

INT. LEONARD SCHILLER'S WRITING ROOM -- AFTERNOON

CLOSE ON LEONARD SCHILLER'S FACE, eyes perfectly still, hands clasped at his chin -- the picture of absolute concentration. SLOWLY PULL BACK to reveal the author, 71, sitting before his manual typewriter and the empty page scrolled to the top line. Finally he breaks from his contemplation -- his fingers lower and spread over the typewriter keys and he begins to work.

INT. ARGO RESTAURANT -- LATE AFTERNOON

CLOSE ON A PHOTOGRAPH of a handsome, middle-aged Schiller. His grin is broad, his piercing eyes look out on a world of unlimited possibility. The photo is on the inside flap of a hardcover book, *The Lost City*.

Reveal HEATHER WOLFE, 24, as she sets the book down on a table. Slender, with searching eyes, she's more compelling than beautiful. She sits alone, adjusting and readjusting her skirt, as if she regrets not having dressed more demurely.

The door opens and Schiller walks in. Heather studies his face, then consults the jacket photo of the young author. He picks her out at once and walks toward her.

SCHILLER

Heather Wolfe, I presume.

HEATHER

Professor Schiller. I can't believe it's you.

SCHILLER

I can't believe it's me either.

They settle awkwardly down at the table. DOLORES, Schiller's regular waitress, appears with pad and pen in hand.

DOLORES

What'll you have, Professor?

SCHILLER

You go first.

HEATHER

I'll just have a BLT and a cup of coffee.

SCHILLER

Baked potato, no--

DOLORES

--no butter, no sour cream. I know.
Tea-- skim milk, no sugar.

SCHILLER

Thank you, Dolores.

(Dolores leaves)

I'm not allowed to put butter on anything
anymore. I had a heart attack last year.
I had surgery-- they cracked me open like
a lobster.

HEATHER

That must have been very scary.

SCHILLER

It did tend to concentrate the mind.

HEATHER

I can imagine.

SCHILLER

So, you've embarked on a project of
questionable merit. You're working
on a study. Of me.

HEATHER

I think it's a very worthy project.

SCHILLER

I'm flattered by your interest. And
if you're intent on doing this study
I won't try to talk you out of it, but
I'm afraid I won't be able to help you.

HEATHER

Why?

SCHILLER

Miss Wolfe--

HEATHER

--Heather.

SCHILLER

I'm trying to finish a novel. My one
remaining goal in life is to finish it.
I can't afford to spend my time
discussing four old novels that aren't
even in print any more.

HEATHER

The Sound and the Fury would have gone out of print in the 40's if Malcolm Cowley hadn't published *The Portable Faulkner*.

SCHILLER

(laughing gently)

And you're going to save me from obscurity with a *Portable Schiller*, is that the idea?

HEATHER

Something like that. I've had several pieces published, most recently on Stanley Elkin in the fall issue of *Illuminata*. Perhaps you saw it?

SCHILLER

I haven't but it's not a question of me doubting your ability, it's just that I need to avoid anything that distracts me from my work. I'm sorry, but my answer is no.

Below the table Heather slips *The Lost City* into her bag.

HEATHER

May I ask one favor?

INT. SCHILLER'S APARTMENT -- EARLY EVENING/FOLLOWING

Heather looks around in awe, taking in the book-lined surroundings of her literary hero. Schiller heads down the hall toward his bedroom.

SCHILLER

If I do have a copy, it should be in my bedroom.

HEATHER

Do you think I could have a look at the room where you write?

SCHILLER

First door on the right, don't touch anything.

Heather makes her way down the hallway, opens the door and, as if entering a shrine, steps into

INT. SCHILLER'S WRITING ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

She takes in the austere room. In the middle of it, a wooden desk and on it a huge manual typewriter and a stack of paper. Behind the desk, a straight-backed chair.

She sits on the edge of Schiller's chair and lets her fingertips graze the typewriter keys. On the bookshelf next to the desk she notices A SHOEBOX. She takes it down and opens it. It's filled with old PHOTOGRAPHS. She comes to one taken when Schiller was a striking young man. She studies his face, then puts it back. She hears footsteps, and changing her mind, slips the photograph into her bag. She turns to leave as a WOMAN arrives in the doorway, holding grocery bags.

WOMAN

Hello. Are you a burglar?

HEATHER

Not professionally.

WOMAN

Well, it's good to have a hobby.

The woman is in her late 30's, attractive, athletic, but with an overall look of imbalance. Her exercise clothes are damp from a workout. A brief silence is broken by Schiller's return.

SCHILLER

Oh, hello, darling. Heather, this is my daughter, Ariel. Ariel, this is Heather Wolfe. She's writing her master's thesis -- for some unknown reason, about me.

Schiller hands Heather a time-worn copy of *The Lost City*.

SCHILLER (cont'd)

Here's that copy of *The Lost City*. It's like a sacred text, there seems to be only one copy of it left in the world.

HEATHER

Thank you. I'll return this next week when I go back to Providence for the rest of my things.

SCHILLER

Fine. You can leave it downstairs
with the doorman.

Heather is a bit stung by Schiller's indifference.

ARIEL

So Dad, are we on for movie night?
I picked up *Notorious* and *The Shop
Around The Corner*.

SCHILLER

Would you mind terribly if I took a rain
check? I really should get back to work.

ARIEL

No problem. I was in the neighborhood
anyway giving a private. I should get
out of your way. I'm interrupting your
interview.

SCHILLER

No, it's all right, Heather was about
to leave.

HEATHER

Oh, yeah, I should get going. Gotta
fight that traffic back to Hoboken.

ARIEL

You got a car?

HEATHER

Yeah. Do you want a ride?

ARIEL

Thanks. Great. Just give me two
minutes.

Ariel disappears down the hallway and into the kitchen.
Schiller and Heather follow on their way to the front door.

INT. HALLWAY BY THE FRONT DOOR -- CONTINUOUS

Schiller gathers Heather's coat from the chair by the door and
holds it out for her. But rather than take it she looks with
determination into his eyes.

HEATHER

I respect your decision, Professor Schiller, but I can't help thinking you've made up your mind too quickly.

SCHILLER

Young lady, I haven't done anything too quickly in years.

HEATHER

Maybe the best thing for your health would be to have a fascinating young woman in your life.

SCHILLER

Miss Wolfe--

Schiller holds her coat open for her, but instead of turning around to allow him to help her on with it, she clutches his hand, brings it to her lips... and kisses it.

HEATHER

Promise me you'll give me a chance.

Schiller drops the coat and steps backward. Then, in an equally strange gesture, he places the palm of his hand over her eyes.

INT. HEATHER'S SAAB -- EVENING/FOLLOWING

Heather and Ariel drive downtown in Heather's battered old Saab. Heather drives with the abandon of a New York cabbie.

HEATHER

So, what's it like to be the daughter of a great writer?

ARIEL

You think he's a great writer?

HEATHER

Don't you?

ARIEL

Sure, but he's my father. The truth is I've never been much of a reader. I'm more of an 'action' person.

HEATHER

That's right, you're a dancer.

ARIEL

I know, you read about me in his second novel. The difficult birth, the tumultuous childhood, the early unquenchable desire to dance.

HEATHER

Are you still dancing?

ARIEL

I teach yoga and exercise. That's what happens to dancers when they die.

Heather speeds through a yellow light.

HEATHER

I'm having the hardest time getting your father to let me interview him.

ARIEL

He's very set in his ways. The next corner is fine.

Heather pulls over. Ariel gets out--

ARIEL (cont'd)

Thanks for the lift.

HEATHER

I'm going to reintroduce your dad's work to the world. I know an editor at the University of Chicago Press who's already very interested.

ARIEL

Cool.

HEATHER

It was nice meeting you.

Heather pulls away.

Ariel turns toward her building but her attention is suddenly grabbed by a group of people leaving a restaurant down the block. Her stare zeros in on a HANDSOME BESPECTACLED BLACK MAN and she reflexively hides in her doorway as she tries to make out the man's face. But before she can they pile into a cab and speed away.

INT. ARIEL'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT/FOLLOWING

Ariel is seated at her desk, phone in hand, a worried look on her face. On the wall behind her we see a framed print of the Erick Hawkins Dance Company and a small bookshelf filled with non-fiction works -- about Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, yoga, tai chi, Authentic Movement -- that suggest a sincere, if not disorganized pursuit of spiritual evolution.

OPERATOR'S VOICE

I don't have a Casey Davis but I have two C. Davises. A Dr. C. Davis on Fifth Avenue.

ARIEL

No.

OPERATOR'S VOICE

And a C. Davis on 107th Street.

ARIEL

Is that a new listing?

OPERATOR'S VOICE

Yes it is.

ARIEL

I'll take it.

Ariel writes down the number, then tentatively begins to dial. Before reaching the seventh digit she hangs up. She crumbles the number and tosses it aside.

INT. 92ND STREET YMCA LECTURE SERIES -- NIGHT

On stage, a WRITER close to Schiller in age reads from his novel. He exudes the understated confidence that comes from years of critical success.

WRITER

'Now he understood that our birth into the world of the body is only our first birth and by no means the most important. He was laboring -- this beautiful labor -- on his second birth. He was undoing the threads that kept him bound to the body. To dissolve them was to become a creature of light. He thought about one of the threads, and it dissolved. He never knew that liberation could be so simple, so full of joy. This was the work he was made for, the work we are all made for.'

The passage is especially resonant for Schiller. He sits among the series members, very aware of their appreciation for the author. Seated next to him, clearly preoccupied and out of her element, is Ariel.

INT. LECTURE HALL/92ND STREET YMCA -- FOLLOWING

After the reading. Schiller observes the author at the podium, surrounded by admirers, signing copies of his book. A short distance away he notices a WELL-DRESSED MAN in his fifties chatting with a few literary types. Schiller quickly turns away but reconsiders and crosses the room, extending his hand.

SCHILLER

Charles.

CHARLES

Leonard Schiller. It's been forever.
How are you?

SCHILLER

I can't complain. How are things over
at GRB?

CHARLES

I left fifteen years ago. I'm at
Mulberry.

SCHILLER

That's impressive.

CHARLES

A little hard work. A lot of luck.
What about you, Leonard? Are you
still writing?

SCHILLER

Yes, of course. As a matter of fact
I'm putting the final touches on my
new novel. If you think you might
be interested, I can send it over as
soon as I'm done.

CHARLES

Leonard, I respect you too much to blow
smoke. We're turning into the movie
industry. It's all about the name.
Literary novels are such a tough sell
anyway, I won't be able to get anyone
on board. To tell you the truth, we
do most of our business from celebrity
confessions and self-help books.

SCHILLER

I understand.

CHARLES

Good luck, Leonard. Good to see you.

SCHILLER

Good to see you too, Charles.

INT. BARNES AND NOBLE ON EAST 86TH STREET -- NIGHT/FOLLOWING

Schiller scans the magazine rack. He spots a single copy of *Illuminata*. Down the aisle he sees Ariel having an animated talk with a woman her age. He plucks the copy of *Illuminata* and flips to Heather's article. He glances over his shoulder just as Ariel says a warm goodbye to the woman and walks toward him. He quickly shuts the magazine and hides it between books on a shelf.

SCHILLER

A friend of yours?

ARIEL

No. Just another woman nearing forty obsessed with her biological clock.

Schiller laughs kindly.

SCHILLER

You have the same gift your mother had. That ability to strike up a conversation with complete strangers.

ARIEL

Except Mom made a career out of it. I'm just a blabbermouth.

SCHILLER

You could be a wonderful therapist too. You've often talked about going back to school to become one.

ARIEL

Let's be honest, Dad. The time for going back to school passed me by.

SCHILLER

Nonsense. You're young. You have so much potential.

ARIEL

It's a little late for me to be talking potential. That grad student Heather-- she's young, she has potential. Come on, let's share a cab. You can drop me off at Victor's.

SCHILLER

Oh, so Victor's back in the picture. I always liked Victor. He's a decent man. Kind. Hard-working.

ARIEL

Maybe you should marry him, Dad.

SCHILLER

If I was nearing forty and anxious to start a family I probably would. He's a good catch.

ARIEL

Every guy I've dated in the past five years is a good catch. Anyone but Casey. Right, Dad?

SCHILLER

I make no apologies for my opinion of Casey. I wish him a long and prosperous life, as long as he prospers in Chicago. And I can't imagine you feel differently.

ARIEL

No. I don't. Let's go grab that cab.

SCHILLER

You go ahead. I think I'll stay and browse a bit.

They kiss goodbye and Ariel leaves. Schiller waits for the front door to close behind her, then returns to the hidden copy of *Illuminata*.

INT. BARNES AND NOBLE BOOKSTORE -- MINUTES LATER

Schiller sits on a footstool in the stacks, engrossed in Heather's article. He finishes and closes the magazine. He takes off his glasses and polishes them slowly with his handkerchief.

INT. VICTOR'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT/LATER

From the floor behind the dishevelled bed come the sounds of sex. Passionate, full-contact.

INT. VICTOR'S BEDROOM -- SOON AFTER

Ariel and VICTOR sit up in bed now as she massages his neck. Victor's an attractive, endearing man in his 40's.

ARIEL

It must be so creepy being around drug dealers all day. Your neck is a mass of knots.

VICTOR

The drug dealers are actually the nice guys. They're always polite and never tell you they're innocent.

ARIEL

Tell me something, Victor. Why did you become a lawyer?

VICTOR

I was always deeply in love with the majesty of the law.

ARIEL

(her face brightening)
Really?

VICTOR

Yeah, right. I was an English major. What can an English major do in the real world? Nothing. So I went to law school.

Ariel sinks a little. She digs her thumbs into Victor's neck.

INT. VICTOR'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT/LATER

Victor wakes up, realizes he's alone. Sees Ariel dressing.

VICTOR

What's up? Stay. I'll make French toast for breakfast.

ARIEL

I've got a seven-thirty tomorrow morning.
I should sleep at home.

She kisses him on the forehead. Over her departure we hear the first few numbers of a push-button phone being DIALED.

EXT. PHONE BOOTH -- NIGHT/FOLLOWING

Ariel dials the last three digits of a number. By the third RING her resolve has weakened and she starts to hang up, then she hears CASEY'S VOICE:

CASEY'S VOICE

Hello?

Ariel says nothing. She covers the mouthpiece with her hand.

CASEY'S VOICE (cont'd)

Hello? Anybody there? Okay, I'm hanging up--

Ariel hangs up. She tosses Casey's number in a garbage can as she hurries across the street to the downtown subway.

INT. SCHILLER'S FRONT DOOR -- DAY

It swings open. Revealing Heather in the hallway, her bag slung over her shoulder, a humble expression thinly veiling her unshakable feeling that life is scandalously easy.

HEATHER

I'm so glad you called. What an unexpected surprise.

On the other side of the doorway stands Schiller, a chagrined smile on his face.

SCHILLER

Please come in.

INT. SCHILLER'S LIVING ROOM - DAY/FOLLOWING

Heather sits on the couch, ready to write in her open notebook. Schiller sits in a chair across from her.

HEATHER

When you wrote *Tenderness*, were you reading a lot of D.H. Lawrence?

SCHILLER

A New York Jew imitates D.H. Lawrence at his own peril.

HEATHER

I didn't say you imitated him, but you remind me of him in the way you give your characters room to reject things-- even things I suspect you value. Like Ellen in *Tenderness*. Even though you obviously sympathize with Ira, you let Ellen walk away from her marriage without ever portraying her as cruel.

SCHILLER

She did what she needed to do.

HEATHER

That's what I mean. You give your characters freedom.

SCHILLER

It's not mine to give. What I give them is the freedom to find their own way.

Heather pauses to catch up on her note-taking. Then she flips back several pages to consult her list of questions. She pulls off her sweater. She's wearing a sleeveless shirt. Schiller discreetly diverts his gaze.

HEATHER

When you start a book do you have the story clearly in mind?

SCHILLER

Never. I wish I did. I always start with a character. In *Tenderness* I had a picture of a woman being asked to leave a museum because she'd run her hand over one of the statues. I had no idea who she was or why she was touching the statue. I wrote the book to find out.

HEATHER

How do you find out?

SCHILLER

You follow the characters around waiting for them to do something interesting. Sometimes they do so right away. Other times I follow them for months only to find that they don't do anything interesting at all.

HEATHER

Is that why it's taking you so long to finish your current novel?

Schiller's face grows dark. There's an uncomfortable silence.

SCHILLER

I think it's in your interest to know you've just hit upon the worst question one could ask a writer.

Heather doesn't apologize. She knows it's a good question.

SCHILLER (cont'd)

The book is taking so long because following one's characters around takes stamina. I'm old. I'm having trouble keeping up.

HEATHER

I notice you've made several references to being old. I can't help but wonder if you're using your age to mask a deeper conflict?

SCHILLER

Miss Wolfe, I've agreed to assist you in your enterprise because you strike me as a serious young woman. However, this is our first interview and there is such a thing as decorum.

HEATHER

Point taken. However, Professor Schiller, should you encounter shortcomings in my thesis, I hope you would not allow me to use my youth as a defense.

Schiller glares at Heather disapprovingly. She meets his stare.

SCHILLER

Okay then. Point taken.

INT. THEATER -- NIGHT

Schiller and Ariel walk down the aisle toward their seats.

ARIEL

Are you sure about this, Dad? Won't this be a distraction from your book?

SCHILLER

Not necessarily. She seems like a very intelligent young woman.

ARIEL

I'm sure she is, but you've always been so inflexible about letting anything take you away from your work.

They arrive at their row and find their seats in the middle.

SCHILLER

And you've argued convincingly that a little deviation may be exactly what I need.

ARIEL

I meant a few extra laps around the reservoir.

SCHILLER

I appreciate your looking out for my interests, but don't worry. It's just a few interviews and off she goes.

They remove their hats and scarves and scan the playbill.

SCHILLER (cont'd)

Oh, by the way, an old student is having a book release party on Saturday. Would you like to come?

ARIEL

I can't. I have a date with Victor.

SCHILLER

I'm glad you're keeping an open mind about him.

ARIEL

Well, Dad, seeing how I'm just weeks away from the big Four-0, I've decided to make a bold move. I'm going to have a baby.

Schiller turns to Ariel with genuine excitement. He closes the playbill and kisses her on the forehead.

SCHILLER

That's wonderful! I'm so happy for you. I confess I'm a little surprised. The last time we spoke you didn't seem very enthusiastic about Victor.

ARIEL

I'm not. Victor doesn't know about it. It's a solo project.

Schiller's face drops. His voice loses all energy.

SCHILLER

A solo project?

ARIEL

Let's face facts, Dad. I'm not getting any younger. If I can't have a family at least I want to have a child before it's too late. So I've stopped taking precautions with Victor and hopefully the stars will line up for me.

SCHILLER

Ariel, darling, I sympathize with your predicament but you're acting out of desperation. To mention nothing of the moral implications.

ARIEL

Here we go.

SCHILLER

It's dishonest and a violation of Victor's trust in you.

ARIEL

Well, Dad, maybe the characters in your books have the luxury of grappling with moral issues, but I'm in the real world.

Schiller and Ariel turn away from each other in disappointment. The lights go down. They switch their attention to the DANCERS who take over the stage. Ariel tries to delight in their daring flights but yields to a stronger feeling of loss and sorrow.

EXT. WEST END AVENUE -- AFTERNOON

Wide and vacant between the tall pre-war buildings and the bare trees of early winter.

INT. SCHILLER'S LIVING ROOM -- AFTERNOON

Heather continues her inquiry into Schiller's work. He shifts in his chair, waiting for her next question.

HEATHER

In *Tenderness* you portray the breakdown of Ellen and Ira's marriage with such brutal honesty it's tempting to assume that it's drawn from personal experience.

A displeased look crosses Schiller's face.

SCHILLER

Miss Wolfe, the writer's words are his fingerprints. The writer himself should be forgotten.

HEATHER

But you'd have to agree that knowing what we do about Hemingway's life informs any serious discussion of his work.

SCHILLER

Perhaps. But there's still no substitute for two or three close readings of *The Sun Also Rises*.

HEATHER

I've had many close readings of all your novels. And I still think it might be illuminating to take a little of our time together to look at the man behind the words.

SCHILLER

I was under the impression you were writing a critical analysis of my work, not a magazine profile.

HEATHER

I'm looking for the theme of my thesis, Professor, and it's unfair of you to accuse me of writing a puff piece because I've asked you to discuss the biographical origins of your fiction.

SCHILLER

My god. Can't a writer borrow details from his life without being accused of autobiography?

HEATHER

Do you at least concede that your first two novels were more tied to you personally?

SCHILLER

Now you're answering your own question. If you'll excuse me for a moment--

Schiller rises. Heather can't see him wince from chest pain as he walks through the low light in the dining room, into

INT. THE KITCHEN -- SAME

He opens a cabinet, pulls down a bottle of prescription medicine, and washes down two pills with a glass of water.

INT. SCHILLER'S LIVING ROOM -- SAME

In the corner, Heather looks intently at a photo of a beautiful woman smiling with motherly affection at a little girl doing ballet in a yard. She senses Schiller's presence and turns.

SCHILLER

I'm a little tired. Why don't we make this your last question until next week.

HEATHER

Of course.

She opens her notebook, looks over her list of questions.

HEATHER (cont'd)

Ellen in your first book is very similar to Beth in your second, and those women were so ahead of their time in how they refused to sacrifice their lives for the sake of their husband's happiness. And then no character resembling her appears in your next two books. What happened to her?

SCHILLER

She died late one evening on an icy stretch of the Taconic Parkway.

HEATHER

Ellen doesn't die. She moves to Paris
and has a child--

Heather stops, studying Schiller's eyes. The fading
afternoon light catches the sorrow in them.

HEATHER (cont'd)

I'm sorry. That was insensitive of me.

SCHILLER

Don't be sorry, you had no way of
knowing.

Pause. At a loss for words, Heather crosses the room and
packs her bag. She lowers her head in regret and heads for
the door. Schiller's voice stops her--

SCHILLER (cont'd)

I concede this, Miss Wolfe-- I have
in my writing occasionally drawn from
my life but it has always been in the
spirit of objectivity.

Heather nods respectfully and starts toward the front door.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE SCHILLER'S APARTMENT -- CONTINUOUS

Schiller steps into the doorway as Heather presses the
elevator button. They hear the groan of the antiquated
gears. She seems to struggle within herself about saying
what's on her mind. Then she turns to Schiller--

HEATHER

I never told you why your work means so
much to me.

Schiller nods.

HEATHER (cont'd)

Your novels set me free.

The sudden exposure Heather feels makes her laugh. Schiller
settles against the open door, giving her tacit permission to
continue.

HEATHER (cont'd)

Growing up, I always felt like an alien. I
never really fit in anywhere, especially not
Cleveland Heights. But I always found solace
in writing and in books.

(MORE)

HEATHER (cont'd)

And then I had this English teacher who encouraged me to apply to an early entrance program at Brown where they allow you to skip your senior year of high school. And I got in. But I had this boyfriend -- who was brilliant. He was a brilliant writer and musician and at the prospect of my leaving he really started coming apart. I had all but made up my mind not to go when I did what I always do in times of great uncertainty. I went to the books. I went to the library. And that's when I found you. I mean, I found *Tenderness*. I sat on the floor in the stacks and I read the whole book and by the time I finished and the library was closing around me, I knew what I had to do.

SCHILLER

You decided to go to Brown.

HEATHER

Yeah. You gave me the courage to live my own life.

SCHILLER

Freedom isn't a choice that the world encourages. You have to wear a suit of armor to defend it.

HEATHER

See, you've always explained my life to me more sympathetically than I've been able to explain it to myself.

SCHILLER

I'm glad I've made some small difference. What became of the boyfriend?

HEATHER

Oh-- he got over it.

She laughs and shrugs her shoulders and presses the elevator button.

SCHILLER

Have patience. It's the slowest elevator on the West Side. Nice to have seen you.

He smiles warmly and steps back into his apartment and closes the door.

INT. SCHILLER'S FRONT HALLWAY -- SAME

Schiller lets go of the doorknob slowly, considering the moment that just passed.

EXT. SHOTS OF NEW YORK IN WINTER -- LATE AFTERNOON

The sun sets on a lonely stretch of Upper Broadway, the empty promenade in Riverside Park, and the darkened tunnel leading down to the boat basin.

EXT. SIDEWALK ON THE UPPER WEST SIDE -- DAY

Heather walks in Schiller's neighborhood, amid the sights and sounds of the streets that have served as the settings for Schiller's novels. Her cell is against her ear -- the next RING connects her to her messages. The first one after the BEEP is from Schiller. Hearing his voice she immediately stops walking and covers her other ear to block out the traffic on West End Avenue:

SCHILLER'S VOICE

Hello, Heather, this is Leonard. This Saturday evening I'll be attending a book release party. If you think the occasion might be of interest to you, you're certainly more than welcome to join me. Goodbye.

She closes her cell phone and walks into the bright winter light, her excitement held within.

EXT. VICTOR'S BUILDING -- NIGHT

An attractive pre-war building on the Upper West Side.

INT. VICTOR'S DINING ROOM/KITCHEN AREA -- NIGHT/SAME

The remains of Chinese food in cartons on the kitchen counter. On the other side of the counter, Victor sits on a stool and Ariel sits on his lap, kissing him. She reaches for his belt buckle. Victor politely pulls away from their kiss--

VICTOR

Wait a second.

ARIEL

Why?

VICTOR

What about your diaphragm?

ARIEL

Oh yeah-- right.

Ariel slides off his lap, grabs her purse, shuttles into

INT. VICTOR'S BATHROOM -- NIGHT/CONTINUOUS

She drops her purse on the toilet seat cover and turns on the faucet. She studies her reflection in the mirror, waiting for the flicker of disapproval to leave her eyes.

INT. BOOK RELEASE PARTY/LOFT BUILDING IN TRIBECA -- NIGHT/SAME

A mosh pit of intellectuals, mostly in their 30's and 40's. Schiller leads Heather by the arm through the crowd.

HEATHER

There are some heavy hitters here, Leonard. You didn't tell me you move in such lofty circles.

SCHILLER

I'm not out of circulation yet.

HEATHER

That's Robert Randolph. He wrote *Time Out Of Mind*.

SCHILLER

Never heard of it.

HEATHER

It's one of my favorite books from last year. You should read it. It's brilliant. By the way, that's a very nice tie. Is it new?

SCHILLER

Oh no, I've had this one for years.

HEATHER

Oh my god! Would you excuse me for a minute?

Heather suddenly crosses the room, leaving Schiller behind. She strides up to SANDRA BENNETT, mid-40's, tall, slender, with enviable cheekbones, who's in a conversation with a handsome younger man.

HEATHER (cont'd)

Hello. My name is Heather Wolfe, you rejected two of my book reviews.

SANDRA

Heather Wolfe, I can't say I remember them. I guess they weren't very good.

HEATHER

I just wanted to tell you I loved the article you wrote last spring about Max's Kansas City. It was the best piece in the *Voice* in years.

SANDRA

Thanks.

HEATHER

But I also thought you weren't saying everything you knew about Lou Reed. You seemed to be pulling your punches.

Sandra looks at Heather with a skeptical, amused expression, but she also seems to be bringing her into focus. With a glance Sandra dispatches the young man who moves on to another conversation.

SANDRA

Maybe I do remember those reviews. You're a graduate student somewhere aren't you?

HEATHER

At Brown. I finished my course work. Now I'm writing my thesis and living here.

SANDRA

The young woman from the provinces, ready to make a name for herself in the big city. I love it!

ACROSS THE ROOM

Schiller watches Heather look at Sandra with the same intensity she habitually trains on him. With nobody to talk to, he turns and scans titles on the bookshelf.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ROOM

Sandra and Heather carry their conversation to the dining area where they each pick up a glass of wine.

SANDRA

So what's your master's about? She asked in trepidation.

HEATHER

It's a critical biography of a great American novelist.

SANDRA

Who?

Heather points across the room at Schiller.

HEATHER

Him.

SANDRA

Who's he?

HEATHER

Leonard Schiller.

(Sandra stares blankly)

...*Tenderness? The Lost City?*

SANDRA

I know the name. He was one of the New York intellectuals-- Bellow, Schwartz... To be honest, I was never really interested in that crowd. I imagine them all as a bunch of white guys in suits, going to bed early.

NEXT TO THE BOOKSHELVES

Schiller sees them looking at him. He waves weakly.

INT. VICTOR'S DINING ROOM/KITCHEN AREA -- NIGHT/SAME

Ariel comes out of the bathroom. Victor turns on his stool to face her, his palms held aloft, a fortune cookie in each.

VICTOR

It's bad luck to make love without knowing your fortune.

Ariel reaches for one. Victor pulls the cookie away--

VICTOR (cont'd)
Not that one. Take this one. I have
a good feeling about this one.

Ariel takes the other cookie, regarding Victor dubiously.
She cracks it, exposing the fortune twisted around a stunning
diamond engagement ring.

VICTOR (cont'd)
So... What does your fortune say?

Ariel's face turns with anguish. But she's not confused.
She drops the ring gently on the kitchen counter and cuts
across the dining room for her coat. Victor walks with her
as far as the dining room table. Negotiates with her across
the table as she puts her coat on.

VICTOR (cont'd)
Maybe I moved too quickly. Let's table
the whole marriage thing and go back to
the way things were.

ARIEL
I don't think so, Victor. I'm sorry.

VICTOR
Don't be sorry. I just thought we
were good together.

ARIEL
It's not you, Victor, it's me.

VICTOR
I hate it when people say that because
they're usually lying.

ARIEL
I know. But I'm not.

Ariel grabs her purse and heads toward the door. Victor
follows.

VICTOR
Don't leave.

ARIEL
I have to.

VICTOR
Ten minutes ago you couldn't take
your hands off me.

ARIEL

Victor-- I didn't put in my diaphragm.

VICTOR

Put it in now.

ARIEL

I didn't bring it with me.

(raises her purse, looks at
him meaningfully)

I haven't brought it for weeks.

Victor looks toward the bathroom, then at her purse, then at her, adding it all up.

VICTOR

You've been trying to have my child,
but now that I want to marry you,
you don't want to have a child with me.

ARIEL

You see, Victor -- it isn't you.
It really is me.

Victor sinks. Ariel wants to comfort him but she knows she can't. Without a word she walks out of his apartment.

INT. BOOK RELEASE PARTY -- NIGHT/LATER

Schiller has joined Heather and Sandra. A well-dressed man, FREDERICK, appears behind him.

FREDERICK

Sandra, I assumed you'd be at the
Vanity Fair bash.

SANDRA

I was just about to head over. Frederick,
may I introduce Heather Wolfe and--

FREDERICK

--You don't have to introduce Leonard
Schiller. Leonard and his wife were
dear friends of my parents. I got your
message, Professor. Morally earnest
as always.

SCHILLER

Frederick was kind enough to offer me
a job writing ad copy.

FREDERICK

Just a few paragraphs about Central Park. He didn't even have to mention American Express.

SCHILLER

I have this old fashioned idea that art and commerce are at war.

HEATHER

I think it's inspiring. To be that pure about your art.

SANDRA

I don't see what's so pure about turning down paid work. As if making a living means you're guilty of selling your soul.

SCHILLER

I make my living writing and, until recently, teaching literature. That's my world and I'm faithful to it. Of course your magazine owes its existence to advertising revenue. There's nothing wrong with that, but it's a compromise I'm not willing to make.

SANDRA

That advertising revenue allows us to introduce new writing talent to the world. I don't see the compromise in that.

INT. HEATHER'S SAAB -- NIGHT/FOLLOWING

Heather parks in front of Schiller's building. Schiller sits beside her in a stupor of resentment.

SCHILLER

Thank you for going out of your way.

She opens her door.

HEATHER

Leonard, do you mind if I come up? I have to use the little girl's room.

She jumps out. For a moment Leonard sits alone in the car, his eyes following her into his building.

INT. SCHILLER'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT/FOLLOWING

Schiller stands still in the hallway, a picture of tension held within. Heather returns from the bathroom.

SCHILLER
Well, then.

HEATHER
But you haven't fed me.

SCHILLER
(softening)
I thought you ate at the party.

HEATHER
A chunk of cheese and a cracker? That will hardly do.

SCHILLER
Well, we can't send you home starving.

They move into

INT. THE KITCHEN -- CONTINUOUS

SCHILLER
My food's rather bland. Fortunately Ariel has her own cupboard.

Schiller opens the cabinet. One side is virtually empty but Ariel's side is stocked with an odd assortment of health and junk foods. Heather pulls down peanut butter and honey.

HEATHER
Maybe a little sandwich.

She laughs lightly and begins to build her snack, pausing to slip out of her black leather boots. The sight of her lovely bare feet seems to shake something in Schiller.

EXT. SIDEWALK ON THE WEST SIDE -- NIGHT/SAME

Ariel heads west, staring forlornly past the Saturday night revelers walking by.

INT. SCHILLER'S KITCHEN -- NIGHT/LATER

The ingredients for Heather's sandwich lie before them on the kitchen table. Heather munches on the last corner of the sandwich. Schiller sips tea.

HEATHER

You looked sad tonight. The knight
of the mournful countenance.

SCHILLER

Honestly, I can't stop thinking about
my daughter. She seems forever adrift
and I can't help but blame myself. Her
mother died when Ariel was still in her
teens, and I didn't do a very good job
after that. I was more concerned with
the perfection of my work and reduced
her to begging for my time and attention.

Heather rests her hand on his and squeezes it.

HEATHER

You're very hard on yourself.

She withdraws her hand from his and notices that she's left
small dots of honey on his knuckles.

HEATHER (cont'd)

Sorry.

She smiles at Schiller speculatively, then dips her fingers
into the honey jar.

HEATHER (cont'd)

Sorry for getting honey on you.

Then she removes his glasses. She paints his forehead,
jawline, and lips with honey, as if this is the only thing
she could have done. Schiller stares at her, uncertain about
what she wants. Then he rises.

SCHILLER

Excuse me.

INT. BATHROOM -- FOLLOWING

Schiller enters and looks in the mirror at his honey-
decorated face. He washes the honey off with a damp hand
towel.

INT. SCHILLER'S KITCHEN -- A MINUTE LATER

Schiller returns. Heather still sits at the table, a tentative quality to the expression now on her face.

SCHILLER

I'm sorry, but I think it's time
for you to go.

HEATHER

Oh dear. Did I do something wrong?

SCHILLER

No, you've been very kind to me.
It's just that I'm too old.

Heather rises and steps toward Schiller, her eyes and manner washed over with sensitivity.

HEATHER

Please, I'm not being kind. If you
want me to go, I'll go. But I'm not
expecting anything from you.

She puts her arms around him and they stand together in the center of the kitchen. They stay pressed together for a long moment.

HEATHER (cont'd)

Can we lie down?

INT. SCHILLER'S BEDROOM -- FOLLOWING

Heather enters first and sits on the bed. She looks up tenderly at Schiller who steps into the room and stands hesitantly before her.

HEATHER

We don't have to do anything. I just
want to be near you.

She slides back on the bed and lies down. After a moment, Schiller lowers onto the bed and lies down beside her. He smooths his tie and they lay side by side in perfect stillness. Then he stations his body so his reach is effortless and, as if he can feel her life force rising from her skin, he holds his hand just above her face.

She unbuttons her dress and he runs his hand through the air a few inches above her, patiently down the length of her body, without once touching her.

All the while Heather looks directly into his eyes. And he looks unwaveringly into hers. Then she closes her eyes.

Schiller lies perfectly still, looking down at her with astonishment, listening to her slow, even breathing ferry her to sleep. Then, making sure not to wake her, he rises.

INT. SCHILLER'S BEDROOM -- FOLLOWING

He comes out of the bathroom in a robe and picks up a throw blanket. He lays it over Heather, gently smooths it out at her neck and shoulders, and leaves the room, shutting the door quietly behind him.

INT. KITCHEN -- FOLLOWING

Schiller sits at the kitchen table -- spreads peanut butter across a piece of bread. He bites into it, doesn't hear Ariel let herself in and enter the kitchen.

ARIEL

Howdy.

Schiller looks up, unable to speak. His response confuses her. She glances around the room and sees Heather's bag flattened beside her sexy black hipster boots.

ARIEL (cont'd)

I should have called.

Schiller stares at her, speechless, peanut butter sandwich suspended in mid-air.

ARIEL (cont'd)

I'll call you tomorrow.

She heads very quickly toward the door. Schiller sits frozen holding the sandwich. He shrugs and takes another bite.

INT. CAB -- NIGHT/FOLLOWING

Ariel sits stone-faced as the cab roars down Broadway at a menacing clip.

ARIEL

If we get into an accident and die,
I won't be able to tip you!

The CAB DRIVER ignores her. They continue to speed down Broadway and Ariel sits back, exhausted from her bizarre evening. She shuts her eyes for a second, then suddenly opens them in horror.

ARIEL (cont'd)

Fuck! My purse. Excuse me, I'm
sorry, but I forgot my purse. I
don't have any money.

The cab SCREECHES to a stop. The driver looks back grimly.

CABBIE

If you don't have money I cannot
drive you anywhere. Good luck to you,
miss. I hope you locate your purse.

Ariel doesn't have the energy to argue, starts to slide across the seat to the sidewalk side to exit the taxi. She suddenly freezes. A smile flickers across her face as she glances through the window at the neon sign for NICK'S DINER.

INT. NICK'S DINER -- LATE NIGHT/IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING

Ariel hovers by the pay phone as it RINGS on the other end, once, twice, three times, then we hear:

CASEY'S VOICE

Hello?... Hello... Hello...
(a long pause; finally)
Ariel?

The slightest smile forms on her face.

ARIEL

How'd you know?

CASEY'S VOICE

I know your silence. Where are you?

ARIEL

Twenty-ninth and Seventh.

CASEY'S VOICE

Nick's?

ARIEL
Nick's.

INT. NICK'S DINER -- LATE NIGHT/FOLLOWING

Ariel sits over her coffee at the counter. Behind her, through the large front window, a taxi pulls up. We see the same bespectacled man Ariel was shocked to see earlier emerge from the cab and walk into Nick's. CASEY DAVIS takes the stool beside Ariel and signals for a cup of coffee. After a moment Ariel shifts on her stool and looks at him. They sit in silence. Finally--

CASEY
I thought you were in California.

ARIEL
I thought you were in Chicago.

CASEY
I just moved back.

NICK arrives with Casey's cup of coffee.

NICK
Folks eating?

CASEY
Just coffee.

Nick takes note of their faces, lights up in recognition.

NICK
Hey! I haven't seen you kids in years. Don't tell me you left us for another diner.

ARIEL
No. It wasn't another diner, Nick. We moved out of the neighborhood.

NICK
Well, it's good to have you back. Coffee's on me.

Nick moves on. Ariel and Casey gaze at each other, in no rush to put their feelings into words.

CASEY
So... what's new?

ARIEL
I joined a glee club.

CASEY
When?

ARIEL
Just now.

Casey smiles and throws down a tip for Nick. Ariel takes his arm and without another word, they stand up and walk out.

INT. SCHILLER'S BEDROOM -- MORNING

Heather wakes up. She's alone in Schiller's bed. She pulls back the blanket, notices her unbuttoned dress. She lies back down, as if to sort out her feelings and decide what face to present to Schiller when she leaves the room.

INT. SCHILLER'S KITCHEN -- FOLLOWING

Heather steps into the doorway, sees Schiller peering into the toaster. He looks up. Already shaved, showered, and dressed in a jacket and tie, he somehow looks undone. But seeing her, his face transforms.

SCHILLER
Coffee's ready. I could make you something to eat.

HEATHER
Thank you but I never eat breakfast.

She veers over to the coffee maker and pours a cup. Brings it to the table and opens the novel she finds there, *The English Teacher*.

HEATHER (cont'd)
I love Narayan.

SCHILLER
You've read him?

HEATHER
Oh my God, yes. He reminds me of Chekhov. He's not as tough-minded but he has more of a sense of humor.

Schiller smiles.

HEATHER (cont'd)

What?

SCHILLER

It's nice to know a young person
who wants to talk about R.K. Narayan
at seven o'clock in the morning.

Schiller brings his coffee and toast to the table and sits
across from Heather.

HEATHER

I've always thought that people will
still be reading him in a hundred years.
Do you ever wonder whether people will
still be reading *you* in a hundred years?

SCHILLER

What I wonder is whether people will
still be reading in a hundred years.

HEATHER

But don't you think about it? Really.

SCHILLER

If I do it would be unseemly to talk
about it. That's got nothing to do
with what the whole enterprise is about.

HEATHER

What *is* the whole enterprise about?
Now that you mention it.

SCHILLER

It isn't something I can put into words.
Not at seven o'clock in the morning.

HEATHER

To put it bluntly, Leonard -- your
novels are out of print, and you've
said that you don't know if anyone
will publish the one you're working
on now. So why do you keep going?

SCHILLER

Heather, what can I say? Whatever I
said would be too much or too little.

HEATHER

But when I'm summing up my thesis, what
should I say it is that keeps you going?

SCHILLER

Just say it's the madness of art.

HEATHER

The madness of art?

Heather gives Schiller a long look, a touch displeased by his evasion. He looks back -- that's all he's going to say about the matter.

INT. CASEY'S APARTMENT -- MORNING/LATER

Casey is still asleep, but Ariel is sitting up in bed, studying him. Sensing he's being stared at, Casey wakes up.

ARIEL

Hello, Davis.

CASEY

Stop glowing at me, Schiller.

ARIEL

Am I glowing?

CASEY

You kept me up half the night with your glowing.

It's true, she is glowing. He can't help glowing right back at her. They reach for each other.

INT. THE BROADWAY DINER -- MORNING/LATER

Ariel and Casey sit side-by-side in a booth eating breakfast.

ARIEL

If he had money I'd think she was scheming to get in his will, but Dad doesn't *have* money.

CASEY

Maybe she *thinks* he has money.

ARIEL

How could she get naked with him? She's like *twenty-five*. It's against nature!

CASEY

Let your father have some fun.

ARIEL

What are you doing defending him?

CASEY

I'm not defending him. I'm just saying be glad he's happy.

ARIEL

I *want* him to be happy. If she'd been a nice old librarian I'd be delighted.

He laughs affectionately, but then, as if produced by the warmth of his feeling for her, a touch of sadness comes onto his face. She picks up on the shift in his mood.

ARIEL (cont'd)

I know that look.

He considers denying it, then--

CASEY

Ariel, before we get too far in again-- it's only fair of me to tell you that I haven't changed my position on having children.

Ariel is almost successful at disguising her crushing disappointment.

ARIEL

Oh really.

CASEY

I just thought I should let you know that right away. So there are no misunderstandings later.

ARIEL

That's fair.

CASEY

I'd rather walk away right now than risk the kind of pain we went through last time.

ARIEL

So there are no misunderstandings later, I haven't changed my position either.

(then, in a sexy whisper)

But don't worry. I'm just going to toy with you for a couple of months, then leave you by the wayside begging for more. Until then, let's just keep things like they are right now-- hot and light.

INT. WEST SIDE HEALTH AND FITNESS -- DAY/FOLLOWING

The warm-down of Ariel's yoga class. She drifts from student to student, making subtle adjustments in their posture, gently giving advice, "Breathe, good, let go, etc..."

The class filters out, each member thanking Ariel before slipping past Schiller who stands outside the door, a look of pride on his face. Ariel greets him with a quick peck as CHELSEA, a fellow instructor, leads her class into the room.

SCHILLER

They love you. I can see it on their faces. You inspire them.

ARIEL

That's because I taught them to breathe. It's amazing what a little oxygen will do.

Schiller hands Ariel her purse.

SCHILLER

I put your keys in the side pocket.

ARIEL

Thanks.

SCHILLER

About last night-- Heather wasn't feeling well, so I put her up in the guest room.

ARIEL

That's what I figured. Give me five minutes to freshen up.

EXT. SOHO SIDEWALK -- DAY/FOLLOWING

Schiller and Ariel walk through the Village. The uncomfortable silence between them suggests a pause in a difficult conversation.

ARIEL

Come on, Dad, let's have it.

SCHILLER

Ariel, this is a man who doesn't want what you want and proved it beyond any doubt five years ago.

ARIEL

That was a decision Casey and I made together.

SCHILLER

No. That was a decision Casey made. If your opinion had meant anything you'd have a five year old child right now.

ARIEL

That's a terrible thing to say.

SCHILLER

The man left you when you needed him most.

ARIEL

For god's sake, it's not that simple!

SCHILLER

And now he has the gall to waltz back into your life and waste more of your precious time.

ARIEL

I called him.

Schiller stops in his tracks. Looks gravely at Ariel.

SCHILLER

Ariel, people don't change.

ARIEL

Maybe not, Dad, but we'll just have to see. Last night I was happy. Doesn't that count for something?

SCHILLER

No. Not if it leaves you so depressed you can't get out of bed for a year.

ARIEL

That's not going to happen this time. I'm five years older.

SCHILLER

That's what worries me.

INT. 92ND STREET YMCA LECTURE SERIES -- NIGHT

On stage, a dynamic WRITER in her 40's reads from her novel.

WRITER

'To sit across the table and talk with
someone you love is itself a complex
engagement; to go to bed with someone--'

In the audience we find Schiller and his companion for the evening -- Heather, who sits at attention, lost in the author's words.

WRITER (cont'd)

'--to carry your conversation into the
realm of the body, a realm of insecurity
and fear as well as pleasure -- was
always fraught with the sad evidence of
how difficult it is to understand another
person and make yourself understood.'

INT. CAFE -- NIGHT/FOLLOWING

Schiller and Heather sit at a corner table.

HEATHER

Thanks so much for inviting me.
She's a wonderful writer.

SCHILLER

Yes, the excerpt she read was very
nicely observed.

HEATHER

Lucky break for me Ariel couldn't
make it.

SCHILLER

To be honest, I was surprised you
were available. I assumed you'd
be out with a gentleman friend on
a Friday evening.

HEATHER

I am out with a gentleman friend
on a Friday evening.

Pause. They both laugh guardedly.

HEATHER (cont'd)

Truth be told, Leonard, I find very few men my age interesting. They're like chewing gum. Ten minutes of flavor followed by bland repetition.

SCHILLER

Surely it can't be that bleak.

HEATHER

Don't get me wrong, I love a good time as much as the next girl but I've got too much to do. I want to be bold. I want to be Joan Didion, Joni Mitchell, and Joan of Arc. What can I say? I've got the under thirty disease.

SCHILLER

I understand. I was your age when I started my first novel -- by the time I finished it three years later I was a different person.

HEATHER

What do you mean your first novel?

SCHILLER

I wrote two unpublished novels when I was in my twenties.

HEATHER

I'd love to read them.

SCHILLER

I'm afraid that's impossible.

HEATHER

You destroyed them?

SCHILLER

I had to, in order to keep writing. If I hadn't, I might never have written *Tenderness*. And then we wouldn't be here right now.

Heather stirs her latte with her biscotti, looking down in contemplation. Finally she looks up at Schiller, a glint of mischief in her eyes.

HEATHER

And where are we, Leonard?

Schiller meets her gaze but doesn't respond for a brief moment.

SCHILLER

It's a bit late. Why don't we pick
this up next time?

Heather eats the last of her biscotti.

HEATHER

Okay.

INT. ARIEL'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

Ariel and Casey make love. Looking into each other's eyes.
It's hot but it's definitely not light.

INT. HEATHER'S HOBOKEN APARTMENT -- LATE NIGHT

Heather types furiously. She stops and looks over what she
has written. A look of genuine distress crosses her face.

She grabs her copy of *The Lost City*, rifles through it. But
she doesn't find any help in it and slams it down, knocking
over THE PHOTO OF YOUNG SCHILLER that she stole earlier. She
picks it up and stares at it for a long time.

HEATHER

Where are you?

INT. THE CLOSED DOOR TO SCHILLER'S WRITING ROOM -- DAY

...as Ariel walks toward it and the muted tap of her father's
typewriter keys, a subtle shift occurs in her face. She
stops a short distance from the door, after all these years
still reluctant to interrupt her father at work--

ARIEL

I'm leaving, Dad. Soup's on the stove.
Let it simmer for an hour.

SCHILLER (O.S.)

Thank you, dear. I'll see you tonight.
Love you.

ARIEL

Love you too.

INT. LOBBY OF SCHILLER'S BUILDING -- FOLLOWING

Accustomed as he is to Heather's regular visits, JEFF, the doorman, invites her to go upstairs without announcing her arrival on the house phone.

The elevator opens and Ariel steps out, surprised to cross paths with Heather.

HEATHER

Ariel, hey. How are you?

ARIEL

Hello, Heather. Dad's working. I don't think he's expecting you.

HEATHER

We've got a lot of ground to cover. I've got to crack that whip.

ARIEL

He's very strict about his writing hours.

HEATHER

A little shake-up in the routine is just what Leonard needs.

Heather brushes past Ariel and hits the elevator button. The remark and brush-by unsettle Ariel but she can only think to walk away. The elevator arrives. Heather steps into it, then leans back out and calls to Ariel:

HEATHER (cont'd)

By the way, happy birthday.

ARIEL

Thank you. How did you know it's my birthday?

HEATHER

Of course I know it's your birthday.

Heather ducks back into the elevator and the doors close. For a moment, Ariel stands in the middle of the lobby as if dizzied, then continues out the lobby door.

INT. SCHILLER'S FRONT DOOR -- DAY/FOLLOWING

The door swings open. Schiller is surprised to see Heather. Her easy manner with Ariel has given way to the tension her thesis is suddenly causing her.

HEATHER

Leonard, I know it's not a work day
but last night I came across something
F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote which really
got me thinking.

SCHILLER

Can't it wait until Monday? I really
should get back to work.

HEATHER

He said that 'most good writers line
themselves up along a solid gold bar--'

SCHILLER

Heather, these are my writing hours and
you must respect them.

HEATHER

I'm sorry. I guess it will have to wait.

She turns and starts toward the elevator.

SCHILLER

Now that you're here, if you have work
to do you're welcome to the living room.

Heather turns back.

INT. SCHILLER'S LIVING ROOM -- FOLLOWING

Heather sits on the couch, struggling to concentrate. She
crosses the room. On Schiller's roll-top desk she sees his
appointment book. Turning the pages she finds very few
entries aside from his doctor appointments, dates with Ariel,
and interviews with *Ms. Wolfe*, which, over the weeks, have
become noted as meetings with *Heather*.

INT. SCHILLER'S WRITING ROOM -- SAME

Schiller sits cross-armed in front of his typewriter, gazing
at the dreary day outside the window.

INT. SCHILLER'S KITCHEN -- FOLLOWING

Heather dips a ladle in Ariel's soup and tastes it. She puts the lid back on and opens the refrigerator, studies the contents -- skim milk, a bag of carrots, a half-eaten can of tuna, a bottle of seltzer, a platoon of prescription drugs.

SCHILLER (O.S.)

Are you looking for something to eat?

Startled, Heather closes the door and turns around.

SCHILLER (cont'd)

Ah, you were engaging in refrigerator analysis? Since you're here we might as well get our work in now. So what's all this about F. Scott Fitzgerald's solid gold bar?

Heather doesn't skip a beat returning to her inquiry, steps decisively toward Schiller.

HEATHER

He said that most good writers have an essential theme that runs through their best work. Hemingway's courage, Dostoyevsky's spiritual violence--

SCHILLER

I trust that you've resisted any impulse to place me in their company.

HEATHER

I do say you breathe the same moral air, especially in your first two books when you adhere closely to your solid gold bar.

SCHILLER

Ah, yes-- personal liberation in the works of Leonard Schiller.

HEATHER

Don't misunderstand me. Your last two novels are brilliant. But I sense a stylistic change in which you're writing less nakedly, less from the heart.

SCHILLER

I did attempt to work on a larger social canvas in *The Lost City*. But in my estimation it's my most passionate novel.

(MORE)

SCHILLER (cont'd)

It's true that my work did change after Stella died. I suppose my own life as a source of inspiration began to interest me less.

HEATHER

You must have loved her deeply.

SCHILLER

My wife was not a bounded entity. She made me feel that I existed in her as much as I existed in my own body.

HEATHER

And you never experienced that feeling again... after you lost her?

He thinks long and hard trying to find the appropriate words.

SCHILLER

No. I suppose not. But I wouldn't be a writer, would I, if I wasn't blinded by optimism.

He looks at Heather intently. She meets his gaze for a moment then averts her eyes.

INT. ARIEL'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT/LATER

CLOSE ON a framed photograph of Ariel, in the peak of her dance form, in flight.

SCHILLER'S VOICE

Happy birthday, darling.

ARIEL'S VOICE

Daddy, you didn't have to.

CASEY'S VOICE

Wow.

WIDER to reveal Schiller and Casey huddled around Ariel who holds the photo in one hand and wrapping paper in the other.

SCHILLER

I've always loved this photograph.

A tear slips out of Ariel's eye and she laughs at herself. She hugs Schiller and starts back to the kitchen.

ARIEL

Dinner will be ready in a sec.

Casey and Schiller stand alone, silence surrounding them immediately.

INT. ARIEL'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT/FOLLOWING

Schiller and Casey sit across from each other, doing their best to appear relaxed in each other's company.

SCHILLER

So, Ariel tells me you're about to launch your own magazine.

CASEY

I've always wanted to provide a forum where people on the left can argue. It remains to be seen if anyone's up for a good fight.

SCHILLER

I was involved with a magazine for a while. Back in the sixties. A literary journal to be published and edited by eight young writers.

CASEY

No kidding. Anything become of it?

SCHILLER

No. There's something about collaboration that seems to bring out the worst in writers.

CASEY

There's only four of us so I suppose we'll have fewer opportunities to disagree.

SCHILLER

Well, it takes a capacity for compromise, like any worthwhile endeavor, be it a magazine or a literary journal or a family. One has to be willing to occasionally surrender his beliefs for the greater good.

Casey takes in Schiller's sly provocation. Sits back in his seat.

CASEY

So Ariel tells me you've got a young biographer doing a study of your work. How's that going?

SCHILLER

Marvelous. Suddenly the literary world is abuzz with curiosity about my every move.

CASEY

Well, you deserve it, Leonard. If anyone knows the meaning of compromise-- Ariel has often told me how you locked yourself away in your writing room, cutting yourself off from the rest of the world. I'm glad you're finally going to get your due.

Schiller and Casey take stock of each other -- two similar men who don't approve of each other. Ariel pokes her head out of the kitchen.

ARIEL

Case, could you give me a hand?

CASEY

Right away. Excuse me, Leonard. Duty calls.

INT. BAR -- NIGHT/SAME

Heather and Sandra drink martinis at the bar.

HEATHER

I'm done with the part about his first two books. That came easily because I love them, but I'm having the hardest time writing about the last two. I just don't get them.

SANDRA

You don't get them or you don't like them?

HEATHER

I don't know. I guess I took it for granted that I would grow to like them. But they never catch fire. They're too neutral. Too careful. The books I love value a certain kind of recklessness.

SANDRA

He went dry. If it can happen to William Faulkner, it can happen to Leonard Schiller.

HEATHER

It's his life that went dry. He's refused too much. At first I was in awe of his single-minded devotion to his art. Now I suspect it drained his art of its freshness.

SANDRA

Two great novels is nothing to sneeze at.

HEATHER

I thought my thesis was going to be about one of America's great unacknowledged writers, not one who was written out by the time he was forty-five years old.

SANDRA

There's no need to ache with disloyalty. To be a writer, you have to hurt people's feelings. Sometimes you have to be a bastard. You'll be speaking with conviction, and when you speak with conviction, people notice.

HEATHER

But he's had enough disappointment. I don't think he ever got over losing his wife.

SANDRA

I hate to tell tales out of school, but from what I hear it's a little more complicated than that.

HEATHER

What do you mean?

SANDRA

On the way down to that Vanity Fair party, Frederick told me a few things about your friend Leonard.

INT. ARIEL'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT/FOLLOWING

Mid-dinner. Schiller reaches into his breast pocket and removes a folded newspaper article and hands it to Ariel.

SCHILLER

Did you see the newspaper this morning?

ARIEL

No, I didn't get a chance.

SCHILLER

It's a story about a comet that will be visible next month. Russell's Comet. It comes close to the earth every forty-five years. I saw it with your mother. You should make a point of seeing it. Then you can tell your children about it, and when it comes around again, in the year two thousand and fifty, they can see it for themselves.

ARIEL

My children. That's nice. You never know, I might just have a couple.

Casey rises with his wine glass.

CASEY

If you'd allow me, I'd like to make a toast to Ariel, our birthday girl. Ariel, back when we first met and shared those years of our lives together, I always thought I was the luckiest guy in New York City. And now, five years later, for us to find each other again-- I know I am. The way you encourage me to go after my dreams and take chances with my life, even if those chances run contrary to your dreams... That's a quality that comes around as often as, well, Russell's Comet. So I raise my glass to you on your fortieth birthday, in the hope I give you some measure of what you give me.

Tears gather in Ariel's eyes and she mouths "you do" to Casey. Neither of them see that Schiller is not at all impressed with Casey's tribute to his daughter. In spite of his apprehension he raises his glass and drinks along with them.

INT. SCHILLER'S BUILDING -- NIGHT/LATER

Schiller returns from Ariel's birthday dinner. Jeff, his affable doorman, opens the door for him.

JEFF

Miss Wolfe is here to see you. I told her you were out but she wanted to wait.

Schiller glances discreetly over his shoulder, sees Heather sitting on the couch by the elevator.

SCHILLER

Thank you, Jeff.

He removes his hat and walks toward her. She stands.

SCHILLER (cont'd)

What's this all about?

HEATHER

Leonard, I want to read your book.

She steps toward him. Schiller scans the lobby, concerned about making a scene.

HEATHER (cont'd)

I know you have a strict rule against showing your work before it's completed, but I want you to break it for me.

SCHILLER

That's out of the question.

HEATHER

Why is it out of the question?

SCHILLER

Because I'm not ready to show it.

HEATHER

That's precisely why you should let me read it. Take a chance. It may free you to finish it.

SCHILLER

I'll finish it by sitting in front of my typewriter. Which is where I need to be first thing in the morning.

Schiller crosses to the elevator and hits the button.

SCHILLER (cont'd)
So if you'll excuse me, I should be
getting to sleep.

HEATHER
I thought you'd make an exception
for me.

SCHILLER
You'll have to make due with my published
novels. Good night, Heather.

A late-returning TENANT enters the lobby. Ever the
gentleman, Schiller steps aside to allow her into the
elevator first. Then he steps in.

HEATHER
I'm sorry, Leonard, but that's not
good enough.

Heather marches into the elevator just before the doors
close.

INT. SCHILLER'S APARTMENT -- IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING

Schiller follows Heather into the living room.

SCHILLER
What aren't you getting, Heather?
What's the problem?

HEATHER
We had an understanding, Leonard.
That if I was to do justice to your
work you would share with me the
events that shaped it.

SCHILLER
That's precisely what I've done -- talk
openly with you about my life and work.

HEATHER
With one glaring omission.

SCHILLER
What in god's name are you talking
about?

HEATHER
Your marriage.

Pause. A shock runs through Schiller but he doesn't show the effect.

SCHILLER

So you've done some investigative work and uncovered details from my personal life.

HEATHER

You've been dishonest with me and it makes me wonder if you're honest with yourself.

SCHILLER

On day one I told you I wouldn't indulge in gossip.

HEATHER

But you had no problem feeding me a myth about a marriage that was a work of art.

SCHILLER

It was a work of art. And like any work of art it was imperfect.

HEATHER

Your wife left you for another man.

SCHILLER

In the year before my wife died we went through some troubled times. What does that tell you about my work?

HEATHER

That life betrayed you and you went into hiding and took your characters with you. They began guarding their lives. They stopped giving in to temptation.

SCHILLER

No, Miss Wolfe, they learned the cost of living only for themselves. I became aware of problems much bigger than my own and you do my writing a great disservice by trying to define it by a single unhappy event in my past. If I had known you would subject my work to such simplistic psychological criticism I never would have wasted my time with you in the first place.

HEATHER

There's no need to be insulting, Leonard.

SCHILLER

You insult me. You insult me by
insinuating I should have written
the same book over and over again.

Silence. Heather appears on the brink of crying or screaming. Unsure what to do with so much feeling, she turns her back on Schiller. Freed from her gaze, Schiller submits to the trembling in his knees. He holds onto the piano to steady himself, then lowers onto the bench.

Heather finally turns around and picks up her coat and bag.

HEATHER

I'm sorry to have kept you up. I
should get going.

She rushes past him. Schiller doesn't lift his eyes from the floor as he calls to her:

SCHILLER

Heather.

She stops in the doorway, listens with her back to Schiller who sits on the piano bench, his gaze still lowered.

SCHILLER (cont'd)

If you'd rather not drive back to
Hoboken at this late hour, you're
welcome to stay in the guest room.

Heather stands perfectly still in the doorway, making up her mind.

INT. SCHILLER'S GUEST ROOM -- FOLLOWING

Heather takes in the few remaining mementos of Ariel's youth spent in this room -- a poster of Machu Picchu shrouded in fog, a framed print of the Dance Theater of Harlem, a few photos with high school friends, a few with her mother and father.

She takes off her sweater and sits on the bed. Schiller knocks.

HEATHER

Come in.

Schiller opens the door. He stands beyond it with fresh towels.

SCHILLER

Would you like me to wake you at
a particular time?

HEATHER

That's okay. I'm always up by seven.

SCHILLER

Well, I'll say good night then.

He takes a short step into the room and sets the towels on the bureau. Heather reaches out and takes his hand. He looks down at his hand in hers. Without fanfare he sits on the bed beside her, leans in, tenderly presses his lips against hers and kisses her.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. HEATHER'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

Empty Starbucks cups and overflowing ashtrays compete for space on Heather's desk with her notebooks and Schiller's novels. She types with such focused intensity she doesn't hear the PHONE. After her terse OUTGOING MESSAGE plays, we hear:

SCHILLER'S VOICE

Hi, Heather. This is Leonard. I just
wanted to wish you well as you finish
your thesis. No need to call back.
I'll see you next Friday as planned.

Heather types through Schiller's message, refusing to let nostalgia corrupt the difficult task at hand.

INT. A ROMANTIC CANDLELIT RESTAURANT -- NIGHT/A WEEK LATER

Schiller sits at a corner table, handsomely dressed in a suit and tie, passing a key on a delicate silver chain from one hand to the other.

The door swings open and Heather enters breathlessly, a manuscript box under her arm. Schiller slips the key into his jacket pocket as she walks over. They embrace awkwardly.

HEATHER

Sorry I'm late. The car died. I
had to take the train.

SCHILLER
That's perfectly all right.
(sees the manuscript box)
Is this it?

HEATHER
It's only a first draft. I hope--

SCHILLER
Don't say a word.

Schiller takes the box from her and they sit. A WAITER approaches -- young, good-looking.

WAITER
How are we doing tonight?

SCHILLER
We're doing fine tonight.

WAITER
A drink to start?

Schiller intends to order them wine but Heather speaks first.

HEATHER
What do you have on tap?

WAITER
Amstel, Bass, Bud...

As he speaks, the waiter smiles at Heather and she smiles back. Schiller's gaze moves between them. He recognizes the complicity of two people who are young and sexually alive.

WAITER (cont'd)
Harp, Moretti, Rolling Rock, Sam Adams--

HEATHER
--I'll have a Moretti.

WAITER
Good choice. And for you, Sir?

SCHILLER
A glass of the house white.

WAITER
I won't be a minute.

He saunters off to get their drinks. Schiller watches him go. Heather smiles guiltily. A brief silence. Then Schiller reaches into his coat pocket and pulls out THE KEY CHAIN.

SCHILLER

There's something I'd like to give you.
This is the key to my apartment.
I thought since you spend so much time
in the city, if there are some nights
when you don't want to go all the way
back to Hoboken, you could stay in the
guest room. Or if you need somewhere
to read in the afternoons. I just want
you to know that you always have a place
where you can come without explaining
yourself.

Heather is frozen in indecision, but quickly gathers her
composure, takes the key and smiles.

HEATHER

This is an honor.

Schiller smiles modestly and raises his glass--

SCHILLER

Here's to the completion of many
months of hard work.

Heather smiles weakly and raises her glass of beer.

HEATHER

I should remind you that it's only
a draft. I still plan to do a lot
more work on it.

SCHILLER

Don't worry so much.

They clink glasses and drink.

EXT. BROADWAY AND 89TH STREET -- NIGHT/LATER

Schiller and Heather walk up Broadway. Schiller talks
rapidly, in the hope he might finally say something that
recaptures Heather's interest.

SCHILLER

If you are going to continue with literary
criticism, I should lend you some books
by the great critics of my era.

HEATHER

I'd appreciate that.

SCHILLER

I doubt if they're taught in the academy these days. Which is all to their credit. They weren't theorists, they were readers.

HEATHER

I would like to keep doing criticism. It's a great excuse to read my favorite books over and over again.

Schiller touches Heather's arm.

SCHILLER

I need to hold on for a moment.

He sits on a bench outside a cafe. She kneels before him.

HEATHER

Leonard, are you all right? Can I help you? How can I help you?

SCHILLER

No, really. I'm fine. I just need to sit for a minute.

Heather continues to study Schiller with concern. He takes a few breaths, hoping to make quick work of this moment of weakness.

HEATHER

Are you okay?

SCHILLER

Much better. Just a touch of heartburn. Let's continue, shall we.

He rises, forcing a smile of nonchalance.

HEATHER

I'll flag a cab.

SCHILLER

No, I'm fine. I'd rather walk. It's a lovely evening.

HEATHER

Yes it is.

He offers his arm. She takes it and they continue uptown.

INT. SCHILLER'S LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT/FOLLOWING

Heather stands patiently as Schiller scans his bookshelves and pulls down four volumes.

SCHILLER
Kazin, Trilling, Howe, and especially,
Edmund Wilson. Take your time with them.

HEATHER
That's so generous of you.

Pause. The evening, and more significantly, their relationship, has come to an end and they both know it.

HEATHER (cont'd)
Thank you for a wonderful evening.

SCHILLER
I enjoyed myself too.

Heather hugs Schiller with a fierceness that surprises him. She lets go but as she turns to pick up the books and go, Schiller pulls her back into his embrace and kisses her. It's not a faint kiss. Heather gently breaks away. She meets his gaze for a brief moment, then, without a word, she turns and leaves.

Schiller listens to the door close behind her, then sees she's left the books of criticism behind. He gathers them, reflexively moves toward the door, then stops and returns them to the bookshelf.

He retrieves Heather's thesis and sits on the couch. He leans forward, sets it on the coffee table, and lifts the cover off the box.

INT. ARIEL'S APARTMENT -- LATE NIGHT/LATER

Casey lies in bed, completely immersed in a copy of Schiller's novel, *The Lost City*, the very book which so troubled Heather.

In the bathroom, Ariel runs a bath. She comes into the bedroom, pulls a booklet from her bag, brings it to the bed.

ARIEL
Hey, Happer.

CASEY
Hey, Flapper.

ARIEL
What are you reading?

CASEY

Your dad's last novel, *The Lost City*.
I really like this book. It's much
stronger than his first book. That
one was so soft and sentimental.

ARIEL

Soft and sentimental? My father?

CASEY

It was one of those relationship books,
two couples and all their problems.
But this one is *about* something.
It has guts.

Pause. Casey takes note of the booklet in Ariel's hands.

CASEY (cont'd)

What do you got there?

ARIEL

A course guide for the master's program
in Expressive Arts Therapy at The New
School.

CASEY

And what exactly is Expressive Arts
Therapy?

ARIEL

It uses movement and dance to work
through your issues.

CASEY

Who would benefit from this treatment?

ARIEL

Let's just say someone who has a
difficult time tapping into his soft
and sentimental side.

Ariel pops up, smiling. Casey swipes at her affectionately.
Laughs at himself.

INT. SCHILLER'S LIVING ROOM -- SEVERAL HOURS LATER

Schiller sits on the couch, intently reading the last page of
Heather's thesis. He finishes and remains still for a long
moment, then he picks up a red pencil, returns to the first
page and starts to mark it.

SCHILLER (V.O.)

I can't say your study filled me with elation, but I appreciate your honesty, your kind remarks about the first two books, and, especially, the seriousness with which you've thought about my work.

INT. HEATHER'S LOBBY/MAILBOX -- NIGHT

Schiller's V.O. continues as Heather flips through her mail and comes to the large brown envelope with Schiller's return address. She opens it and sees Schiller's note.

SCHILLER (V.O.)

...I'm grateful that you looked for a common thread in my work, although I do wonder whether it was precisely your conclusion that my true theme is 'freedom' that left you unable to appreciate my two later books, especially *The Lost City*.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY -- DAY

Schiller's VOICE OVER continues as Heather picks her way through a crowded sidewalk.

SCHILLER (V.O.)

But I suppose it's not for me to say. A writer isn't the best judge of his own work. I once knew a literary critic who, when asked to characterize his critical method, said that he simply tried to read the hell out of a book.

INT. SANDRA'S OFFICE -- DAY/FOLLOWING

Sandra sits in a chair in the center of her office. Heather stands before her, reading aloud Schiller's letter.

HEATHER

'You have certainly read the hell out of mine, and that's all a writer can ask. Yours, Leonard. P.S. Your prose is good, but here and there it could be more direct. I made a few suggestions on the manuscript.'

Heather drops into the seat across from Sandra, unsettled by Schiller's benevolence.

HEATHER (cont'd)

And he went ahead and gave me a total line-edit. He strengthened all my arguments and the amazing thing is, he made it much more clearly critical of his own work.

SANDRA

That's great, you must be thrilled.

HEATHER

I should be, shouldn't I?

INT. SCHILLER'S KITCHEN -- DAY/SAME

Schiller sits at the table. Ariel can sense all is not well with him. She arranges a plate of tea and biscuits as they talk.

ARIEL

How's the writing going?

SCHILLER

Not too bad, I suppose.

ARIEL

I haven't seen your friend Heather around in a while. Where's she been?

SCHILLER

Couldn't say. Her work is done.

ARIEL

Did she ever write that book, or whatever it was?

SCHILLER

Master's thesis. It wasn't very good. Kind of half-baked, really.

ARIEL

I'm not surprised.

Schiller's face tightens. Ariel doesn't notice as she brings the tea and biscuits to the table.

ARIEL (cont'd)

Hey, Dad! *The Young Girls of Rochefort* is playing at the Cinema Village. Would you like to join me and Casey?

SCHILLER

I don't think so. Not tonight.

ARIEL

Come on, Dad. It's a brand new print.

SCHILLER

I'm really not up to it.

ARIEL

But you love that movie.

SCHILLER

What do you mean, you're not surprised?

ARIEL

Excuse me?

SCHILLER

Why are you *not* surprised? She graduated from an Ivy League school. Do you have any idea how much discipline and hard work that takes? What basis do you have for denigrating her work?

ARIEL

Hey, you're the one who said it was half-baked.

SCHILLER

She's been published in a major literary journal.

ARIEL

I didn't mean anything by it. She just didn't impress me as being deep enough to write about your work. I thought she'd be wasting your valuable time.

SCHILLER

Wasting valuable time. Now there's a subject you're well-schooled in.

ARIEL

You're way out of line, Leonard Schiller. You don't know what goes on between Casey and me. You don't know the first thing about our relationship.

SCHILLER

I know enough. I was there for his toast to you on your birthday. Apparently, I'm the only one who heard it.

ARIEL

I heard it. He said he feels lucky that he found me again.

SCHILLER

He said you give him everything and ask for so little in return. Of course he feels lucky. How can you accept that condition? A man who says you're secondary to his dreams and always will be.

ARIEL

I don't know, Dad. How did Mom do it?

Ariel glares fiercely at her father, then grabs her things and walks out. Schiller stares at the empty doorway.

EXT. CINEMA VILLAGE -- LATE AFTERNOON/FOLLOWING

Ariel and Casey stand in line to buy tickets. To their right is the ticket-holder's line for *The Young Girls of Rochefort*. To their left is the line for *The Battle of Algiers*.

ARIEL

Oh come on, Casey. You look like you're going to the dentist. Keep an open mind. You may even enjoy it.

CASEY

Two hours of French people singing and dancing for no apparent reason?

ARIEL

It would be a better world if everybody sang and danced for no apparent reason.

CASEY

Just remember your side of the deal. Next week we come back for *The Battle of Algiers*.

ARIEL

You know what, Casey, go see *The Battle of Algiers*.

CASEY

No, no. A deal's a deal.

ARIEL

Go ahead. See the movie you want to see.

CASEY

Really? Sure you don't mind?

ARIEL

What's the difference? We're just sitting in the dark anyway, right?

CASEY

Okay. Great. You go to your movie, I'll go to mine. We can discuss them later over dinner.

They step up to the cashier. Casey pays.

CASEY (cont'd)

One for *Rochefort*, one for *Algiers*.

INT. LOBBY OF SCHILLER'S BUILDING -- LATE AFTERNOON/FOLLOWING

Heather strides up to Jeff, the doorman.

JEFF

And how are you today, Ms. Wolfe?

HEATHER

I'm all right, Jeff, thanks. Is the professor home?

Jeff picks up the house phone. RINGS Schiller.

JEFF

He took a walk this morning, but he's been back for hours.

HEATHER

That's odd. I just phoned him twenty minutes ago. There was no answer.

JEFF

Maybe he's taking a nap. He's not picking up.

HEATHER

He never naps late in the afternoon, it keeps him up at night.

They look at each other as the phone continues to RING on Schiller's end. Heather doesn't wait for Jeff to hang up, bolts for the elevator.

INT. SCHILLER'S APARTMENT -- CONTINUOUS

Heather unlocks the door with her key. Jeff rushes in with her. She CALLS OUT--

HEATHER

Leonard?

Down the hall, they split up and meet again in

INT. SCHILLER'S BATHROOM -- DAY/CONTINUOUS

They find Schiller slumped on the floor, disoriented, his pills and a glass of water spilled on the floor.

HEATHER

Leonard, are you alright?

Schiller just looks at her, an expression of urgency in his eyes.

JEFF

Let me help you up, Professor.

Jeff and Heather lift him onto the toilet. In his delirium, Schiller's eyes attempt to zero in on Heather. He moves his lips, but no sound comes out.

INT. ROOSEVELT HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM -- EVENING/FOLLOWING

Heather sits alone, worried, frightened, nursing a cup of vending machine coffee. She looks up to see Ariel and Casey enter. Ariel surprises her with a hug.

ARIEL

How is he?

HEATHER

I don't know.

ARIEL

What happened to him? Did they tell you what happened?

HEATHER

They can't be sure yet, but they think it might be a stroke.

Ariel bolts off to look for the attending doctor, leaving Casey and Heather alone. Heather extends her hand.

HEATHER (cont'd)
Hi, I'm Heather Wolfe, I'm a friend
of Leonard's.

CASEY
Oh, yeah, Heather. I've heard a lot
about you. You're writing the book
about Leonard, right?

HEATHER
It's just a thesis.

CASEY
I've just been reading *The Lost City*.
It's brilliant.

HEATHER
Yes it is.

Ariel re-enters the waiting room.

ARIEL
They said the doctor will be out
shortly. Maybe it's not a stroke.
It might just be stress. He has
been under a lot of stress lately.

Her glance at Heather carries a hint of accusation.

HEATHER
He has been having a hard time
finishing his book.

Ariel looks at Heather dismissively. She takes Casey's arm and leads him a few steps away. Heather goes and sits down alone.

ARIEL
If I fall apart, will you take care
of me?

CASEY
I will if you do, but you won't.

ARIEL
I can accept that he's going to die.
But I can't accept that he's going
to be dead forever.

The door opens and DOCTOR MATHIS walks in. Ariel, Casey, and Heather rush toward him. Ariel introduces herself and Casey.

DR. MATHIS

First, let me tell you that your father is resting comfortably. His vital signs are stable. But it does appear that he's suffered a fairly large stroke.

Ariel reaches for Casey's hand.

DR. MATHIS (cont'd)

He hasn't done any further damage to his heart, which is encouraging, but he's still not responsive. It'll be twenty-four hours or so before we really know where we are.

ARIEL

Can I see him?

DR. MATHIS

Yes, of course. He may not know you're there. But go ahead and talk to him just the same.

ARIEL

I'd like to see him now please.

DR. MATHIS

I'll be right back.

The doctor smiles warmly and walks out. Ariel and Casey hurry after him. Ariel suddenly stops and spins back toward Heather.

ARIEL

Is this what you mean by shaking things up, Heather? Is this what you had in mind?

INT. INTENSIVE CARE UNIT -- NIGHT/FOLLOWING

Schiller lies under a sheet, a tube in his nose, another in his arm.

Casey waits by the door as Ariel walks up to her father, takes his hand, studies his face and in a deeply emotional but strangely calm voice repeats the same phrase.

ARIEL

I love you. I love you. I love you.

INT. ARIEL'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT/FOLLOWING

Ariel lies flat and motionless on her back on the bed. Casey walks in from the living room and slides down next to her. He takes her in his arms. She begins kissing him at once, with savage intensity. She pulls his shirt loose, then suddenly springs from the bed, starts toward the bathroom. He looks up at her questioningly.

ARIEL
Diaphragm.

INT. ARIEL'S BATHROOM -- NIGHT/CONTINUOUS

Ariel removes her diaphragm from the medicine cabinet. She closes the cabinet and catches her reflection in the mirror.

INT. ARIEL'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT/FOLLOWING

The bathroom door opens and Ariel steps out, suddenly unable to look at Casey. She paces between the living room and bedroom before she finally stops in the doorway and turns toward him. He sits up on one arm, a little slow to sense the change that has come over her.

ARIEL
I can't do it, Case.

CASEY
Do what?

ARIEL
I can't do hot and light. I tried
but I can't.

CASEY
Hey, I never called it hot and light.
That's your term.

ARIEL
Oh yeah? What do you call it?

CASEY
Love. That's what I call it.

ARIEL
With one condition. And I can't
live with it. I never could.

Casey swings his legs over the bed and sits up, a little impatient with the grim turn in the conversation.

CASEY

I thought that was behind us.

ARIEL

What can I say, Case? I have this bad habit of silencing myself with you. I barely survived it last time. Doesn't say much for me if I get back in line for more of the same. Does it?

CASEY

Come on, Ariel. Why go back there? We talked all that through.

ARIEL

We never talked it through. You defended yourself and I got over it.

CASEY

You're the one who kicked me out. I wanted to stay.

ARIEL

Lose the kid, but let's go on as if nothing has changed. How long do you think that would have lasted? Let's be honest, Case.

Pause.

ARIEL (cont'd)

It may not be my fate to have children and I can live with that. I just can't live without possibility. But you're a closed man, Casey. I'm sorry, but there's not enough air in your world.

Silence. Ariel turns and walks into the living room, sits on the edge of the low table and looks plainly at Casey from a distance.

CASEY

Can we sleep on it?

ARIEL

Is there anything to sleep on?

CASEY

I'm not going to leave you alone, Ariel.
Not tonight. Not with Leonard in the
state he's in.

ARIEL

That's exactly why you have to leave.
If anything happens to my father I'll
never be this strong again.

Casey does the only thing he can do. He buttons his shirt,
slips on his shoes, kisses Ariel goodbye and leaves.

The intense emotions of the evening fight their way to the
surface. Ariel sits at the table and holds on.

EXT. SHOTS OF NEW YORK IN WINTER -- DAY

The crush on Broadway. A green light turns red and people
cross the street. A family walks toward Riverside Park.

Life goes on.

INT. SCHILLER'S APARTMENT -- WEEKS LATER

The front door opens and Ariel walks Schiller into the
apartment. She holds him steady as he puts down his cane and
removes his hat, scarf, and overcoat.

ARIEL

Maybe a little tea or something to drink.

She holds Schiller's arm and leads him gingerly into the
kitchen. In his absence Ariel has moved Schiller's easy chair
into the kitchen. She helps him into it.

ARIEL (cont'd)

Can I get you something to drink?
Would you like some tea?

Schiller shakes his head heavily.

Ariel walks back into the front hallway and picks up the
walker parked there. She returns to the kitchen to see that
Schiller has risen from his seat and moved to the counter
where he attempts to open a jar of jelly. The lid won't
budge. Ariel reaches to assist but he swats at her helping
hand and turns away and continues to struggle with the lid
himself.

ARIEL (cont'd)
Dad, I'm leaving your walker right
outside the door.

SCHILLER
My goodness. A walker.

Ariel walks out. Only now does Schiller turn and glance at
the walker.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- LATER THAT NIGHT

Ariel is asleep on the couch, the TV flickering across the
room. The sound of TYPING wakes her.

SHE WALKS DOWN THE HALLWAY to Schiller's writing room and knocks.
There's no answer, just the weak SLAP of the keys. She lets
herself in.

INT. SCHILLER'S WRITING ROOM -- SAME

Ariel sees her father hunched over the typewriter.

ARIEL
Shouldn't you be resting? Are you
sure you should be working so soon?

SCHILLER
I'm running out of time, dear. I
have to finish.

He turns back to the page in his typewriter. Ariel observes
the effort it takes for his slow, shaking hands to push the
keys down. After a moment he stops typing and looks up at her.

SCHILLER (cont'd)
My daughter.

These two simple words reach the place where Ariel's most
vulnerable. She smiles with emotion and as her father
resumes typing she backs out of the room, slowly closing the
door.

EXT. RIVERSIDE PARK -- LATE AFTERNOON

Wind off the Hudson River shakes the barren trees in the empty park. From beyond comes the hum of the cars racing by on the West Side Highway.

INT. SCHILLER'S APARTMENT -- DAY

The DOORBELL. Ariel enters the front hallway from the kitchen and opens the door. Standing in the hall, holding a small bouquet of flowers, is Heather.

ARIEL

Hello, Heather. I'm glad you could come by.

HEATHER

I meant to come earlier.

ARIEL

Well, your visits have always meant a lot to him.

HEATHER

Oh, thank you. How has he been feeling?

ARIEL

He gets tired after about a half hour, but he's a lot better than he was a month ago. I'll get a vase for those.

Ariel takes the flowers and goes to the kitchen.

Heather drifts down the hallway and straightens her hair in the mirror. She turns at the opening of the door to Schiller's study. Schiller emerges slowly on his cane. He's dressed neatly in a suit and tie, but there's an air of imbalance about him. He does not raise his voice to cover the distance between them.

SCHILLER

Heather.

Ariel re-enters arranging Heather's flowers in a vase.

ARIEL

Daddy, did you see the lovely flowers Heather brought?

SCHILLER

Lovely.

Ariel sets them down, picks up her purse on her way out.

ARIEL
Your snack is ready, Dad. I'll be
back in about an hour. Bye, Heather,
nice to see you.

Ariel exits. Schiller and Heather stare at each other, the long hallway between them.

INT. SCHILLER'S KITCHEN -- FOLLOWING

Schiller lowers himself into his easy chair. Tea and toast wait for him.

Heather dips into the refrigerator and helps herself to a glass of juice. She sits across from Schiller.

HEATHER
How are you?

SCHILLER
Hanging on.

HEATHER
Ariel tells me you're working again.

SCHILLER
I sit, I look for the typewriter keys,
sometimes I can find them.

HEATHER
Well I'm glad you're working. I'm
glad you're going to finish your book.

He breaks off a slice of toast and brings it toward his mouth. Heather notices the tremor in his hand.

HEATHER (cont'd)
I was reading about how Rosellen Brown
got all her early books back in print
after she hit it big with *Before And After*.
I think that could happen for you.

Schiller nods vaguely.

HEATHER (cont'd)
It's really wonderful that you're
going on. I have a good feeling about
this new book. I have a feeling that
this is going to be your best.

Schiller seems deeply moved. He reaches out. Heather smiles, expecting the same caress of the air around her face as on the first night they spent together. She leans forward to close the distance, unprepared when Schiller, using the meaty center of his palm, SLAPS her. Full on the mouth.

Schiller settles back in his chair.

HEATHER (cont'd)
I didn't deserve that.

Schiller doesn't look at her. He lifts his coffee cup with a steady hand and takes a long sip. Heather sits stoically without making a sound as TEARS stream down her face.

HEATHER (cont'd)
I'm sorry everything got so fucked up.

SCHILLER
You gave an old man some excitement.

He looks at her searchingly, taking her in fully.

SCHILLER (cont'd)
It's been good knowing you.

HEATHER
I got the best of the bargain.

The only thing left to do is leave. Except she can't. She sits motionless in the fading afternoon light.

Schiller realizes she isn't leaving. He adjusts his pillow, leans back and closes his eyes. All we hear is the ticking of the wall clock, Schiller's labored breathing, and Heather quietly sipping her juice.

Soon it's obvious that he has fallen asleep. Heather rises, takes out the key he gave her and puts it on the table. From her purse she takes the copy of *The Lost City* that Schiller loaned her and the PHOTO of young Schiller that she stole on the same visit. She sets them beside the key and walks out of Schiller's apartment for the last time.

INT. WEST SIDE HEALTH AND FITNESS -- DAY

Ariel has just finished teaching. She gathers her things and turns to leave, sees Casey in the doorway.

CASEY

Excuse me, is this the right room
for Advanced Booty Ballet?

Ariel smiles wryly, glad to see him but not wanting to show it.

ARIEL

Booty Ballet is across the hall.
This is a Pilates mat class.

CASEY

Damn, I've just got to do something
about this big old caboose of mine.
In that case, do you have time for
a cup of coffee?

ARIEL

Sorry, I don't. I have another
class in fifteen.

CASEY

How about after class?

ARIEL

Can't do it. I have to get uptown.
I have school tonight.

CASEY

You got into that arts therapy program?
There's a cause for celebration. I'm
taking you out for dinner after school.

ARIEL

I don't think it's such a good idea.

CASEY

I have to disagree with you, Schiller.
I've been doing a lot of thinking
and I'm seeing things more clearly.

ARIEL

People don't change, Casey. Not
that fast.

CASEY

I know my reputation precedes me but
I'm ready to make some big changes.

ARIEL

They won't hold. You don't want to
give up the comfort of being together.
But that's not change. That's fear
of change.

CASEY

Come on, Ariel. You're selling me short here.

ARIEL

Let's face the facts, Case. We're not a good match. It kills me to let you go. But I am. I'm letting you go.

The door to the studio opens and Chelsea, Ariel's fellow instructor, bursts in--

CHELSEA

Oh, Ariel-- there you are. Please tell me you're free to cover my three o'clock tomorrow.

ARIEL

Sure, I can cover you.

CHELSEA

Oh you're a lifesaver. I cracked a crown and that's the only time my dentist can get me in this week.

ARIEL

Oh no-- damn! What am I saying-- I've got to take my father to the doctor tomorrow. Did you ask Brenda?

CHELSEA

She has a private. And Ruthie's out of town.

CASEY

I'll do it.

They both look at him, perplexed.

ARIEL

You can't teach yoga.

CASEY

No, I'll take your dad to his doctor's appointment.

ARIEL

Really?

CASEY

Sure. Why not?

ARIEL
(to Chelsea)
Okay. You're covered.

CHELSEA
Thank you, kind stranger, you've earned
many karma points.

Chelsea leaves. Ariel looks at Casey with a wary smile.

ARIEL
This doesn't change anything, you know.

CASEY
Just helping out. Nothing more than that.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE -- DAY

Casey sits in the waiting room. The door opens and Schiller comes out, looking as if he's been through an ordeal. Casey stands and holds Schiller's coat open for him.

CASEY
How did it go?

SCHILLER
Don't grow old, that's my advice.

EXT. BROADWAY -- DAY/FOLLOWING

Casey and Schiller walk uptown. Casey has a hard time walking slowly enough to keep pace with Schiller. Suddenly, Schiller stops in his tracks.

SCHILLER
Oh my.

CASEY
Is something wrong?

SCHILLER
My stomach.

Schiller grips his cane with a pained look on his face. Casey realizes that he has soiled himself.

SCHILLER (cont'd)
My body is not my own. It's time
to die.

CASEY
It's not time to die, it's time
to get you to a restroom.

Casey supports Schiller as they cut toward the bar across the street.

SCHILLER
I'm sorry you have to go through this.

CASEY
Don't mention it.

SCHILLER
Thank you. I don't want to make a scene.

CASEY
Don't worry about it.

INT. BAR -- FOLLOWING

Casey helps Schiller toward the bathroom. The BARTENDER, a red-faced man in his fifties, looks at them.

BARTENDER
Can I help you?

SCHILLER
We're fine.

BARTENDER
Restroom's for customers only.

Casey slaps a twenty dollar bill on the bar.

CASEY
We're customers.

Casey drags Schiller into the men's room. The door closes behind them.

INT. SCHILLER'S APARTMENT -- LATE AFTERNOON/FOLLOWING

Through the partially opened bathroom door we see Casey kneeling by the bathtub, a towel draped over his shoulder, bracing himself to help Schiller out of the tub.

CASEY
Okay, Leonard, on three. One,
two, three--

A grunt of exertion and sloshing of water is followed by the appearance of Schiller being hoisted by Casey out of the tub.

INT. SCHILLER'S LIVING ROOM -- LATER

Schiller enters in his bathrobe, carrying a thick manuscript box, and helps himself into an easy chair. Casey returns from the kitchen with a cup of tea for Schiller.

SCHILLER
Thank you. That seems to be all
I can say to you today.

CASEY
Let that 'thank you' stand for
all other 'thank you's.'

SCHILLER
All right.

Schiller smiles weakly and sips his tea.

SCHILLER (cont'd)
I wonder if I might be so bold as
to ask one more favor of you.

CASEY
What can I do for you?

SCHILLER
(extending the manuscript box)
Perhaps you could find a place to
store this for me.

CASEY
What is it?

SCHILLER
Something I've been working on.

Casey accepts the box. Feels its prodigious weight. Takes the lid off.

CASEY

Leonard, this is your novel. You've been working on this for ten years.

SCHILLER

Precisely. And I've only recently come to realize why it's eluded me for so long.

CASEY

Why is that?

SCHILLER

My characters haven't done anything interesting. I followed them faithfully for a decade but I finally have to admit they never will.

CASEY

Why not put it in your closet and take a little time away from them? You may be inspired to figure out what to do.

SCHILLER

I already know what to do but that would mean starting over and I'm not sure I have the strength.

CASEY

I understand but all the same I can't imagine Leonard Schiller not working on a novel.

A moment passes. Schiller smiles sadly at Casey.

SCHILLER

And what are you going to do now, my friend?

CASEY

Right now I think I'm going to go home and sleep for a thousand years.

SCHILLER

You've earned it. Thank you, Casey.

Schiller holds out his hand. Casey shakes it.

CASEY

You're welcome, Leonard.

EXT. RIVERSIDE DRIVE -- LATE AFTERNOON

The last golden light of the day filters through the trees lining the quiet park drive.

INT. CASEY'S APARTMENT -- EVENING

Casey sleeps in his clothes on top of the covers. Ariel sits next to him, watching him. He slowly opens his eyes.

CASEY

You're glowing at me again.

(Ariel says nothing)

What?

ARIEL

I talked to my Dad.

CASEY

And?

ARIEL

Let's just say you have a fan in Leonard Schiller.

CASEY

What did he say?

ARIEL

He said you held his hand in hell.

CASEY

Not hell. I don't think he said hell. He must have said Hell's Kitchen.

Pause.

CASEY (cont'd)

Hey, how'd you get in here?

ARIEL

Just because I let you go doesn't mean I turned in my key.

CASEY

I had to turn in mine. That doesn't seem fair.

ARIEL

Fair's got nothing to do with it.

INT. SCHILLER'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Schiller shuffles in from the hallway in his bathrobe, a cup of tea in one hand, a plate of toast in the other. He sets down his tea and toast on the night table and sits on the edge of the bed, beside Flaubert's *Sentimental Education* spread atop the bed cover.

INT. SCHILLER'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT/FOLLOWING

The tea cup is full but no longer steaming. The toast is untouched. *Sentimental Education* is spread at the same page on Schiller's bed cover. The bed is empty.

INT. SCHILLER'S WRITING ROOM -- NIGHT/SAME

EXTREME CU of Schiller's face. As in the first shot of the film, his eyes are perfectly still and his hands are clasped at his chin.

PULL BACK SLOWLY and soon we see that Schiller once again sits before his typewriter, his gaze set on the empty page scrolled to the top line.

The SLOW PULL BACK stops finally outside the door of his writing room, revealing the author in his solitude, sitting in absolute stillness and silence before the question of starting over. Then his hands separate and his fingers drop to the typewriter keys, and we hear the faint percussive sound of TYPING.

THE END