not blow your wad, so maybe cool it off a notch, and you can't put the same artist twice on the tape, except if some subtle point or lesson or theme involved, and even then not the two of them in a row, and you can't woo somebody with Joni Mitchell's "Big Yellow Taxi" and then bash their head off with something like GBH's "City Baby Attacked by Rats," and... oh, there are a lot of rules. Anyway, I worked hard at this one.

INT. ROB AND LAURA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Rob sits Indian-style on the floor in front of the stereo.

He has a pad of paper with scrawled titles and cross-outs, and is surrounded by piles of CDs and records.

LAURA

Who's that for?

Rob winces, turns. He's busted.

ROB

This? Oh, just that woman who interviewed me for The Reader. Carol? Caroline? Something like that.

Laura turns and walks out of the room.

INT. RECORD STORE - DAY

Rob is tucked into the corner, on the phone.

ROB

Hi, Caroline... Oh, it's Rob. Yeah, listen, I have a new list for you and -- Oh. Yes. Of course... Well maybe next week they could print a, uh, retraction. Or a correction. Because the list I have now it really much more -- right. Okay. Anyway, I have your tape. That's right. Shall I mail it to you? Or... would you like to have a drink?

CUT TO:

ROB IN HIS CHAIR

Rob to camera.

ROB

How are you not going to fall for someone who wants to interview you? Now Caroline is all I can think about. And in the daydreams I imagine every detail, the entire story of our future relationship, until suddenly I realize that there's nothing left to actually, like, happen. I've done it all, lived through it all in my head. I know the whole plot, the ending, and the good parts. Now I'd have to watch it all over again in real time, and where's the fun in that? And fucking--when is it all going to stop? Am I going to jump from rock to rock for the rest of my life until there aren't any rocks left? Am I going to bolt every time I get itchy feet? Because I get them about once a quarter, along with the store's tax bill. I've been thinking with my guts since I was fourteen years old and, frankly speaking, I've come to the conclusion that my guts have shit for brains. You know what's wrong with Laura, what my problem is? What's wrong with Laura is that I'll never see her for the first or second or third time. That's all.

(MORE)

ROB (cont'd)
Fuck it. I'll probably mail the
tape. Probably.

CUT TO:

INT. NORTH SIDE TAVERN - DAY

Rob sits at a table in the bar, nervous. He watches the door, sits up straight when it opens, and follows someone with his eyes, all the way to his table. She sits. It's Laura.

LAURA
A drinking lunch on a school day.
What a nice surprise.

Rob says nothing.

LAURA
Are you worried about tomorrow
night?

ROB
Not really.

He plays with his drink.

LAURA
Are you going to talk to me, or
shall I get my paper out?

ROB
I'm going to talk to you.

LAURA
Right.

He plays with his drink some more.

LAURA
What are you going to talk to me
about?

ROB
I'm going to talk to you about
whether you want to get married or
not. To me.

LAURA
Ha ha ha. Hoo hoo hoo.

ROB
I mean it.

LAURA

I know.

ROB

Oh, well thanks a fucking bunch.

LAURA

I'm sorry. But two days ago you were in love with that girl who interviewed you for The Reader, weren't you?

ROB

Not in love, exactly, but...

LAURA

Well forgive me if I don't think of you as the world's safest bet.

ROB

Would you marry me if I was?

LAURA

No. Probably not.

ROB

Right. Okay, then. Shall we go?

LAURA

Don't sulk. What brought all this on?

ROB

I don't know.

LAURA

Very persuasive.

ROB

Are you persuadable?

LAURA

No. I don't think so. I'm just curious about how one goes from making tapes for one person to marriage proposals to another in two days. Fair enough?

ROB

Fair enough.

LAURA

So?

ROB
I'm just sick of thinking about it
all the time.

LAURA
About what?

ROB
This stuff. Love and marriage. I
want to think about something else.

LAURA
I've changed my mind. That's the
most romantic thing I've ever heard.
I do. I will.

ROB
Shut up. I'm only trying to
explain.

LAURA
I mean, maybe you're right. But
were you really expecting me to say
yes?

ROB
I dunno. Didn't think about it,
really. It was the asking that was
the important thing.

LAURA
Well, you've asked.

She leans over and takes his hands in hers, smiles at him.

LAURA
Thank you.

INT. ARTFUL DODGER - NIGHT

TWO TURNTABLES

with the mixer in the middle. "Just Begun" by Jimmy Castor
spins on turntable #1. A hand reaches in, and begins to
draw the slides down, quieting the music.

Rob looks up from behind the deejay table, set up amongst
the instruments. The place is packed with people, and
everyone seems to be having a great time.

Almost everyone -- Rob sees Barry, who pretends to nod off
when Rob catches his eye, and Justin, who looks back at him
and mocks a bulimic act. Rob gives him the finger. He sees
Laura, and she beams at him. He comes to the front of the
stage, and taps a microphone.

ROB

Uh, thanks for uh, coming out tonight. I hope you have a good time. And I hope you like the record. The one by the Kinky Wizards. The record that we're having this record release party for.

(hoots from the crowd)

Thanks. Listen to it first, though.

(laughs)

Okay. We'll get to that later.

Right now, I'd like to introduce...

(mumbles)

Sonic Death Monkey.

Good-natured applause. Rob steps down and bee-lines to Laura. Barry and his crew mount the stage. Rob takes a big gulp of beer.

ROB

(to Laura)

I'm an idiot. I should have played the record first. This place is about to get burned down.

LAURA

It's gonna be fine. These people are ready for anything.

BARRY

(dubious)

Yeah, well...

Barry stands in front of the mic, surveying the crowd with a smile. He and the band all wear suits and ties.

BARRY

Thanks for the enthusiastic intro, Rob. We're not called Sonic Death Monkey anymore, though, ladies and gentlemen. We might be on the verge of becoming the Atavistics, but we haven't decided yet. But tonight, we are... BARRY JIVE AND THE UPTOWN FIVE! ONE TWO THREE --And they launch into Marvin Gaye's "Got To Give It Up," almost flawlessly faithful to the original. Barry is transformed -- shuffling footwork, a wide smile, and when the intro winds up, an almost perfect falsetto. The crowd goes nuts, filling the floor. Rob is stunned, begins to smile.

(MORE)

BARRY (cont'd)
Laura takes his hand and leads him
out into the crowd...

THE END