

LADY EVA

by
Steven Clark

© 2016

SAClark69@verizon.net

FADE IN:

INT. OFFICE - DAY

A neat desk. Various family photos. A bachelor's degree hangs on an ego wall along with several framed inspirational quotes, one more ridiculous than the next.

TYLER LEEDS (34), stylish-casual, sits on a chair next to the desk facing the ego wall. He's read every inspirational quote at least twice. He checks his watch, turn around.

Leaning against a wall and staring out the window is BRIAN TASSER (47). A serious man who missed a few wrinkles on his suit. Serious about what, no one is really quite sure.

TYLER

Sir, I hafta get to work.

BRIAN

You are at work.

TYLER

Work is where they pay me, sir.

BRIAN POV: On the STREET below he locks in on...

A WOMAN and a YOUNG CHILD, hand-in-hand, as they playfully traverse the pavement. Arms swinging, laughing. A BEAT, then --

ON BRIAN:

You can almost see the light bulb above his head.

BRIAN

Rampant Harlots Hit Main Street.

TYLER

Sir?

Brian goes to his desk, sits, then opens a drawer and slams down a copy of the MILLTOWN PRESS.

BRIAN

That's gonna be our headline. Well, maybe not that exactly. But that's what we're gonna do. Expose the underbelly of this town. The prostitutes... The whores.

(taps his finger on the paper)

Right here on the front page. And you're gonna write it.

TYLER

I am?

BRIAN

Yeah. Whaddya think?

TYLER

I don't the necessary contacts.

BRIAN

(grins)

We have contacts. Don't worry. We'll set up the interviews. You get the background. The little things. Then we unleash front page hell.

TYLER

But why?

BRIAN

This town's gone to shit, son. You've seen it.

TYLER

Yeah, well, the factory shut down three years ago. Moved upstate. Maybe we should do a story on that.

Brian scoffs at this.

BRIAN

Stories like that don't sell papers. You know that.

TYLER

The Milltown Press is free.

Brian glares at him. Pounds a chubby fist on the desk.

BRIAN

And it's the best goddamn free paper
in the county.

INT. CAR (MOVING) - DAY

The intermittent swish-swash of wiper blades. The pitter-pat of rain.

EVA (V.O.)

So, you're from the Milltown Press,
huh?

TYLER (V.O.)

That's right.

An exit sign approaches. He takes it.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Wannabe hipster hang out.

At a table, across from Tyler, sits EVA (41), back alley attractive, long chestnut hair. Behind the layers of skin toner, you can tell elegance once resided here.

EVA

Isn't that the paper that had a
picture of Jesus playing soccer on it
last month?

Tyler shifts in his seat.

TYLER

That wasn't me.

EVA

I would certainly hope not. so,
where'd you write before this?

TYLER
I'm a freelancer.

EVA
That wasn't my question.

Tyler pulls out a digital recorder, places it on the table.

TYLER
Who's doing this interview?

Eva twirls her hair, sips from her cup.

TYLER
Look. I appreciate your time, I do.
This is not my day job. I'm a
furniture salesman, okay? This isn't
the New York Times. I'm just a local
reporter doing a story. The counter
culture of prostitution in this part
of town...

She puts her hand up.

EVA
Whoa, whoa, whoa. Counter culture?
(he flicks the recorder
on)
Lemme tell ya something. I'm not part
of no counter culture. Girls out there
today scorin' fifty here, fifty there.
Gucci bags and iPads? That's not me.
Never was.

TYLER
Then who are you?

Someone snickers. Tyler looks beyond Eva to a table where two
MEN, both early twenties, hunker down.

Without turning --

EVA
See those two?
(Tyler nods)
(MORE)

EVA (cont'd)

Faux rich kids, arrogant disposition?
That one with with the messy head?
He's my eight o'clock.

The one she described locks eyes with Tyler, then quickly turns away.

TYLER

Really?

Eva nods, *tings* her mug with a French cut nail.

EVA

Married his high school sweetheart.
That's what they do around here. They
graduate, marry, then go across the
river over in Youngstown to find work.
You do it any different?

TYLER

I'm not from here.

EVA

Oh. Up river guy.

TYLER

So, if he's married why does he still
come and see you?

She leans in close, eyes darting back and forth.

EVA

(whispers)

I cover my teeth better than she does.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Eva and Tyler stroll the strip. Tired shops trying desperately to look current. *For Lease, For Rent* in every other window.

EVA

This place used to feed off the city.
Not so much now. They'd escape here
when they needed a break. Not me.

(MORE)

EVA (cont'd)

I left home at sixteen and headed
straight for the beast.

Tyler scribbles in a note pad, narrowly avoids slamming into a
lamp post.

TYLER

Why so young?

EVA

My mother had a bottle to keep her
company. To her I was just an ornament
on a tree. Something she could show
off when the neighbors passed.

TYLER

And your Father?

Eva struts a little, pumps her arms like she's dancing.

EVA

I used to be a dancer, you know.
Ballet, jazz, ballroom. I was really
good. I'd always dreamed of my Father
and I dancing at my wedding. Arm-in-
arm, gliding across the floor like we
were tip-toeing on the clouds.

TYLER

What became of that dream?

Silence, save for the morning traffic.

EVA

He probably would've missed that, too.

She reaches into her purse, pulls a set of keys. She aims them
at a car ahead on their left. *BEEP BEEP*.

EVA

Look, I know I said I'd give you my
time, but I'm running late.

Tyler looks confused. He lowers his note pad.

TYLER

I need more. I mean -- prostitution,
it's relation to the drug epidemic.
The degradation of this town...

She puts her hand up, snatches his pad and pen and writes something down.

EVA

You really want more?

TYLER

(laughs, and)

Yes!

She hands the note pad back.

EVA

Call me tomorrow 'round five.

Tyler looks up. Thinking.

TYLER

Five o'clock... I'm working till six.

Eva steps from the curb. Her expensive heels *click* on the wet street. Tight black leggings hug shapely legs up to...

She turns, bends, and for the first time -- a hint of spectacular cleavage spills out from her fur-lined coat, zippered half-way up.

Her playful eyes meet his.

EVA

Well, get un-worked.

INT. DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

Sofa's, love seats, recliners and beds. In the background, Muzak destroys a perfectly good Beatles song.

Tyler, shirt and tie, shakes hands with someone O.S. He watches as they go.

He turns his back, and steps deeper into a sea of furniture. He gently slides a finger across a leather sectional.

EXT. TRAILER HOME - NIGHT

Early evening light. In the middle of nowhere, a clearing and -- a white MOTOR HOME, more than modest in size. Party lights dangle along the edge of an awning that juts out over the steps.

Eva stands out front, bundled up, smoking a cigarette. She watches as --

Tyler's car rolls up. He kills the engine, gets out. The door closing echos off an abundance of trees set far back along the perimeter.

EVA

You found me.

TYLER

Amazingly. More like a treasure hunt.

Eva flicks her cigarette, blows out the last of the smoke.

EVA

Something like that.

INT. TRAILER HOME - NIGHT

Inside it's neat and expensive looking -- lush carpeting, Tiffany lamps covered with crimson scarves, fine leather seating. Impressive stuff.

TYLER

Nice place.

She heads to the kitchen.

EVA

Thanks. Want some coffee?

TYLER

Sure, if you're gonna have some.

KITCHEN

Eva inserts a K-Cup into a Keurig. In no time it's done, and she returns to the

LIVING ROOM

To find Tyler gazing at a picture on the wall --

A young Eva with several other WOMEN, dressed to the nines. Not slutty, as one might imagine, but tasteful. And dignified.

Handwritten, along the bottom: *The Lady's Club*.

She hands him the mug.

EVA

1993. I was nineteen.

TYLER

What's the Lady's Club?

EVA

(smiles)

We were high end all the way. Our clientele were the richest of the rich. Wall Street business types. Tycoons.

TYLER

Trump?

EVA

(chuckles)

Not me. Her.

She points to an exquisite, leggy blond.

TYLER

Wow.

EVA

See, we weren't a part of no counter culture. Not hookers. Not cheap sluts. We cost money. Real money.

(MORE)

EVA (cont'd)

We were our own entity. And we stuck together.

Another picture further down. This one of a young Eva and a MAN -- distinguished in a tuxedo with graying hair, raising a champagne glass.

Tyler taps the picture.

TYLER

This guy looks really familiar.

EVA

He should. That's Sandy Shore.

TYLER

Sandy Shore... You mean Sanderson Shore, the millionaire?

EVA

Multi-millionaire. He was so different than the rest.

Tyler takes out his recorder.

TYLER

How so?

She turns to him, her eyes aglow. Suddenly she's nineteen again, her body fluid and young. And now --

INT. OFFICE

A portly MAN (57), big-ticket suit, bad comb over, sits behind a solid oak desk talking on the phone. He holds up a chubby finger as he looks our way.

EVA (V.O.)

The CEO of Titan Industries would hire us all -- the entire Lady's Club -- for an end of the year party. It was a really big deal. We were there every year.

INT. BALLROOM

A massive room bathed in gold light. Numerous PEOPLE dance and make merry -- their conversations mesh together in one excited hum and...

EVA (V.O.)

Those gatherings were so grand. No expense spared. Ice sculptures and caviar. Hundred dollar bottles of champagne like it was nothing.

An ice sculpture of a swan... Bottles of champagne in buckets overflowing with ice... Lobsters and filet mignon.

And there, sipping a martini by the BAR is Eva, twenty years younger. She gazes across a sea of people and locks eyes with...

SANDERSON SHORE (54), thousand dollar suit, not a hair out of place. Assertive. Confident.

EVA (V.O.)

And that's where I met him. We found each other from across the room. I was drawn to him like a magnet. We danced and talked all night.

BALLROOM FLOOR

Sandy and Eva in the middle of the floor, swaying effortlessly to the music. Everything so in sync. She puts her head back and erupts in laughter.

INT. EVA'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Eva twirls, holds her hand out to an imaginary partner.

EVA

Oh, the way we danced. It was like I'd found my soul mate. Everything seemed so right when we were together.

She stops, breathless. A smile cascades across her face, and she gazes across the room, seemingly looking through the wall out onto a...

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

The city lights twinkle, steam rises from the asphalt. Taxi's zip past, majestic buildings soar high into the sky and here's...

Sanderson and Eva, their backs to us, strolling down the sidewalk. He in an overcoat and she in a fashionable fur. Their hands clasped tight, getting further away. Slowly they disappear into the night as we slide back into --

INT. EVA'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Eva's eyes, longing and blue. Her cheeks flushed as she brushes hair from her face.

EVA

We had such wonderful times together.
And you wanna know the strangest
thing? We never, ever made love.

TYLER

Never?

Shakes her head, more a point of pride than disappointment.

EVA

And I'm not really sure why. I used to
think he was gay, but that wasn't it.
I think that, deep down inside, he was
just a very lonely man.

She runs a finger along the tip of her leather sofa.

TYLER

And what became of you two?

EVA

Oh, I still see him from time to time.
He buys me things. We talk.

(MORE)

EVA (cont'd)

This leather couch? Almost everything in here that doesn't look five and dime he gave to me.

TYLER

(off the sofa)

Stock number eleven-oh-seven, dash A. Fairbanks and Company.

She clears her throat and...

EVA

(rolls her eyes)

Nerd.

TYLER

I don't hear much about him anymore. Kinda fell away from the public life.

EVA

He keeps a low profile. Not the mover and shaker he once was. He wanted to take me away from all this. The lifestyle. The Club. He wanted to save me.

TYLER

Doesn't sound so bad to me. Sounds like he really loved you.

She faces him now. Defiant.

EVA

I didn't need to be saved. The Lady's Club was the first time I'd felt like I was part of something. The first time I felt like someone really had my back. I couldn't leave all that behind. Turning my back on them would've been like losing my salvation.

TYLER

I don't get it.

EVA

You don't have to get it, sugar. I've been myself far too long to change who I am now.

She places her hand on his shoulder, runs it down his arm. She slinks to the sofa, and plops herself down.

EVA

So. What else do you wanna know?

INT. TYLER'S HOUSE/DEN - NIGHT

Fingers tapping away on a keyboard. Books on shelves. A half dozen pens and pencils in a cup.

Tyler in a warm sweater at his desk, his face awash in the glow of the computer screen.

ERICA (33) and visibly pregnant, comes up behind him, drapes her arms across his chest.

ERICA

What're you writing?

TYLER

(sighs)

Little piece on this prostitute I met.

ERICA

You interviewed a hooker?

Tyler removes his glasses, rubs his face.

TYLER

So, you wanna be a journalist, huh?

ERICA

Yes, you do.

The faint cry of a baby from another part of the house.

ERICA

Amy's up.

TYLER

You want me to get her?

Erica straightens, runs a hand through his hair.

ERICA

No. You finish up. She probably just wants her binky. But don't stay up too late. You got work tomorrow.

(she leaves, and)

TYLER

Okay. Thanks.

At his desk a moment longer, staring at the screen. He taps a key, closes the laptop. And just sits there.

EXT. EVA'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Darkness encroaching upon day's last light as the sun sinks behind the trees.

INT. EVA'S TRAILER/LIVING ROOM

Tyler on the sofa taking notes. His mini work station spread out across the coffee table as Eva looks on, troubled.

EVA

Can I ask you a question?

TYLER

Sure.

EVA

Are you gonna trash me?

TYLER

Huh?

EVA

The story you're writing. I told you I wasn't one of them.

Tyler doesn't look up.

TYLER

This story's becoming more difficult than I thought. It's supposed to be about prostitution and its relation to our society and you're giving me a...a love story.

An uncomfortable silence, when... A car door *SLAMS* outside. Tyler looks up, fearful.

TYLER

Expecting company?

A sneaky grin and --

EVA

Oh yes.

She leaves, goes to the door and opens it. Greetings and laughter. A WOMAN'S voice, then a MAN'S.

Tyler peers over, growing more uncomfortable by the second. They enter the room.

And here's CASSIE (42), a very buxom blonde, black leather coat draped over a short red skirt. Her infectious laughter fills the room.

EVA

Tyler. This is Lady Cassie. One of the girls from the photo.

She saunters to Tyler, plants a kiss on his cheek before he can utter a word.

CASSIE

I'm the one who fucked Trump.

The other new arrival is BOB DEVERAUX (39). He's rail thin, Freddie Mercury stache. A powder keg of nervous energy.

TYLER

This is quite a surprise.

Cassie grabs Eva, pulls her in close as they flank Tyler.

CASSIE

Lady Eva. We must immortalize the moment.

(hands her phone to Bob)

Take some pictures.

Bob turns the phone over several times before he settles on a position. He looks up, big toothy smile.

BOB

Bro, bro, bro. You look great! Hold it. Right there. Don't move. Girls. Move in closer. Come on. Cassie, great. Just a little bit more. Eva, you gotta--

CASSIE

Will you just take the fuckin' picture!

Tyler nearly jumps out of his skin.

BOB

Right, right, right.

He hits the button. Fake snap. Flash and...

Cassie and Eva, their arms around Tyler... Now both women kissing either cheek... Cassie with a fish-netted stocking up along Tyler's midsection... Just Eva gazing at her journalist.

Tyler -- deer in the headlights look in every one.

And then it starts.

EVA

Bobby, you brought the goodies?

BOB

Oh yeah.

He opens a black bag, lays it out on a table -- white powder in vials, shiny razor blades, a wad of hundreds and a bottle of pills.

He snatches the bottle, rattles it next to his ear.

BOB
Is this what you desire?

He tosses it to Eva along with the money.

EVA
Thanks, sugar.

She unscrews the cap, pops two dry. Turns, and starts for the hallway.

TYLER
Wait.

EVA
What, honey?

TYLER
(discreetly)
I can't stay for...this. Whatever's going to happen. This is not my scene. I've got a family at home. I've got--

EVA
You fancy yourself a journalist, yes?

He's defeated and knows it.

TYLER
Yes. Of course.

EVA
Then you need to see. You need to see what's real and what isn't. I won't be long.

She disappears into a back room, shuts the door.

Tyler slowly turns find Bob, cocaine in his moustache, wearing nothing but a pair of Speedo's that appear to have a drawer full of socks stuffed down the front.

Cassie on the sofa, her huge breasts spilling out of her bra.

Tyler sits next to her.

BOB
Hey bro? Bro, bro, bro.

TYLER
Yes?

BOB
You wanna see me tie my cock in a knot?

TYLER
Umm...

CASSIE
Watch.

From behind, Bob yanks down his Speedo's. He fiddles mightily with his junk. Tyler's face contorts with each pull and tug. And this goes on until, finally, Bob spreads his arms apart like a circus ringmaster.

BOB
Ta-Da!

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Bob (still naked), Tyler (hands folded between his legs) and Cassie sit together on the couch, shoulder-to-shoulder.

Bob bends over the table, loudly snorts a line of coke. He raises his head just in time to see...

CASSIE
And there she is. Lady Eva.

Eva at the edge of the hall wearing a see through evening gown over lace bra and panties. Sexy beyond belief. A five-foot two image of smooth, on the money curves.

BOB
Oh. Daddy like.

Cassie and Bob get up. Eva slides in next to Tyler, and rests her head on his shoulder.

EVA

Do you think I look beautiful?

CASSIE (O.S.)

Will you untie that thing.

TYLER

You look exquisite.

She raises her head.

EVA

(groggy)

That's something Sandy would have said to me.

She closes her eyes. Very relaxed now. Tyler observes intently. She looks beautiful. Peaceful. Finally starting to see her as something more than --

One arm slips from her gown.

And there it is -- dozens of scars like train tracks, trailing from shoulder to wrist. Criss-crossing. Both arms. *And* legs -- thigh to ankle like a busy railway station. Some fresh, scabbed over, some old and faded.

Not heroin tracks. They're too neat. Purposeful.

Cassie places a half-full glass of wine on the table in front of Eva, next to the pills.

CASSIE

(motherly)

Not so much now, dear.

EVA

Okay.

She goes to put something else on the table.

EVA

No.

Eva holds out her hand. A double-sided razor blade winks back in the light.

Cassie retreats to Bob. Even the side show freak is solemn, as though witnessing a sacred ritual.

TYLER

Eva, no...

EVA

It's okay if you wanna leave now.

He thinks about this, then shakes his head.

TYLER

No. I'll... I'll stay.

Eva smiles softly.

Her fingers press the blade against the tender skin below her shoulder. The skin breaks. The blood leaks. Slowly she inches the razor further down. Carefully precise. Pressing down just hard enough.

Tyler, fixed, surveilling every move.

TYLER

Does it hurt?

Through a smile --

EVA

Nothing hurts right now, sugar.

Suddenly, a *SLAP!* Cassie's open hand connects with Bob's face.

CASSIE

You just gonna stand there and watch?
Show a little respect!

BOB

Yes, ma'am.

But Tyler's attention is only on Eva, observing, as she cuts herself again. And again.

And so the party continues.

FADE TO BLACK:

Muffled laughter echoes in the darkness. Crazy, drunken cackling as a car door *SLAMS* shut and we're still in

INT. EVA'S TRAILER - NIGHT

as Tyler's eyes snap open. *Where am I?*

He looks around. Confused. Oh yeah. Headlights pour in through the window, then disappear.

Tyler tries to move. He grabs his neck in pain, manages to stand. He finds his coat and slips it on. It's late. And he just stands there a moment before looking to the

HALLWAY

Careful, quiet steps now lead him into more darkness. He stops at the last door, cracked open only an inch. It's Eva's room. He knows it, wants to peek in but -- hold a BEAT --

Doesn't. He re-enters the

LIVING ROOM

and glances down at the coffee table. It's been wiped clean. No cocaine, wine or razor blades. Instead --

A silver MUSIC BOX.

He sits. Drawn to it. BEAT. He takes it, studies the finely detailed bordering along its edges. He flips it over, and there, engraved on the bottom:

"My Sunshine, My Eva -- Sandy, 1998."

He slides a finger across the words, scans the room, and slowly raises the cover.

On a circular sliver of glass, a miniature BALLERINA dances round and round while...

A soft waltz accompanies her. The notes rise and fall like the delicate breaths of a newborn, beautiful yet sad in 3/4 time.

He listens for a short while. Carefully, he closes the box and places it down.

EXT. TYLER'S HOUSE - DAY

Morning sun, dewey grass. Daybreak on a middle class home in a middle class neighborhood.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

A weary Tyler in t-shirt and pajamas, at the stove with Amy in his arms, trying not to burn breakfast.

Erica eyes him from behind a coffee mug. She's not happy.

ERICA

So, how was your night?

He hesitates, adjusts his glasses.

TYLER

It was interesting. To say the least.

She shrugs, raises an eyebrow.

ERICA

You are almost finished with this, right? You can't be staying out all night like this.

TYLER

I know, honey. You're right.

(Amy tugs his nose)

I kinda can't wait for this to be over with either.

The phone *RINGS*. Erica shuffles to the cordless, checks the caller ID, clicks a button.

ERICA

Hello? Yeah. He's here. Hold on...

(covers the receiver)

Cassie?

Tyler freezes.

TYLER

Yeah. I met her last night.

She hands him the phone, staring intently.

TYLER

Hello? Cassie? Yeah, what...

(sobs heard on the
other end)

Oh, my God.

EXT. EVA'S TRAILER - LATER

The trees behind the trailer and the open expanse of land interrupted now by the presence of a POLICE CAR, as two EMT'S load a sheet covered gurney into the back of an AMBULANCE.

Cassie and Tyler, out front, watch as both vehicles crawl down the dusty road.

Through tears, trying to hold it together --

CASSIE

I'd forgotten something. I came back.

And... There she was.

TYLER

Where?

CASSIE

Bedroom. It was like she'd just gone to sleep. The bottle of pills and...

Then I tried to wake her...

She trails off. Tyler embraces her, holding on for a long while before he releases.

TYLER
I'll be right back.

INT. TRAILER - DAY

Everything so surreal now.

Tyler slips slowly into the

HALLWAY

The door to Eva's room looms ahead like a portal to another world. He stops, studies it as though only a password will grant him entrance.

His fingertips brush the wood, it opens without a sound.

INT. BEDROOM

Stuffed animals on the bed -- Blue, white and gold ribbons (1st Place, dance, ballet, interpretive) on the walls -- certificates of achievement. Ballet slippers on the floor.

This is a little girls room.

On a nightstand next to the bed, a framed picture of -- Eva with Sanderson Shore, dressed for the evening. The power couple out for a night on the town. A long time ago. Now back into the

LIVING ROOM

and the silver music box still on the table until...

Tyler takes it and disappears. O.S., the sound of his footsteps crossing the floor, and the door closing behind him as he leaves.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Surrounded by trees, tucked safely away from the main road. Rows upon rows of headstones, different shapes and sizes. A few cars parked near a clearing and there, under a TENT, is Cassie and Tyler.

In front of Eva's casket, a PRIEST goes on telling them about how death is only the beginning.

PRIEST

Let us go in peace to live out the
word of God. In the name of the
Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit.

Quietly -- *Amen*. And it's over.

Cassie turns to Tyler.

CASSIE

I thought you might like to have
these.

She hands him a thin, brown paper bag.

CASSIE

These are the pictures we took from
the other night. I don't know. Maybe
you can use them for your story.

TYLER

That's very sweet of you, Cassie. You
take care of yourself.

CASSIE

You too.

She leaves Tyler on his own. He slides the pictures from the bag. The first one he sees is --

Cassie with her leg draped across his waist.

He laughs to himself, shuffles through some more. Here's the one he's looking for --

Just him and Eva. She, wistful as she gazes up to him and he, frozen, a crooked smile on his face.

He regards it for a moment, then slides it back in the bag with the rest. Now he takes a deep breath and slowly approaches the casket.

A shiny wood grain finish with gold roping and handles. It does not look cheap.

He reaches into the pocket of his overcoat, pulls out the music box and places it on top. Then --

Footsteps from behind.

Polished black shoes *tap* along the cobblestone until they come to a stop next to Tyler. A MAN in a long black overcoat with a red scarf, white hair beneath a fedora.

Tyler raises his head, shocked to see SANDERSON SHORE (74) standing next to him.

He searches for words -- the right words. There's so many questions, but all he can think to say is...

TYLER

I'm so sorry for your loss.

The old man nods.

SANDERSON

Did she go peacefully?

TYLER

Yeah. I believe she did.

Sanderson places his hand on the casket.

SANDERSON

Good.

An awkward silence falls over them.

TYLER

She spoke well of you.

SANDERSON

I'd speak well of her, too.

TYLER

Yeah. It's almost like she thought of you as...

Sanderson reaches for the music box. He cups it lovingly in his hands, opens the top. The little ballerina dances. The soft waltz begins again.

Tyler, watching. Curiously, and then --

It hits him with all the force of a wave crashing on a beach. The realization sweeps across his face, then ebbs, as though he should've known it all along.

TYLER

You're her father. Aren't you?

Sanderson nods. He closes the music box and places it gently back where it was.

SANDERSON

This should go with her.

TYLER

I'm sorry. I was under the impression that you were a... More of a client.

The old man composes himself.

SANDERSON

I was a client. I had to pay for her time just like the rest.

TYLER

(incredulous)

I-- I don't understand.

SANDERSON

I tried my best to explain it to her. By the time we had reconnected it was just too late. She was too far gone at that point. Too wrapped up in her... own world. So I just enjoyed the time I had with her.

(looks to the sky)

Maybe-- maybe if I'd been there for her more when she was younger, I could've...

His fist clenches. He trails off, then drops his hands at his sides. Silence again.

A quick wind rustles up some leaves behind them. Sanderson clears his throat.

SANDERSON
So, you're the journalist.

TYLER
(perplexed)
She told you about me?

He shakes his head yes.

SANDERSON
She mentioned you last time we spoke

TYLER
I see.

Tyler offers his hand. They shake.

TYLER
Well, I-- I guess I'll leave you two alone. It was real nice meeting you. And Eva. I'm sorry.

SANDERSON
Thank you.

TYLER
Okay.

Tyler leaves Sanderson alone. He heads down the cobblestone path to where his car awaits on the street.

As he opens the door, Sanderson calls out --

SANDERSON
Hey. How do you think your story's gonna end?

Tyler stops abruptly. Searches the hood of his car as though the answer might be scrawled there. It's not.

Finally...

TYLER

I'm starting to think we're gonna need
a rewrite.

Sanderson nods approvingly, and raises his hand.

Tyler smiles, waves back. He gets in the car and slowly pulls
away, heading for the exit.

FADE OUT.