

THE BIG FELLA

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. HOME OF MARIAN OLAVSON - DAY

MARIAN'S home is a white, two-story, frame house with a dark blue roof and shutters. Large elm trees shade the lot one block away from Main Street in the small college town of Fox Lake, Minnesota. A long sidewalk leads to the front steps. The kitchen windows face the street.

INT. MARIAN'S KITCHEN - DAY

The appliances are yellowed with age. The shades are frayed, and curtains are faded. The floor is blue rubber tile, and the walls are pink. One wall is adorned with abstract shapes on shiny foil. The cupboards are handmade from plywood. The kitchen table is handmade from pine with a red linoleum top, and the used chairs are from a restaurant. Marian's son, NEAL, is sitting at the table reading a history book, and listening to sacred music from the local Nordland College radio station. MARIAN OLAVSON, a young widow in her forties, enters the kitchen carrying an empty clothes basket. She is wearing a plain house dress and sweating heavily. She has a frustrated look on her face.

MARIAN

If you won't get your butt off that chair and help me get things ready for Phil's graduation party, I'll go crazy.

NEAL

Why is it my responsibility? If Phil is your favorite son, you can do the work. I have to study for my history test.

MARIAN

If Daddy Martin was alive, you wouldn't dare talk back to me.

NEAL

If Daddy Martin were still alive, you wouldn't bully me so damn much.

MARIAN

Don't swear in my house. You're such a smart aleck. Why can't you be more like Phil?

NEAL

I'm not Phil, dammit. Quit comparing me to Phil.

MARIAN

My friends and my family are going to think we live in a pig sty.

NEAL

There's not one damn dish out of place in this house. I think you are crazy.

MARIAN

I haven't bought anything new since Daddy Martin died. I can't even afford a new table cloth. You should get a job and make some money. You're probably going to flunk out anyway.

NEAL

So, Phil is going to graduate with honors, and I'm going to flunk out? Is that what you think of me?

MARIAN

I didn't say that.

NEAL

But that's what you mean. It pisses me off. It's always Phil did this. And Phil did that. He's not that great. You act like he's a god. I don't get it.

MARIAN

He's going to graduate from Nordland with honors. And he's an all-American football player. You're not.

NEAL

Sure, I'm struggling. But I'm not a good-for-nothing bum. You make me feel like I'm a worthless piece of crap.

MARIAN

So, put your book away and do something useful for a change.

NEAL

No one is helping me. Maybe I'll go crazy, too. I think I deserve some respect. Why doesn't anyone respect me?

MARIAN

You haven't earned anyone's respect. That's why.

NEAL

Earn respect by running around on a football field? What kind of respect is that? Am I suppose to start grubbing for grades and kissing the butts of my professors?

MARIAN

Sometimes I can't believe that you're my son. I have a million things to worry about. And all you want to do is sit there on your butt and argue with me.

NEAL

What are the millions of things you have to worry about? Buying beer for your alcoholic family?

MARIAN

They like to have fun. They're not up-tight like those pious preachers at your college. I've never seen one of them smile or laugh at anything.

NEAL

What's there to laugh about in this town?

MARIAN

If they'd drink a couple of beers, they'd find lots of things to laugh about. You certainly don't have any sense of humor.

NEAL

So, what else is wrong with me?

MARIAN

I don't want to talk about you. I want to talk about Phil's graduation.

NEAL

I don't understand why you always make such a fuss over Phil.

MARIAN

It's a waste of time trying to talk sensibly with you. You contradict everything I say. Why can't you be more agreeable, like Phil?

NEAL

Do you think I'm better than Phil at anything?

MARIAN

No. Not really.

NEAL

Then, you don't think that I'll graduate from college?

MARIAN

Not with your lousy attitude.

NEAL

Daddy Martin talked to me last night. He's living behind the knotty pine walls in my room.

MARIAN

What did he say? Did he talk about me?

NEAL

Of course, he did. He told me to tell you that he's still madly in love with you. He asked me if you still love him.

MARIAN

Of course, I still love him. I love him more than ever. Did you tell him that?

NEAL

He wonders if he's going to be welcome at Phil's graduation party.

MARIAN

Why is he wondering about that?

NEAL

He thinks it might be canceled. And he wants to know if you're going to marry Al.

MARIAN

Did you tell him Al wants me to sell our house? I love our house. I'm going to die right here in this house. Then, we'll be together in Heaven. Did you tell him that?

NEAL

Yes, Mom. I did. I think that made him happy. But I think he's still sad.

MARIAN

Did you tell him how sad I am without him? I don't want to live alone in this world. I'd rather be dead and be with him. Did you tell him that?

NEAL

I couldn't tell him sad things. There are too many sad things in this world.

MARIAN

Did you tell Daddy Martin any good news?

NEAL

I couldn't think of any. He wanted to know how I was doing.

MARIAN

What did you tell him?

NEAL

I couldn't tell him that I'm a failure. And no one really cares about me. That all I am is a punching bag.

MARIAN

Your father loved you just as much as he loved Phil. Daddy Martin loved everybody. And everybody loved and respected Daddy Martin. He was an honest and decent man. You should've spoken up for yourself. Why did you keep quiet?

NEAL

I don't have any self-confidence. Why is that?

MARIAN

I don't know. I hope you're not trying to blame me. I've always loved you. Did you tell Daddy Martin that I'm tired of living without him?

NEAL

He said he knows that. He's waiting for you to join him.

MARIAN

I'm glad he talked to you. Does he understand why I'm dating Al?

NEAL

I didn't ask him.

MARIAN

I know Daddy Martin feels safe, when he's sheltered behind the walls of your room. He built that room especially for you and Phil

NEAL

He was so handsome. I'm still trying to erase my memory of Daddy Martin dying in your bedroom. His hands were thinner than a bird's claws. And his eye sockets were so black and hollow. I'm still haunted by those memories.

MARIAN

I thought I was the only one with him at the end. I'm sorry you saw him that way. I should've sent you away. Now, I won't be able to sleep.

NEAL

I have to stay up all night and study. Now, I'm really spooked. My adrenalin will keep me awake.

MARIAN

Staying up all night is a bad idea. Your father worked himself to death.

NEAL

That's the chance I have to take.

MARIAN

I'm glad Daddy Martin talked to you. Maybe, he'll straighten you out. I can't.

When the wall phone rings, Neal jumps up and answers it before Marian can walk across the kitchen.

NEAL

Hello.

AL

(slurring)

Howdy, partner. Say, Neal, what does your mother want for lunch? T-bone steaks or liver?

NEAL

She prefers liver. When will you get here?

AL

(slurring)

Tell Marian that after a few more deliveries, I'll be right up. Set the table and get the frying pan hotter than a firecracker. Just remember I told you I'll get you a job this summer, and you can trust me. And tell your mother she can trust me.

NEAL

Sure. I will.

MARIAN

You'll what?

NEAL

I'll see you later.

MARIAN

What's he doing?

NEAL

Working. He's going to make a few more deliveries and be right over. He's bringing liver.

MARIAN

You mean he's going to have a few more drinks, and then come over.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Neal goes into the bathroom to scrub up and stares at himself in the mirror. He uses an electric razor on an invisible beard. He washes his face and shakes his head as though he doesn't like what he sees. Suddenly, Marian is pounding on the door.

NEAL

(shouts)

I'll open the damn door. Don't bust it down.

MARIAN

What are you doing in there?

NEAL

What do you think? I'm playing with myself.

Neal timidly opens the door and gives her a phony smile.

MARIAN

You're cute enough. You better ask Marlene for a date before she forgets about you. She's not going to wait for you much longer. Or are you mooning for that tall, skinny thing you brought home from your college last fall.

NEAL

She happens to have a name.

MARIAN

What is it? I forgot.

NEAL

Christie.

MARIAN

Christie what?

NEAL

Christie Norheim, for your information.

MARIAN

Why'd you bring her to our house, when I didn't know you were coming?

NEAL

It was the worst mistake of my life. It was a date from hell.

MARIAN

I've told you not to swear in my house. You act like you're one of those spoiled, rich kids from your school.

NEAL

It's all yours, Sarge.

MARIAN

(yells at him)

Don't you dare call me 'Sarge' anymore.

EXT. QUIET STREET IN FRONT OF MARIAN'S HOME - DAY

AL parks his brand new, two-toned, green and yellow, 1958 Buick, in front of Marian's house. Neal walks out to greet him. Al's green eyes sparkle, as he breaks into one of his charming smiles. His dimples deepen into small whirlpools. His dark hair is plastered straight back. He's wearing a bright, floral Hawaiian shirt, tan slacks, and brown loafers. He's carrying a bag of groceries.

NEAL

You didn't bring liver, did you?

AL

(winking, hands
the bag to Neal)

That's what your mother wanted. You can show her.

NEAL

She's impossible to please.

AL

What kind of mood is she in today? I hope I didn't keep her out too late last night.

NEAL

She's fine. About the same as usual.
She's powdering her nose.

INT. MARIAN'S KITCHEN - DAY

Al walks into the kitchen and plants a kiss on Marian's lips.
She backs away quickly.

AL

How's my sweetheart today?

MARIAN

What did you bring for lunch?

NEAL

I'll show you. It's liver.

MARIAN

It better not be. Or both of you are leaving
this house.

AL

I'm going to fix myself a little
snort. Do you want to join me,
Neal?

MARIAN

If you encourage him to drink in my house,
you're never coming back. Do you hear me?

Al winks at Neal and sets a slender brown bag next to the sink. Neal sits at the table and watches Marian move back-and-forth across the kitchen like a steamroller. Al gets an ice tray from the refrigerator and fills a tall glass half-full of cubes. Then, he pours the whiskey over the ice, and adds a touch of water. After he stirs his drink with his knife, he takes a long drink.

Marian carefully lays the T-bones on the broiler pan and sets them under the flames. She smashes the core of the lettuce hard on the counter and peels the leaves into bowls. She pours the mushrooms into a pan of sizzling butter, and places the peas on the front burner. When everything is hot and steaming, Marian sets it on the table and bows her head.

MARIAN

Neal, will you bless this food for us?

NEAL

Good bread. Good meat. Al's here. Let's eat.

MARIAN

Good heavens. When are you going to grow up? I'm thankful that Phil isn't as childish as you are.

Al grins and winks at Neal. Al drinks his meal and eats only a small portion of his steak.

MARIAN

Who wants dessert?

Neal raises his hand like he's in grade school. Al shakes his head no. Al's eyes are at half-mast, and he's listing in his chair. When the phone rings, Neal jumps up and answers it.

NEAL

This is the Olavson residence.

PHIL

(voice over)

Since when have you acquired such good manners? Let me talk to Mom.

NEAL

Why don't you to talk to me first?

Neal motions for Marian to answer the phone and angrily hands the receiver to her and sits down.

MARIAN

(very sweetly)

Hi, Phil. You and Betsy would like to join us for Sunday dinner? Neal will pick you up at Betsy's dorm at noon, after church. It's no bother. That'll be fine, honey. Goodbye.

Marian takes a pen and tablet from a drawer and writes a list of groceries she needs.

MARIAN

Someone will have to drive to the store for me right now. Don't both of you volunteer at once.

AL

I'll take my car, and Neal can go with me. We both need a wee bit of fresh air. Am I invited for dinner tomorrow?

MARIAN

Of course, provided you help me today. And I mean really work.

Al's dimples deepen, and he breaks into a devilish grin. He digs around in his pants pockets for his car keys.

AL

I'm ready to go.

EXT. DOWNTOWN FOX LAKE - DAY

Al and Neal cruise down the Main Street, past the bakery where Marian works, and over the bridge in the center of town. Al jerks to a stop in front of Billy's Pizza Palace. Neal hops out and crosses the street to Punkey's Grocery Store. Al waits in the car until Neal is inside; then, Al sneaks across the street and into the Vet's Club.

Later, Neal is waiting in the car with a bag of groceries.

As Al approaches his car, he's not really staggering, just walking on the balls of his feet in a very unnatural way. He winks at Neal.

AL

(slurring)

I had a little business I had to take care of. I have to brace myself for this afternoon. I know we'll have to work awfully damn hard to please your mother.

NEAL

You're right about the Sarge.

AL
(slurring)
You're damn right I'm right.
Where'd they put the damn keyhole
in this thing? Do you think I
had one too many?

EXT. RETURNING TO MARIAN'S HOME - DAY

As Al drives across the river, he takes his eyes off the road and looks at Neal.

AL
Do you think your mother will marry me?

NEAL
She's hard to figure out.

AL
(slurring)
What I want to do is take her out to
California on a honeymoon. She'll love it.
You can come with us. Or you can stay here
and work at the lumberyard.

After Al turns the corner and drives a block to Marian's house, he hits the curb while coming in for a landing.

NEAL
I don't know what her plans are.

AL
When will she make up her mind?

NEAL
I don't know.

AL
Will you put in a good word for me?

NEAL
Yeah, I will. I'm on your side. But we
better go in the house before she sees us and
starts asking questions about what took us so
long.

INT. MARIAN'S KITCHEN - EARLY EVENING

Marian and Neal are eating supper at the kitchen table. The phone rings and Neal jumps up to answer it.

NEAL

Hello. This is the Olavson residence.

PHIL

Neal, this is Phil.

NEAL

What's the occasion?

PHIL

Have you finished eating?

NEAL

We're almost done. I'll call you back.

PHIL

No. Don't hang up. Come up to my room. I have to talk to you.

NEAL

Why?

PHIL

Don't ask questions. Just do it.

NEAL

All right. I will.
(hangs up angrily)

MARIAN

What does Phil want?

NEAL

He wants me to come up to his dorm room.

MARIAN

What did he say? He must have told you what he wants.

NEAL

I only talked to him for a minute. He didn't tell me anything.

MARIAN

Okay. Don't answer me.

NEAL

He wants me to come up to his room to talk about something. That's all he said.

MARIAN

Honestly. Daddy Martin would not approve of your attitude.

NEAL

Why do you always lay a trip on me about my father?

MARIAN

Because Daddy Martin is watching everything you do. I know he wants you to respect me. I think Daddy Martin is worried about you.

NEAL

Who else is worried about me?

MARIAN

I am. And so is Al. Neither one of us approves of your childish behavior.

NEAL

That's not the impression I get. I know Al likes me. He told me I don't have to be a big shot like Phil.

MARIAN

Al changes his story every other day. You can't believe what he says.

NEAL

What else does Al say?

MARIAN

He thinks you should start working with him at the lumberyard. We need more money.

NEAL

He doesn't tell me that. He always tells me to keep fighting and earn my sheepskin.

MARIAN

He says one thing when he's sober. He's says something else when he's been drinking.

NEAL

Why are you criticizing Al? Has he done something wrong?

MARIAN

He wants me to sell my house and move to California with him. He says this is the most boring town in the whole country. There's nothing interesting for him to do.

NEAL

Tell him to go by himself. I don't want to leave. Will you go without me?

MARIAN

I told him to go by himself, but he says he can't. He loves me too much.

NEAL

Why does Phil expect me to jump whenever he snaps his fingers? Just because I'm his younger brother doesn't mean I have to lick his boots. Now, I won't be able to study. Can I use your car?

MARIAN

Go ahead. I want to find out what's so darn important.

INT. PHIL'S DORM ROOM - EVENING

After Neal knocks on the door of Phil's room, Phil greets him with a vigorous hand shake and a hug, as though they are long lost buddies. Phil is sharply dressed in a dark blue blazer, gray slacks, white shirt, and striped tie.

PHIL

How's Mom doing? Is she driving you crazy?

NEAL

What do you mean?

PHIL

I thought you told me she won't let you study.

NEAL

She's all right. She's still feeding me, so I'm satisfied.

PHIL

Does she inspect your room for dust bunnies?

NEAL

I ignore all of her criticism. Otherwise, I'd end up in the loony bin.

PHIL

Will you give me a ride to Betsy's dorm?

NEAL

Did I drive up here just to give you a ride to Betsy's dorm? That's a really rotten deal. I don't get it.

PHIL

Do you want to hear some really bad news?

NEAL

No. I hear that all the time. I want to hear some really good news. So, what's the bad news?

PHIL

Someone didn't sign his pledge on his blue book. So, now I'm accused of cheating.

NEAL

Are you going to be expelled? Mom can't survive any more disasters. She's already depressed as hell.

PHIL

I have to meet with the Student Honor Council. I don't know the details of the charges against me. I simply got a message from Dr. Hall to report for a meeting. I'm wondering if you'll do me a big favor.

NEAL

What big favor? I hope you don't want me to go with you.

PHIL

Will you? I really want your support.

NEAL

I'm just an average student. Why would the intellectuals on the Student Honor Council believe me? I'm completely in the dark about all of that stuff.

PHIL

Someone thinks he saw me cheating on my philosophy exam, and that's why he didn't sign his blue book pledge.

NEAL

You're scaring the hell out of me. If you're expelled, the shock will kill Mom.

PHIL

Don't you have the courage to come with me?

NEAL

Honestly, I don't think I can help you.

PHIL

You're my brother. It's your moral obligation to help me. Don't you believe in loyalty to your family?

NEAL

If you're expelled, it'll ruin your reputation. You won't be able to explain it to graduate schools, or employers.

PHIL

You don't get it. I'm not guilty. It's only the guilty who have to pay for their sins.

NEAL

Aren't there innocent people in prisons?

PHIL

Not anyone I know.

NEAL

Mom's going to ask me what we talked about. What should I tell her?

PHIL

Make up a story. You're good at telling fibs.

NEAL

No, I'm not. Mom's not going to let me get away with lies.

PHIL

Tell her we talked about my graduation party.

NEAL

She won't believe that. She knows we don't care.

PHIL

Jeez. Give me a break. I don't care what you tell her. Just don't tell her the truth.

NEAL

She's going to grill me until she wears me down. Why don't you call her and explain what's happening?

PHIL

Just play dumb. You're good at that. Will you give me a ride to Betsy's dorm? We want to spend time together before school's over.

NEAL

That sounds sweet. Do you think I'll find my perfect girlfriend this year?

PHIL

Probably not. The girls on this campus are looking for someone with more status than a poor townie.

NEAL

Ouch. That really hurts.

PHIL

I didn't mean that in a negative way. You know what I mean. You're not at the top of your class. You don't look like a very good prospect.

NEAL

That hurts even more.

PHIL

I'm sorry. You asked for my opinion. I'm not trying to hurt your feelings.

NEAL

That's okay. I can waste my time and flunk my classes. I'll give you a ride.

INT. MARIAN'S DINING ROOM ON SUNDAY - DAY

The Olavson family is seated around Marian's dining room table. Al is seated at the head of the table facing the kitchen door. Phil is seated on Al's left. BETSY is seated on Phil's left. Neal is seated across the table from Phil and Betsy. Marian's empty seat is near the door into the kitchen. The table has been cleared, and they are waiting for Phil's announcement. Phil and Betsy are dressed in their best Sunday clothes. Neal, Marian, and Al are dressed casually. Marian is in the kitchen.

BETSY

Your mother's making too much fuss. It isn't necessary.

PHIL

You'll have to get used to her.

NEAL

She's the human steamroller. Stay out of her way, or she'll run over you.

BETSY

You two should be ashamed of your selves.

NEAL

You'll find out soon enough.

BETSY

Maybe, I should help her in the kitchen.

NEAL

Good luck. Don't get run over.

After Marian enters and takes her seat at the table, there is a long period of silence.

PHIL

I'd like to say a prayer.

MARIAN

Of course, Phil. That would be nice. We'll all bow our heads.

PHIL

Dear Heavenly Father. We wish to thank you for this day of rest. We thank you for the food that my mother put on the table. We thank you for a supportive family. We thank you for the peace and prosperity that we enjoy. We thank you for our education at Nordland College. We thank you for this solid home that our father, Martin, bought and remodeled for us. We thank you for all of the professors who have taught us to love You. We thank you for the farmers who grow the crops that feed us. We thank you for our mother, Marian, who has sacrificed so much to make our lives easier and better. We thank you for the love that is shared by Betsy and me. We thank you making our lives happy and free from guilt. We thank you for your Son, Jesus, who guides us through our daily lives and forgives our sins. Amen.

NEAL
(sarcastically)

Amen.

MARIAN
That was wonderful, Phil. I wish that Neal would learn to pray like that.

PHIL
I suppose you're waiting for our announcement. I think Mom has already figured it out. Betsy and I are engaged.

MARIAN
When are you getting married?

PHIL
That isn't our only announcement. I've been accepted at The University of Chicago. I'm going to start my graduate studies next September.

MARIAN
Are you going to be a minister?

PHIL
I could possibly teach. I'll see what happens.

MARIAN
(sobbing)
Daddy Martin should be here. I don't know why God took him away from me. Did I do something wrong? Is that why Daddy Martin got cancer? I don't know why I'm being punished.

PHIL
You didn't do anything wrong, Mother. Get that idea out of your head. I want this to be a day of celebration.

MARIAN
I must have done something wrong. But, no one will tell me what it is.

PHIL

Stop it, Mother. You're being illogical.

MARIAN

I've been alone for so long. I miss Daddy Martin so much. Nobody understands how lonely I am.

PHIL

You still have Neal at home. You haven't lost everyone.

MARIAN

No one can ever take the place of Daddy Martin. Neal won't help me like he should.

PHIL

I'm sorry we have to leave, Mom, but Betsy and I need a ride back to the college. We're really busy.

Marian hugs and kisses Phil and Betsy as they try to leave gracefully. Neal and Al wait patiently on the sidelines. Marian can't quit crying.

Neal drives Al's car through town and up Nordland Avenue to the campus that sits atop a hill. He winds along the narrow road past the impressive Gothic buildings until he comes to Betsy's dormitory. Phil and Betsy hop out without really thanking him and walk hand-in-hand into Betsy's dorm and disappear. Neal drives back home slowly, observing the river and the two-story, nineteenth century buildings downtown.

INT. DEAN SOLDAL'S DORMITORY ROOM - EVENING

The next night Neal drives up to the campus to ask DEAN SOLDAL for help doing math problems. After he parks in front of the men's freshman dorm, Neal knocks on the door of Dean's dorm room. The KNOCK echoes down the dimly lit hallway.

The door opens slowly, and Neal peers into the darkened room. The only light is a desk lamp that creates a pale yellow halo around the head of Dean's ROOMMATE. The curtains are drawn tightly shut; the overhead lights are off.

DEAN

(whispers)

We can't talk here. My roommate is studying for his chemistry exam. I'll be out in a minute.

Dean tiptoes into the hall with a Tom Sawyer grin on his face. He eases the door shut, so there are absolutely no vibrations.

EXT. THE DESERTED COLLEGE CAMPUS - LATE EVENING

Neal and Dean tiptoe quietly out of the dorm into the cool, crisp evening air. A pale-yellow moon, the same color as the cathedral-shaped library windows, stands directly above the peak of the Nordland Library. They stand in front of the dorm, looking around and scratching their heads.

DEAN

Where are we going to find a pair of cute girls? Do you have any ideas?

NEAL

You told me that we were going to study math. You didn't say anything about looking for girls.

DEAN

Don't worry, Big Fella. We'll hit the books later, but I'm trying to think of where Christie might be.

NEAL

She's probably in her dorm. You don't have to find her for my sake. Should we go to the library?

DEAN

No way, Big Fella. I know she's not there. But I have a brilliant idea. Follow me.

EXT. COLLEGE CAMPUS - EVENING

Dean jogs quickly across the campus, staying ahead by two or three paces. Dean's calves and thighs bulge out of his cutoff jeans. He's wearing a Nordland College athletic jersey with the sleeves rolled up to show off his well-developed biceps.

Dean bounces on his toes and pumps his arms. They run past the chapel and past the library and down the steps to Nordland Avenue. Dean finally slows and suddenly stops in front of an off-campus coffee shop, named Oscar's. Neal grabs Dean's arm and turns him around.

NEAL

I'm not going in there. This is a waste of time.

DEAN

Trust me. I think there might be someone inside you'll want to meet.

INT. OSCAR'S COFFEE SHOP - EVENING

Neal follows Dean inside, and they saunter past the wooden booths and the long wooden counter on the opposite side. They head for the empty tables in back. As they pass the third booth, Dean pauses and nudges Neal in the ribs with his sharp elbow. Neal gazes at two lettermen, who are hustling CHRISTIE NORHEIM and another girl. Christie breaks into a broad smile when she sees Dean.

CHRISTIE

Dean, what are you doing here?

DEAN

Neal and I are going to study at one of the tables in back. Come back and talk to us, when you have time.

Neal and Dean find two chairs at an empty table. Neal shakes his head like he can't believe what's happening.

DEAN

Hand me your book. I'll work one of your easy problems for you. Why don't you buy a couple of sodas for us. I'll pay you later.

Neal shuffles to the front of Oscar's and sees the two lovely girls still sitting with the two lettermen. He keeps his eyes averted and tries to act casual, like a regular customer.

A thin, tired-looking old man in a white apron takes Neal's order and sets two colas on the counter. Neal returns to the table, and Dean reaches for his glass mechanically, like Neal doesn't exist.

NEAL

What in the hell are you doing?
Figuring out Einstein's theory of relativity?

Dean doesn't bat an eyelash. Neal stares into space.

NEAL'S FLASHBACK TO FALL SEMESTER 1958

EXT. CHRISTIE'S DORMITORY - DAY

Neal parks in front of an impressive, Gothic structure, which is the freshmen girls' dorm and looks at himself in the rear-view mirror. He's wearing a baggy, button-down sweater with light-blue and dark-blue vertical strips, dark gray cords, a faded white shirt, and loafers. He climbs the steps and opens the heavy, oak, cathedral doors.

INT. THE LOUNGE OF CHRISTIE'S DORM - DAY

The dark oak walls and ceiling resemble a spacious drawing room in a European castle. Neal sinks into the plush gold carpet, as he walks towards a huge stone fireplace with a mantle of ornately carved flowers. An ugly desk stands in front of the door from which the coeds leave and enter. Neal asks the monitor if she will call down Christie Norheim.

Christie appears wearing a gorgeous Norwegian sweater with two bright-red reindeer prancing across a field of snow-white wool, and a tight black skirt. Her wavy brown hair is pulled back from her high forehead and arched eye brows.

Her light-blue eyes sparkle with anticipation. Her bright-red lips stretch from ear to ear, when she smiles at Neal. Neal follows Christie outside, opens the car door for her like he's truly a gentleman and drives downtown and parks in front of Billy's Pizza Palace.

INT. BILLY'S PIZZA PALACE - DAY

Neal and Christie walk past the two black-haired Greeks, who are throwing pasta high into the air and catching it in a cloud of white flour. "Love Me Tender" is playing on the jukebox, which is a carnival of lights, motion, and music. On the walls, the faded Gondoliers row along the canals of Venice. Neal leads Christie past the booths occupied by townies to a booth in the back. They slide into a wooden booth, facing each other.

They are eating their pizza, when a TOWNIE slugs Neal hard on his shoulder. The townie is a scrawny-looking punk, who reeks of liquor. He totters for a moment and slides into the booth beside Neal. The townie hasn't shaved for at least a week, his eyes are blood shot, and his greasy hair looks like he was caught in a tornado.

TOWNIE

(slobbering)

Where in the hell have you been? I suppose up at that college with all the cute, young chicks. I ain't seen any of your college games, but maybe you can get me a pass. Our high school team this year is chicken manure. You know what I mean. I don't want to offend your fancy-looking girlfriend, but we ain't had a team worth a damn since you left. You were the best we ever had.

NEAL

You're making a mistake, buddy. I'm Phil's brother, Neal. I'm not Phil.

TOWNIE

Like hell you're not. Don't try to fool me, just because you think I'm a little bit tipsy. I know who you are. I just want to say 'hi,' you old fart. I'll bet you're an all-American in college.

NEAL

I told you, I'm Neal. I'm not Phil.

TOWNIE

(hollers)

You're a damn liar. Don't try to get rid of me. Maybe I had one too many, but I ain't that damn dumb. I'd like to beat the hell out of you. You got all the publicity in high school. But I was just as good as you were.

NEAL

Okay. I guess I can't fool you. I really am Phil.

The townie stares at Neal for a long time, appearing to be in deep thought. He feels Neal's arm for size.

TOWNIE

(blurts out angrily)

Oh, damn it to hell. You're not Phil. Phil's better looking than you are. And he's sure as hell better built. I don't think you could even play football.

NEAL

Why don't you tell me your name. I'll tell Phil 'hi' from you.

TOWNIE

(slurs)

Never mind, you jerk. Don't tell Phil nothing. I'm going across the street and have a drink.

During Neal's conversation, Christie nervously twirls her hair around her long fingers. By the time the drunken townie leaves, she appears to be agitated. Neal and Christie glance at each other, as though they have nothing to say.

Christie wipes her eyes with her napkin and sniffles a few times. Suddenly, she becomes radiantly beautiful, as if nothing had happened.

EXT. OUTSIDE MARIAN'S HOME - EVENING

Al's car isn't parked in front of Marian's house. The house is totally dark. So, Neal parks his car and stares at Christie.

NEAL

This is where I live.

CHRISTIE

Very impressive. Is anyone home?

NEAL

No. I don't think so. My mom is probably on a date with her boyfriend. Do you want to come in for a minute? We can watch television.

Neal puts his arm around the back of the seat and waits for Christie to slide over next to him. Christie stares out the windshield and doesn't move or look at him. So, Neal opens his door, walks around the front of the car and opens the passenger door. She follows behind him to the house.

Neal peers through the window and sees the flickering shadows of the television set. Then, he sees his mother's feet suspended in mid-air, as she lies back sleeping in her green, vinyl recliner. He doesn't see Al. Neal freezes.

CHRISTIE

What's wrong? Let's go in. It's chilly out here.

NEAL

My mom's home. Are you sure you want to? Do you want to meet her?

CHRISTIE

What else should we do? We're already here. What's wrong with your mother?

NEAL

Nothing. I just don't know if we should disturb her. She's like a bear when she wakes up.

CHRISTIE

I'd like to meet her. She must be quite a woman to raise you by herself. Make up your mind. You can take me back to the dorm.

INT. MARIAN'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Neal opens the door, and Christie follows him into the living room. Marian is snoring with her mouth open, and looks like a raccoon with dark rings around her eyes. He shakes her bare foot to wake her.

NEAL

Mom, wake up. It's me, Neal. Don't you want to go into your bedroom?

Marian snorts loudly a couple of times. She blinks her eyes open and props her recliner up, so she's facing them. Her face is covered with white cream, her tattered robe is half open, and her hair looks like a rat's nest.

MARIAN

Is this your date? This is a girl you haven't told me about. Aren't you going to introduce me?

CHRISTIE

Good evening, Mrs. Olavson. I'm Christie Norheim. I'm very pleased to meet you. I've heard about you from Neal.

MARIAN

Neal, turn off the television like a nice boy, so we can visit.

Neal turns off the television. Then, Marian motions for them to sit on the old, green couch, which they do, and they nearly sink out of sight because the cushions are so old.

MARIAN

(coldly)

Now tell me about yourself.

CHRISTIE

There isn't much to tell you, Mrs. Olavson. Neal and I are taking Freshman English together. What else would you like to know?

NEAL

What do we have to eat?

MARIAN

What would you like? I can fix most anything.

CHRISTIE

I don't care for anything, thank you.

NEAL

How about a cup of hot chocolate.

Marian heads for the kitchen. She runs the water for a long time, and makes lots of noise. Christie does not remove her expensive, red plaid coat. Neal and Christie sit in silence, staring at the blank television screen.

Marian returns with hot chocolate, and then retrieves a tattered photo album of Neal's baby pictures. She turns on the floor lamp and sits next to Christie.

MARIAN

This is Neal on his first birthday. Isn't he a cute baby? Look at his sun suit and how fat his legs are. It was taken right in front of our house. His father took it. And this is Phil and Neal having a fight. Neal lost, so he's crying. Isn't that cute? And this one is cute, too. Neal is five-years-old. Isn't he big for his age? And so cute with his little tummy bulging out. He was such a good eater.

NEAL

That's enough pictures.

Neal places his hand over the page, so Marian can't turn it.

MARIAN

Do you see how sensitive he is? We can't even look at his baby pictures. But he's been a nice boy.

CHRISTIE

(sarcastically)

I hope so, Mrs. Olavson.

NEAL

We have to go, Mom. Christie has a curfew.

CHRISTIE

It was a pleasure meeting you, Mrs. Olavson. Maybe, we'll meet again.

MARIAN

Tell Neal to bring you back when I'm not sleeping.

EXT. IN FRONT OF CHRISTIE'S DORM - NIGHT

Neal drives across town to Christie's dorm. He parks in front, and tries to reach over and hold her hand, but Christie won't come near him. He gazes at her, but she stares straight ahead.

NEAL

I've fallen in love with you. I want you to know that.

CHRISTIE

You don't know anything about me. You can't say you love me. You can only say that you're infatuated.

Neal slowly gets out of the car, walks around and opens her door, and offers her his hand, which she doesn't hold. He follows her to the top of the steps, but she doesn't turn around to wish him good night. He walks back to his car and sits, slumped in his seat for several minutes. Then, he slowly drives away.

END FLASHBACK FROM FALL SEMESTER, 1958

INT. OSCAR'S COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

Dean punches Neal hard on his shoulder. Neal snaps out of his daydream, but he doesn't say anything. Dean leaves Neal alone to study his math problems, while he meanders to the front of Oscar's. Then, Dean hollers at Neal and waves his arms for Neal to come to the booth where the girls are sitting alone. Dean and Neal sit down in the booth with the two lovely coeds, Christie and ASTRID.

DEAN

We are trying to think of something we can do together on the weekend. You know this town. Can you think of anything to do?

NEAL

We can get drunk with the locals.

CHRISTIE

What would you like to do, Neal?

NEAL

Pizza? A movie? I don't know. I thought Dean would think of something interesting.

DEAN

I've had enough pizzas and movies to last me a life time. Let's go to Neal's house and have a dinner party. Just the four of us. Doesn't that sound like fun?

NEAL

I don't care.

ASTRID

(flirting with Dean)

That sounds like fun.

DEAN

We'll pick you up in Neal's car at about six. Is it formal dress?

ASTRID

Let's dress up and dine by
candle light. It sounds so
romantic.

CHRISTIE

It's time for us to leave. We'll
walk back alone. You two can stay
here and study math.

Dean and Neal stare at their two female friends as they are leaving. Astrid's tight-fitting jeans really shows off her figure. Christie's red plaid slacks and a soft-looking camel sweater are very attractive. Dean and Neal stare at each other in disbelief.

INT. MARIAN'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

The next night Neal is sitting at the kitchen table bent over his history book. A storm is raging outside with startling flashes of lightning and loud crashes of thunder. Marian enters from her bedroom next to the kitchen. She looks like a ghost with white cream on her face, her hair in a net, and wearing an old robe.

MARIAN

Why are you sitting at the kitchen
table? Are you afraid of a little
lightning and thunder?

NEAL

I got spooked up in my room. Every
time the lightning flashed, I saw
Daddy Martin. My room is haunted.

There is an extremely bright flash of lightning. Neal and Marian jump from fright. The flash is followed by a loud boom of thunder.

MARIAN

What subject are you trying to study?

NEAL

History. I have to study about two-
hundred pages. Does that sound like
fun to you?

MARIAN

Why didn't you start earlier?

NEAL

I've been too busy.

MARIAN

What've you been doing? You've been acting awfully mysterious.

NEAL

Nothing, really. Maybe flunking out of college would be good for me.

MARIAN

Don't you have any backbone? Phil wouldn't say that. That's why he's an all-American in football. You'll never succeed if you quit whenever you have a problem.

They are startled again by a bright flash of lightning. A very loud rumble of thunder follows.

NEAL

I'm reading about World War One. Most of the soldiers were shell-shocked from the millions of shells that exploded next to them. The bombardments continued relentlessly for days.

MARIAN

They were soldiers. They should stand up and fight like men.

NEAL

When they got orders to climb out of the trenches, they were ripped to shreds by machine gun bullets. Would you want me to be one of them?

MARIAN

If I had to join the army, I'd fight for my country.

NEAL

Why are men the personal property of the government? When our country goes to war, they round us up, put us in uniforms, hand us guns, and tell us to kill people.

MARIAN

It's your duty to fight. Your father risked his life for all of us during World War Two.

NEAL

He was fighting because the Nazis had taken over Norway. What if Daddy Martin had been killed in the war? Would you be depressed?

MARIAN

I am depressed. What in the world are they teaching you up at that college?

NEAL

Our professors are teaching us to think.

MARIAN

That's a mistake. You have to believe in your leaders. You're reading about wars, so now you know more than the generals.

NEAL

Your brother got killed. He was in the National Guard with no experience.

MARIAN

He died for his country. It was a war that had to be fought. He died for all of us. Even you. But you don't have the brains to appreciate it.

Marian goes into her bedroom and returns with a bottle of brandy. She fills a tumbler to the top and drinks half. Then, she finishes the rest, before she bursts into tears.

NEAL

So, I have to agree with everything
I'm told?

MARIAN

(tipsy)

Our country will fall apart if we all
do what we want to.

NEAL

I have to think for myself.

MARIAN

No you don't. Our leaders are paid to
do our thinking for us.

NEAL

I don't believe that.

MARIAN

You don't believe anything. You must
be a terrible student. I'd hate to
have you in my class.

NEAL

And Phil's brilliant, because he
believes everything he's told?

MARIAN

Phil thinks for himself. But you're
not Phil. You're a strange duck. I'm
going to bed.

NEAL

I'm sorry that we don't understand
each other. Good night, Mom.

INT. MARIAN'S KITCHEN - EARLY MORNING

Neal is hunched over his history text book. He does not
appear to be tired. Marian enters the kitchen dressed in her
white uniform for her job at the bakery.

MARIAN

Haven't you gone to bed?

NEAL

I told you I had to study all night. I've read all of the material. The question is will I remember it for my final?

MARIAN

Do you recite in class? You remember things for the rest of your life if you recite them.

NEAL

Should I recite The Gettysburg Address? It says, "This nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth." Do you know what that means?

MARIAN

No. I don't really care. I don't like history.

NEAL

What does "of the people" mean?

MARIAN

It can mean lots of things. What kind of dumb question is that?

NEAL

It means all of the voters in this country. Do you know what "by the people" means?

MARIAN

Why should I care?

NEAL

"By the people" mean the elected officials represent the people's wishes. Do you know what "for the people" means?

MARIAN

I suppose it means, "I fixed lunch for all the people."

NEAL

You just flunked history class. Do you know who said it? Abraham Lincoln. Gettysburg was the first cemetery that was created next to the battlefield where the soldiers fought and died. Lincoln came to consecrate the cemetery. Does that impress you?

MARIAN

I have more important things to do than worry about the Civil War. Why don't you study science?

NEAL

If you were a nurse, I would. You could help me.

MARIAN

I wouldn't help you. That's cheating. If you learned the carpenter trade like your father, you could be making money right now.

NEAL

I don't want to be a carpenter. I'm trying to improve myself. We're in the poor class, and you don't even know it.

MARIAN

We weren't poor when your father was alive.

NEAL

I know it, but now we're stuck at the bottom. College graduates make a lot more money than you do.

MARIAN

But are they happy?

NEAL

A hell of a lot happier than we are.

MARIAN

That's one thing I've noticed. You swear a lot since you started going to college.

NEAL

I'm frustrated. I don't have enough time to study. The professors are really demanding. I don't have any friends or social life. That's why I swear.

MARIAN

Okay. I can't live your life for you. I know you're not happy. I was the happiest woman in the world until your father died. I had a wonderful husband. A beautiful home. Two healthy, intelligent sons. But I lost everything. Make fun of me. I don't care.

NEAL

Did Phil ever stay up all night and study?

MARIAN

He never advertised it. I'm going to work.

NEAL

Don't worry about me, Mom. I don't have any competition. I'm smarter than all of them.

MARIAN

Really? Why did you say you're going to flunk?

NEAL

I was joking.

MARIAN

You're a puzzle to me. Dress up for a change. Phil always wears nice clothes.

NEAL

I'll take your advice. I wish I had some nice clothes. Everything I own is a hand-me-down from Phil. Actually, I don't care.

MARIAN

That's right. It's what's inside a person that counts. I'll fix you something good for supper. I have to run.

EXT. DOWNTOWN FOX LAKE - NIGHT

Neal gazes out his bedroom window at the soft pink and blue sky and the yellow moon. He clears his desk of everything except his history book. Then, he tiptoes to his bed and ever so carefully lies down. He closes his eyes.

When Neal wakes up, it's already dark. He sneaks downstairs and out the back door. At the back of the house, he stands by the lilac bushes. He walks down to Main Street. At the tavern where Al hangs out, he sees Al's car. Then, TOMMY THOMPSON cruises towards him. Neal waves his long arms in the air, and Tommy sees him.

TOMMY

(shouts out the
window and stops)

Olavson. Damn it, it's good to see again. Where in the hell have you been?

Neal jumps in, and Tommy revs his Ford eight cylinder and drops it into gear, so they lurch forward, squealing for several feet.

NEAL

I've either been at home or at school. It's boring as hell. What are you doing?

TOMMY

Looking for Cheryl. She said she was going to the movie with Marlene.

NEAL

Let's cruise by the theater. It must be about time to let out. Have you been getting much lately?

TOMMY

You won't believe me if I tell you. She's hot after my body. I'll turn around, and we'll go back.

They make the traditional U-turn at the south end and head back towards the theater. As they turn off Main Street and climb the hill by the theater, Neal spots CHERYL with MARLENE, walking down the hill with the old duffers and the kids.

NEAL

(shouts)

Turn around at the corner. We'll pick them up.

Tommy cruises up next to Cheryl and Marlene, and Neal shouts out the window. Tommy revs the engine a couple of times to impress them.

NEAL

Hey, Marlene. Cheryl. Do you want a ride?

CHERYL

Why not? Come on, Marlene. Let's go with them.

Neal jumps out and opens the doors, so Cheryl climbs into the front seat with Tommy, and Marlene climbs in back with him. The girls are dressed nicely in summer blouses and tight-fitting skirts, and both are acting flirtatious.

TOMMY

Where shall we go?

Neal puts his arm around Marlene, and she snuggles next to him.

CHERYL

Let's go out in the country. I'm sick of driving around town. Let's park someplace. Is that okay with you, Marlene?

MARLENE

I don't care.

NEAL

There's a nice bluff south of town. I like the view from out there.

TOMMY

(laughing)

Yeah. Me too.

Marlene stares at Neal for a few minutes like he's a stranger. Then, she smiles sweetly, her dimples deepen at the corners of her full red mouth, her blue-green eyes sparkle like flashing mirrors, as she snuggles into him.

NEAL

(shouts)

Hey, Tommy, I like that rock-and-roll. Turn up the radio.

TOMMY

(shouts)

Hey, Neal, I'd like to rock-and-roll in the car. Wouldn't you?

NEAL

(shouts)

Right on. Turn left down the next gravel road.

Tommy wheels to the left, and Cheryl grabs the steering wheel, making him veer towards the ditch. Both of them laugh hysterically.

NEAL

(shouts)

Learn how to drive. We'll all be killed.

Neal tickles Marlene in the ribs, and she laughs at him, so they start wrestling. The car is rocking like there's an earthquake. Tommy stops at the top of the bluff, and below them is the tranquility of the town nestled in the valley with its lights twinkling back at the millions of stars.

Neal pins Marlene's arms behind her, and she has no choice but to kiss him passionately. They embrace for a long time, melting into each other.

CHERYL

Hey, you dope, don't hang that
up there.

When Neal looks up in front, Cheryl's bra is hanging from the rear view mirror. The car begins rocking-and-rolling, because they are all laughing so hard.

NEAL

(shouts)

We should hang Marlene's up there too.

TOMMY

(shouts)

Yeah. Take it off.

MARLENE

(whispers)

Don't you dare. I'll be embarrassed.

NEAL

(shouts)

She'll be embarrassed.

CHERYL

No you won't. Come on, you party
pooper.

Marlene smiles sweetly at Neal.

MARLENE

(whispers)

Maybe, later.

After giggling and shouting and romping in the car, Tommy and Cheryl drop Neal and Marlene off at Marlene's house. The porch light is on, but the rest of the house is dark. It's a large, two-story frame house, like Neal's, only on the opposite side of town. Tommy and Cheryl ROAR off into the night to have more fun.

MARLENE

Do you want to come in and warm up?
It's chilly, and you have a long walk home. You're only wearing a thin, short-sleeved shirt. I think my parents are sleeping.

NEAL

Okay. It's cold out here. I can come in for a few minutes.

Neal's teeth are chattering. He's shaking like he's cold, but it's the excitement of the evening that's causing him to tremble.

INT. MARLENE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Marlene leads Neal by the hand into the darkened living room. He sits on the edge of the couch and pulls her down beside him. She smiles sweetly in the light from the street light on the corner shining through the window. Neal smothers her in a long kiss. He leans back on the couch and holds her tightly.

MARLENE

You sure seem happy. How's school going?

NEAL

Just fine. I've been so darn busy. I guess I forgot to call you. I have this one professor for math who just told me yesterday that he thought I should drop his class. It made me so darn mad, because I'm getting help. I don't plan on flunking his stupid course. I've never flunked a course yet, but he's a jackass. He asked me a bunch of questions about how much I

NEAL (CONT'D)

study, like I was a lazy bum, and, then, he tells me he is going to be hard on me, because I only got a D on my first test. But I'm going to pass. I have a friend who's helping me.

MARLENE

I wish I could help you, Neal. Is there anything I can do for you?

NEAL

No. I have to make it on my own.

Neal puts his arms around her, under her blouse, and fumbles with the tiny hooks on her bra. He can't unfasten them. He keeps trying with his sweating hands, until one hook pops loose, and then the other. The straps snap like a broken rubber band.

NEAL

(whispering)

But I'm doing fairly well in English and history. I went in to see my history professor this afternoon. His name is Dr. Roth. I just wanted to see how well I was doing. He gave me all kinds of encouragement and told me about himself, how he came back after the Second World War on the G.I. Bill, with a wife and two kids, and studied like mad to get good grades, so he could go to graduate school and teach college. Damn, I'd like to do that. Maybe I'll go out to Stanford for graduate school. He went to the University of Chicago after he graduated from Nordland. I don't know how he did it. I just can't imagine working that hard and writing a dissertation. It sounds impossible to me, but I'd like to try.

Marlene rubs Neal's shoulders and back to relax him.

MARLENE

Did Dr. Roth's wife help him?

NEAL

She must have. I didn't ask him.
I suppose she has a degree, too.
At least, a bachelor's degree.
I've never seen her.

MARLENE

Wouldn't you miss your family and friends
if you went to Stanford?

NEAL

I don't know. I could get by, if it
were just me, alone, I guess.

MARLENE

Don't you plan to get married?

NEAL

It would be nice to be married, but lots
of guys finish school, and, then, after
their wives have helped them, they break
up. I don't think that's fair at all.
It's a rotten thing to do to a girl.
What does she end up with? Nothing.

MARLENE

(whispers softly)

I suppose you're right. Let's not talk
about it anymore.

Neal tries to undo the tiny buttons on her blouse. Then, Marlene slowly and carefully undoes the buttons herself, one by one, until her blouse flops open. Neal removes it carefully, one arm at a time, and lays it gently on the couch. Then, he lifts the straps from her shoulders and holds them for her, while she gracefully pulls her long, slender arms out of them. Neal drops the white bundle on top of her blouse and begins trembling all over. Her figure is full, and he stares at her in the cool, dim light from the streetlight.

NEAL

Aren't you cold? My teeth are chattering.

MARLENE

No. I'm not cold. It's funny you are.

Neal stands up, holds her hands, and helps her to her feet. He carefully reaches around her with his long arms to see if he can find the zipper on her skirt. He undoes the button and tugs at the zipper, but it's stuck. He stops, so she reaches the zipper with her own hands, and her skirt drops to the floor. Neal stares at her startling white panties and her long, slender legs.

MARLENE

I'll take them off, if you want me to.

NEAL

We might have a shotgun wedding. I'll end up working for your old man in his clothing store. I'll have to drop out of college, if we have a kid. That scares me.

Marlene steps forward, puts her arms around Neal and holds him tightly, squeezing him, testing him.

MARLENE

(whispers)

I'll help you.

Marlene steps back and tugs at Neal's belt buckle, but it won't come undone. Neal begins to unfasten his shirt buttons and practically tears the buttonholes to shreds. Neal removes his shirt and holds her to his chest. He warmly and lovingly kisses her.

MARLENE

Take your pants off.

NEAL

Take your panties off first

Marlene bends over like the beautiful women in paintings, who are preparing to take a bath. Neal is so filled with yearning that he's trembling and can't undo his belt buckle. Suddenly, Marlene's whole body convulses and shrivels into a crouching ball.

NEAL

What's wrong?

MARLENE

You don't love me. You didn't call me once all year.

NEAL

I'm sorry. I really am.

Marlene is sobbing, so Neal helps her sit down on the couch. She looks pathetic and helpless. Neal puts his shirt back on. He sits by Marlene and holds her hand to comfort her.

NEAL

Why don't we talk about it. What did I say wrong?

Marlene dries her eyes with the palms of her hands.

MARLENE

I don't want to talk about it. You won't understand.

NEAL

Understand what? What won't I understand?

MARLENE

My feelings. You don't love me. That's all. You've changed. You have your own ambitions. They don't include me. It's simply me this and me that. It's never us. You're probably dating some college girl. I'm not stupid, Neal. I've just made a terrible mistake. I'm sorry. I'm really sorry.

Marlene rolls up into a ball on the couch.

NEAL

I want to apologize, but what can I say? I suppose I've changed. Maybe my college friends have had an influence on me. But I feel the same as I always did. You're not very appealing, hunched over on the couch like a child.

MARLENE

You'd better go home, now. It's awfully late.

NEAL

Yeah. My Mom's going to wonder where I've been. What should I tell her?

MARLENE

I don't care, Neal. Please leave. Please.

Neal kneels down, takes her tear-filled face into my two hands, and kisses her salty cheeks.

NEAL

I'm sorry. I don't understand you very well. I don't understand your feelings. I want to stay and explain everything. I really want to say I love you. I want to kiss you again.

MARLENE

I'm embarrassed. I can't face you anymore. I don't want to see you ever again. Will you please leave? I just heard my father. He usually comes down at night for a drink of water.

Marlene stares at Neal; her eyes are cold and glassy.

NEAL

(whispers)

Goodbye. I'm sorry. I really am.

Marlene remains silent, while she watches Neal quietly sneak out the door into the darkness.

EXT. DEAN'S DORMITORY - EVENING

Neal is driving his mother's older model Chevrolet. His friend, Dean, is waving his arms wildly to flag him down. Dean is dressed in an expensive, tan, three-piece summer suit. Neal is wearing a plain white shirt and well-worn, gray slacks. Dean jerks open the passenger door before Neal is completely stopped.

DEAN

Why are you so damn late, Big Fella?

NEAL

Why didn't you help me clean our house
and set the table?

DEAN

Oh. You're going to be bitchy tonight.
Loosen up, Big Fella. It's your big
chance to score.

NEAL

Fat chance. She doesn't even like me.

DEAN

She's hot for your body. I could
see that when I got our dates.

NEAL

You're crazy, Dean. She likes you
better than me.

Neal drives slowly to the front of the girls' dorm. Dean
jumps out. Neal sits in the car looking depressed.

DEAN

Get your butt out here. Shape up
and act like a man. You're coming
in with me.

Neal reluctantly exits the car and follows Dean into the
girls' dorm. Dean asks at the desk for Christie and
Astrid. The girls are dressed in expensive evening
clothes. They are both gorgeous. Dean is bubbling with
excitement, but Neal looks befuddled. Dean and Astrid
immediately fall into each others arms. Christie keeps her
distance from Neal. She acts as though she hasn't seen him
before. They get into the car and drive across town to
Neal's home.

INT. NEAL'S HOME - EVENING

When they enter Neal's home, Marian is wiping her hands
on her apron. She is wearing a matronly-style,
dark blue dress. Her forehead is sweaty. Her
make-up is too thick. Her smile is forced.

NEAL

I'd like you to meet Astrid. You know Dean. And you've met Christie.

MARIAN

I love meeting Neal's new friends from college. I didn't think he would make any new friends. He's so bashful. He's been shy ever since he was a baby. I've tried to coax him to open up, but he's too stubborn. I'll show Neal how to broil your steaks. I just bought them today. You can sit in the living room. We'll call you when they're ready.

Marian helps Neal place the steaks under the broiler and quietly slips into her bedroom, next to the kitchen. Neal opens the oven and the steaks spit hot grease on his arm.

NEAL

Ouch. Sonofabitch. That really hurts.

Dean runs into the kitchen, followed by Astrid and Christie.

DEAN

You poor baby. Big Fella burned himself. Let me kiss your owie.

When Dean tries to kiss Neal's hand, Neal pushes him away.

CHRISTIE

Why do you call him Big Fella?
Does he like that nickname?

NEAL

Hell, no. He's always mocking me. Sometimes, Dean is a pain in the ass. I'll bring the steaks to the table. Go, sit down. Please get out of my way.

CHRISTIE

Neal sounds just like my father when he gets mad. He is temperamental.

INT. MARIAN'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The guest are unusually quiet, until they finish eating.

ASTRID

In just two weeks I'll be in Paris.
I'm dying to speak French with real
Frenchmen. Where are you going this
summer, Dean?

DEAN

My father is learning Spanish,
because he's does business in Mexico.
Our family will be in Mexico City.
I don't want to go, but they insist.

ASTRID

Christie's going to Norway with her
mother.

CHRISTIE

I follow my mother around while
she shops for flatware. If I
don't like what she shows me,
then she buys it.

ASTRID

Where are you going, Neal?

NEAL

I'll be riding around town in a
lumber truck. My mother's boyfriend
said there's an opening at the
lumberyard.

There is an uncomfortable silence at the table.

NEAL

I'm taking orders for dessert.
What would you like? Apple pie,
blueberry pie, or lemon? Astrid,
what would you like?

ASTRID

I'm on a diet.

CHRISTIE

It sounds tempting. But nothing
for me either. Just coffee.

DEAN

I'd better not. I want to keep
my boyish figure.

NEAL

Well, what should we do?

ASTRID

We can play bridge.

NEAL

We don't have any cards.

CHRISTIE

I'll make coffee. Dean and Astrid
can sit on the couch and visit.

Christie and Neal clear the dishes from the table. Dean
and Astride cuddle up on the couch like lovers do.

INT. MARIAN'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Neal puts his arms around Christie's waist and holds her
while she's making coffee.

NEAL

(to Christie)

I'm going to the back door and howl at the
moon.

CHRISTIE

I'll bring you a cup of coffee when it's
ready.

Christie soon walks down the dark hallway with Neal's cup
Of hot coffee. She hands it to him carefully.

CHRISTIE

Watch out. It's hot.

NEAL

(jokingly)

What's hot?

CHRISTIE
(laughing)
The coffee's hot.

NEAL
Look at the ring around the moon.
We can see it even better from
my bedroom window.

INT. NEAL'S BEDROOM - EVENING

After they climb the stairs to Neal's knotty pine bedroom, they walk across the room to the window and stand together sipping coffee.

CHRISTIE
(smiling)
Won't your mother wonder where we are?

NEAL
Let her wonder.

Neal takes Christie's coffee cup and sets it on the window sill next to his. He holds her around her waist and softly kisses her. She's a statue at first, but she changes into a warm, loving person.

NEAL
(whispers)
Let's sit on the edge of my bed.

CHRISTIE
On your bed? Don't try anything.

NEAL
Sit down carefully. The springs squeak.

Neal holds her waist, as they sit on the edge of the bed gazing at the moon.

NEAL
(whispers)
I'm still in love with you.

CHRISTIE
Will you be back at Nordland next year?

NEAL

I hope so. If I don't have any problems.

CHRISTIE

What kind of problems?

NEAL

I can't talk about them.

NEAL

Do you mind if I lie down? My back is sore.

CHRISTIE

Go ahead. I'll just sit here.

Neal walks around to the other side of the bed and slowly rolls onto the mattress until he's lying behind her. The moonlight casts a halo around her wavy hair. Neal messages her back gently, and she slowly rocks back and forth. When Neal reaches around her waist, she gently pushes his hand away.

CHRISTIE

You promised not to try anything.

NEAL

I had my fingers crossed.

MARIAN

(hollers)

Yewhoo. Neal. Are you up there?

CHRISTIE

Answer her.

NEAL

Maybe she'll go away.

CHRISTIE

(snaps)

No, she won't. You answer her, or I will.

NEAL

(yells sarcastically)

I'm here, Mother Dear. I'm being a good boy, so don't worry. Go back to bed like you promised.

Marian moccasins sound like sandpaper as she swishes down the hall.

CHRISTIE

We have to leave.

Christie sits up abruptly and brushes off her dress.

NEAL

There's no place to go.

CHRISTIE

I'm going downstairs. Are you staying here?

NEAL

I'm coming.

INT. THE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Neal follows Christie down the stairs and through the house and into the living room where Astrid and Dean are being romantic.

CHRISTIE

We're leaving. Neal's going to drive me back to the dorm. I'm not feeling well. You stay here if you want. I don't want to ruin the party.

ASTRID

We should go, too. Did Neal's mother upset you?

CHRISTIE

Not at all.

DEAN

We'll stay here. Don't forget to come back for us.

EXT. NEAL DRIVES DOWNTOWN AND THEN TO THE CAMPUS - NIGHT

Neal drives slowly down Main Street and then past Oscar's Coffee Shop.

NEAL

I have an idea. Let's go into Oscar's.
It's still early.

CHRISTIE

(sharply)

That's a ridiculous idea.

Christie doesn't look at Neal or say anything even after they are parked in front of her dorm.

NEAL

It wasn't my fault. I told my
mother to stay in her room.

CHRISTIE

I know it. She just doesn't like me.

Christie opens the car door and lets herself out and marches up the stairs of her dorm with Neal following.

CHRISTIE

You can come in and sit in the lounge
if you want.

NEAL

I can't. I feel terrible.

CHRISTIE

Suit yourself.

Neal opens the door of her dorm like a gentleman and watches her disappear. After he drives back home, he sneaks in the back door and retreats to his bedroom. He waits until it's time to take Dean and Astrid back to their dorms.

INT. HONOR COUNCIL CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Phil and Neal are seated with DR. HALL and the six student members of the Honor Council at a long table. The students look like prudish, intellectuals. Spotlights shine down on them like it's an inquisition. DANIEL EGGLESTON, the student chairman of the Honor Council, raps his gavel.

DANIEL

The meeting of the Honor Council will come to order. My name is Daniel Eggleston, and as chairman of this council, I am going to first call on Robert Johnson to explain to all of us in detail what exactly it was that he saw or heard in his philosophy class with Philip Olavson and Betsy Knight that would lead him to his decision not to sign his pledge on his blue book. The floor is yours, Mr. Johnson.

ROBERT JOHNSON

As it happened, I noticed that Mr. Olavson had finished his test, but that he wasn't leaving the room, as he was supposed to. All I can assume is he was waiting for his girlfriend, Miss Betsy Knight. Well, if he had just waited for her, and had not done anything, that would have been all right. But as it was, he took a piece of paper from his shirt pocket and wrote a very long note to her, which he would do for no other reason than to pass her the answer to one of the questions on our test. Is there any other reason why someone would pass a note during a test, especially when the Code of Honor strictly forbids it? I mean, he must be crazy to think that he could get away with it.

PHIL

I admit that I finished my test before Elizabeth, and I also admit that Mr. Johnson is right in that I did not leave the room immediately. I will admit that I did, indeed, wait for her as he said. I realize, now, that waiting for her was a mistake. But as far as writing a note to her and giving her the answer to one of the test

PHIL (CONT'D)

questions, that is absolutely ridiculous. How could I possibly write the answer to a philosophy test on a scrap of notebook paper? And how could I hand it to her without the whole room seeing me do it? The only thing I admit to doing wrong is sitting in the room a bit longer than I should have and waiting for Betsy to finish.

DANIEL

And you didn't whisper to her?

PHIL

Definitely not.

DANIEL

And you flatly deny that you wrote her a note, and the answer to a philosophy question?

PHIL

I wrote no such note. I waited without moving a muscle.

DANIEL

Then, you are going to deny all the charges made by Mr. Johnson?

PHIL

I most certainly do. I've never cheated on any of my work at Nordland, and I don't know of anyone who has.

DANIEL

Neal Olavson, have you come to this meeting with your brother to testify about your brother's integrity and honesty? Is there anything that you can think of that would make us believe your brother, Phil Olavson, rather than Mr. Robert Johnson?

NEAL Well, I remember that when I was in high school, I wanted Phil to write some papers for me, and help me do some problems, but he always said that it would be cheating, and that I had to do the work by myself, whether I flunked or not. They were my problems, so I had to solve them. I can see now why he said what he said, even though I got pretty mad at him at the time for being so straight. He was too honest to help me.

DANIEL

Is that all?

NEAL

Yes. That's all.

The Council members look at one another, deciding who should speak next. DAVID HENDERSON, who looks like he lives in the Nordland Library, raises his hand.

DAVID HENDERSON

My name is David Henderson, for the sake of those of you who don't know, and I'd like to know from Mr. Johnson exactly where he was sitting in relationship to Mr. Olavson and Miss Knight. May I ask Mr. Johnson to explain where he was sitting, so we can tell how good his eyesight is, and how he could see everything so well.

ROBERT JOHNSON

I was two rows behind, and one row to the left of Miss Knight.

DAVID HENDERSON

What I want to know is whether or not there were any students sitting directly between you and Miss Knight.

ROBERT JOHNSON

Yes, there was one person who was sitting between me and Betsy, but there was no one sitting behind Phil Olavson, so I could see him very clearly.

DAVID HENDERSON

You mean you could see everything clearly from three rows away?

ROBERT

I saw everything. Just the way I described it. Are you calling me a liar?

DAVID HENDERSON

Yes. I think you're lying. Why, I don't know.

The hand of RON INGERSOL flies up, and he is bubbling with excitement. He looks feminine with long hair.

INGERSOL

My name is Ron Ingersol. I want to diagram where each of you was sitting before we go any further. It always helps me to clarify what really happened. I'll draw a seating chart. Where were you sitting, Mr. Johnson?

ROBERT JOHNSON

I was sitting in the second row in seat five. Elizabeth Knight was sitting in row four, seat three. And Phil Olavson was in row five, seat three.

RON INGERSOL

Were there students sitting between you and Miss Knight and Phil Olavson?

ROBERT JOHNSON

Yes. All of the seats in row three were occupied. But I could see between them.

RON INGERSOL

I really have a hard time believing that you could see them. You couldn't have seen Mr. Olavson writing anything. You probably want to believe that Mr. Olavson was cheating. But it's so unlikely, it makes me laugh. I really think there's something fishy about your accusation.

Council member IRENE SCHMIDT waves her thin arm in the air. Her black glasses are butterfly shaped.

IRENE SCHMIDT

I'm Irene Schmidt, and from my experience on the Honor Council, it has almost always turned out that in cases where the accused is guilty, there have been two or more witnesses who have seen the act perpetrated, and in this case, it is the testimony of only one witness. Furthermore, in this case we have talked to professor Holland, the philosophy professor who teaches this course, and he said that the answers did not look like they'd been copied or plagiarized. If two people read the same textbook, they're bound to write essays that are vaguely similar. We only have the word of the Robert Johnson, and it doesn't seem sufficient to me to prove that Phil Olavson is guilty of cheating.

CAROLE JAMES raises her hand to speak. She is thin and angular in appearance.

CAROLE JAMES

I'm Carole James. I'd like to know why we haven't been asked to consider the testimony of Elizabeth Knight. It's highly irregular, Dr. Hall. Why isn't she here?

DR. HALL, the adviser to the Honor Council, acts surprised and defensive.

DR. HALL

Well, Miss James, I understand why you're asking the question. I've already talked with Miss Olavson. I mean Elizabeth Knight. I have reasoned that insofar as Phil and Betsy are engaged, it would be like asking a wife to testify against her husband. Generally, that's not considered to be acceptable. I, therefore, concluded that she shouldn't testify. I suppose that doesn't please you, but I took it upon myself to be the judge in this case. When I talked with her, she told me quite a few details about the situation. But I'm not free to divulge those facts at this time. To answer your question, I told her that she did not have to attend this hearing.

CAROLE JAMES

I don't accept your reasoning, Dr. Hall. When I was in high school, everyone I knew cheated almost every day on tests and homework assignments. I swore that I'd try to do something about it. I came to Nordland because I knew it had the Honor System, and there wouldn't be any cheating. I think that an engaged couple is even more likely than friends to be tempted to cheat, mainly to show their personal loyalty. I don't like it, and I think Miss Elizabeth Knight should be here. You are probably allowing her to get away with cheating. I'm going to ask Mr. Philip Olavson how much time he spent tutoring Elizabeth Knight before this test. She is not a philosophy major, but he is. I want to know how weak she really is in the subject of philosophy. I couldn't pass a philosophy test without personal help. What actually did he do before their test? There has to be a limit as to how much help you can give to a fellow student.

CAROLE JAMES (CONT'D)

I believe that Phil Olavson and Elizabeth Knight crossed the line. Their so-called tutoring was actually cheating.

PHIL

Elizabeth and I were in the same freshman English class. We did not study together. But we share hundreds of similar opinions about literature. Just because we think alike does not make us cheaters, Miss James. Elizabeth's major is music. If she teaches me how to sing a song, is that cheating? If I tell her that such-and-such an idea was developed by a certain philosopher, is that cheating? I can assure you that Elizabeth Knight is very intelligent. She can write her own answers without any help from me. Yes, we did spend time studying together. I don't think there is anything wrong with that. We can't live in academic isolation. Aren't some of the world's greatest discoveries done in collaboration? Is this college going to make a rule that students can't study together? I'll tell you again that Elizabeth did not need to get any answers from me, and I didn't offer any to her.

ARTHUR ESTERBERG raises his hand to speak. He is a sober-faced blond, wearing a white dress shirt, who looks like he's angry with Phil.

ARTHUR ESTERBURG

My name is Arthur Esterburg. I assume that the majority of Nordland students are totally honest and obey the rules. On the other hand, I know how much cheating goes on at the universities in this country. At Nordland we can't afford to lower our standards. There must be absolutely no cheating on our campus. Our reputation rests on the fact that we have an Honor Code, and we live by its rules. Expulsion is the price you pay if you're a student on our campus, and you get caught cheating. Occasionally, someone will forget to sign his or her pledge. If that person is reported to be a cheater and explains to us that he or she merely forgot to sign the blue book pledge, there is no penalty whatsoever. But a student's signature stating that he or she has not cheated or seen anyone else cheat, is what makes this a great and honest college. I'm sure you agree with what I'm saying, Mr. Olavson. You're a senior. You will graduate in a couple of weeks with honors. What would your family say if you told them you're not going to get your degree? You admitted that you waited for Miss Knight after you had finished your test. That is very bad judgment. So, I am inclined to believe Mr. Johnson. I'd like to ask Robert Johnson if he has seen anyone else cheat, and if he has reported anyone else to the Honor Council.

ROBERT JOHNSON

No, I haven't. There was never a need to. This is the first case of cheating that I've seen.

A sixth member of the Honor Council raises his hand to speak. STANLEY KRUPP is a composed, mature-looking student With friendly eyes and a calm, quiet demeanor.

STANLEY KRUPP

My name is Stanley Krupp. I'd think that Mr. Olavson, after four years at Nordland, would have more sense than to cheat on a test just before graduation. If he did pass a note to Miss Knight, I'd like to know what she did with it after she apparently read it. What did she do with it, Mr. Johnson?

ROBERT JOHNSON

I don't know. I couldn't see what she did with it.

STANLEY KRUPP

Then, you probably didn't see anything else either, did you Mr. Johnson.

ROBERT JOHNSON

You can think whatever you want to.

STANLEY KRUPP

I think you're up to something. What is it, Mr. Johnson?

ROBERT JOHNSON

You're crazy. I'm telling you the truth.

Chairman DAN EGGLESTON raps his gavel.

DAN EGGLESTON

Each member has had a chance to speak. If there are any further comments from the accuser or the defendant, we'll hear them at this time.

ROBERT JOHNSON

None.

PHIL

No.

DAN EGGLESTON

Then, we'll deliberate after the witnesses have left and reach our verdict. Dr. Hall will contact the people involved and give them the results. Remember that everything that was said here today is strictly confidential. This part of the meeting is adjourned.

Phil and Neal rise and leave very slowly and humbly.

INT. PHIL'S DORMITORY ROOM - DAY

NEAL

I was terrified in there.

PHIL

I trust in the Lord. Honesty always wins. What's there to be afraid of?

NEAL

If they vote that you're guilty of cheating, it'll be like having a felony on your record.

PHIL

Why are you taking this so seriously? I'm graduating at the top of my class.

NEAL

If you're found guilty, you'll be expelled. It'll mean the end of your career.

PHIL

I've made this college famous in Minnesota. How would the Honor Council explain it, if I suddenly disappear just before my graduation?

NEAL

Their job is to judge your academic integrity. A couple of them think you cheated. You're not important to them as a scholar or an athlete. Tell me the truth. Did you cheat?

PHIL

Do you know anyone who's been expelled by the Honor Council?

NEAL

If you're expelled, you slip out the back door quietly.

PHIL

You're too pessimistic.

NEAL

Your entire life is at stake.

PHIL

I say, "Trust in the Lord."

NEAL

What if the Lord isn't watching?

PHIL

My faith in God has brought me this far. Why should I worry?

NEAL

It's based on fear. All the Nordland students are scared to death.

PHIL

If you don't believe in the Honor Code, you should've gone to a state college.

NEAL

But what if the Honor Council gets it wrong?

PHIL

They won't, Neal. They're the most honest, intelligent students at this college.

NEAL

They never make mistakes?

PHIL

I don't see how they can. The truth always wins. Say hi to Mom.

NEAL

She's getting nervous about your graduation party.

PHIL

Tell her not to make a big fuss.

NEAL

I wish it were over.

PHIL

Don't worry so darn much. God is on your side.

NEAL

Do you think Daddy Martin is on your side? We can't disappoint him.

PHIL

You see deeper into the past and future than I do.

NEAL

That's the kindest thing you've ever said to me. If Daddy Martin appears to me tonight, I'll tell him you love him. He has very tender feelings. I know that because we inherited them from him.

Neal and Phil give each other bear hugs.

INT. CHRISTIE'S DORM ROOM - NOON

Christie is sitting on her bed with her friend PETER. They are chatting and laughing until they hear a knock on her door. Her two heavy and two light pieces of luggage are standing in the middle of her otherwise completely bare room. Her door opens slowly, and Neal peeks in at them. Christie and Peter look surprised.

Peter is a stocky, red-head, wearing a Nordland College letterman's jacket with a patch for playing football. He appears to be cocky and not overly intelligent.

CHRISTIE

Neal, what are you doing here? I thought you weren't coming. So, I asked Peter if he would help me.

NEAL

I tried to call you, but no one answered the switch board. My mother wouldn't let me use her car today. Her sister's sick, so she went to visit her. I had to run all the way from home. I'm sorry I'm late.

CHRISTIE

I really don't need your help. You can run back home, if you want to.

NEAL

Don't you want me to carry your luggage out to the bus?

CHRISTIE

Peter, do you want Neal to help you carry my luggage out to the bus? Neal's strong. He's going to work at the lumberyard this summer.

PETER

If he's going to work at the lumberyard, he must be strong.

NEAL

(to himself)

Are you mocking me?

CHRISTIE

Are you mad at me? You weren't here. I can't carry it myself.

NEAL

No. But, I'm really embarrassed. Do you want me to help you, or not?

CHRISTIE

I don't think you should start whining. It's not my fault, if you're not dependable. Peter wouldn't whine, would you Peter?

NEAL

(to Peter)

I haven't seen you before. How did you meet Christie? What's your claim to fame?

CHRISTIE

Peter's on the football team.

NEAL

Then, you know my brother, Phil Olavson. I'm Phil's humble, younger brother.

PETER

If you were humble, you'd go away and leave us alone.

CHRISTIE

I agree. Neal broke our date, and he wants me to take the blame.

NEAL

If you're on the football team, why haven't I seen you play? Are you on the fourth or fifth string?

PETER

I play for the fun of it.

NEAL

That's a line of bull. Nobody plays football for fun. It's not fun trying to injure each other every day.

PETER

We don't try to injure each other. Where did you get that idea?

NEAL

I know it for a fact. My brother laughs about injuring people. He thinks it's funny if he breaks someone's leg.

PETER

That's not your brother's attitude. I know him. He's a religious guy. He wouldn't play that way.

NEAL

I know him better than you do. He told me once that he broke a guy's leg. They stopped the game and took him to the hospital. Does that sound like fun?

PETER

It hasn't happened to me, so I don't care. You sound more like a nerd than Phil's brother.

NEAL

If we were playing football, I'd knock you flat on your butt with a forearm flipper.

PETER

You don't know anything about football. I think you're a phony.

NEAL

Christie knows who I am. Tell him that I'm Phil's brother.

CHRISTIE

I don't know anything about you either. To me you're like a shadow.

NEAL

Haven't we gone out on dates? Didn't you come up to my bedroom?

CHRISTIE

You're living in a dream world.

NEAL

Didn't I tell you that I love you?

CHRISTIE

Your approach was very crude.

NEAL

Why don't you say yes or no to me?

CHRISTIE

Girls don't say yes to every guy who tries to flatter them.

NEAL

So you leave everyone dangling. And that's all right with you?

CHRISTIE

If someone's sincere, he'll tell you over and over that he loves you. He won't say it once, and then clam up, like he's afraid of you.

NEAL

Am I supposed to repeat myself endlessly? After you snubbed me?

CHRISTIE

That's a strange thing to say. I didn't snub you.

NEAL

What did you tell me?

CHRISTIE

I said that you're infatuated with me.

NEAL

To me that means that you don't like me.

CHRISTIE

No, it doesn't. It means I'm not in love with you. I told you that before. You don't fall in love with someone until you get to know them.

PETER

(to Neal)

You're going around in circles.
Your comments don't make sense.

NEAL

If you don't fall in love the first
time you see someone, you'll never
fall in love with them.

CHRISTIE

I don't believe that.

PETER

I don't either.

NEAL

When's your bus leaving?

CHRISTIE

You made me forget. Peter can carry
my two small bags. Neal has to
build up his muscles, so he can work
at the lumberyard. He doesn't mind
carrying my heavy luggage.

PETER

Sounds fine to me. I'll sit on the
bus with you until it leaves for the
airport.

NEAL

I'm going to find out if my
professors posted my final grades.

CHRISTIE

You're always too eager. You have
to learn to be more patient.

NEAL

(whispers to himself)

Yes, Mother, dear.

Christie and Peter are smiling broadly and holding
hands, as Peter carries Christie's two small bags. Neal

(CONTINUED)

lags behind, shuffling like a slave with the two large pieces of luggage, which he can barely lift. Neal sets the two heavy pieces of luggage next to the idling airport bus. He peers through the tinted windows and sees Christie and Peter seated together inside.

INT. GRIMSBY HALL, A GOTHIC SCIENCE BUILDING - DAY

Neal climbs the steps to Dr. Mizener's office on the top floor. Neal knocks on Dr. Mizener's office door, since the grades aren't posted on the bulletin board in the hall. The doorknob turns slowly. Dr. Mizener's scowling face peers out at him, like he's being disturbed.

DR. MIZENER

It's never my 'A' students who come to see me about their grades. It's always someone who's worried. That's what you want to know, isn't it, your final grade?

NEAL

Yes. Do you have my final exam corrected yet?

DR. MIZENER

I didn't sit here and grade yours first. I don't pick out the best ones to grade first, either. I know your friend, Dean Soldal, will get an 'A,' so it would be easy to grade his first, wouldn't it? I may have graded yours. I hide the names while I grade the tests. I suppose I can see if I graded yours.

NEAL

(shaky voice)

No, don't bother. I'll wait until they're mailed out.

DR. MIZENER

I'm curious myself, Olavson. Wait here. I'll look.

Dr. Mizener closes the door in Neal's face with a bang that echoes down the empty hall. Neal squirms around like he's going to wet his pants. Dr. Mizener opens his door slowly and stares daggers at Neal as he hands him his blue book.

DR. MIZENER

(sneering)

Here it is. Percentage-wise it's seventy-nine percent. If I average that in with your other grades, you'll get a 'C-.' That's a respectable grade in my class. Now, I have to get back to work. If everyone came in to see me, I'd be here all summer.

NEAL

(takes his blue book)

Thanks for the grade.

DR. MIZENER

Did you study for a change, or did you get help?

NEAL

Both.

DR. MIZENER

I'd advise you not to major in math or science.

NEAL

Thank you, sir. For your advice.

INT. THIRD FLOOR OFFICES OF NORDLAND LIBRARY - DAY

Neal raps on Dr. Roth's door, and the noise rattles like thunder down the empty hall. Dr. Roth's head pops out of an office down the hall, and he calls back.

DR. ROTH

I suppose you want to know your final grade.

Neal humbly walks down to meet Dr. Roth, who smiles at Neal, even though Neal broke into Dr. Roth's conversation with a fellow English professor. Dr. Roth walks back to his office. Removes a ring of keys from his pocket, and beckons Neal to come in and take a seat. Dr. Roth reaches for his pipe and lights it with a wooden match. His Ivy League sport coat has big leather patches on the elbows.

Dr. Roth digs through a pile of blue books on his desk.

DR. ROTH

Let's look at your final exam first.
Here it is.

While Dr. Roth reads parts of Neal's final, he grunts, chuckles, and apparently enjoys things that Neal has written.

NEAL

Did I blow it?

DR. ROTH

Here. It's yours. You can keep it as a souvenir. It's a very good exam, Olavson. You can be proud of yourself.

Neal looks inside the cover of his blue book.

NEAL

This is the first 'A' I've gotten in college. Is this my final grade?

Dr. ROTH

I said that to motivate you, but I'm giving you a B+ for your final grade. I think that's a good grade, and what you deserve for the course. If you take another course from me, I'll give you the benefit of the doubt and give you the 'A.' Do you think that's fair, Olavson?

NEAL

Sure. I'm happy to get a B+. I don't think I'm an 'A' student, anyway.

DR. ROTH

Don't put yourself down. You wrote very well. Better than most. I enjoyed reading your test. You had some interesting ideas and interpretations. You'll make a good history student. You have extremely interesting insights.

NEAL

You're the one who deserves credit. You're a very fine teacher.

DR. ROTH

(chuckling)

Now, you can come back in the fall and find yourself a lovely, young belle.

NEAL

That's the one subject I'm flunking.

DR. ROTH

(puffing his pipe)

Don't worry. You have plenty of time. What do you do during the summer?

NEAL

I plan to work at the lumberyard. The pay is good. It all depends.

DR. ROTH

Depends on what?

NEAL

My mother's boyfriend works there, and he told me he'd get me a job. Thanks for the great class. I learned more than I have in my other classes.

DR. ROTH

Thank you, Neal. I hope you take one of my other classes. Good luck with your job this summer.

INT. MARIAN'S KITCHEN ON DAY OF GRADUATION- NOON

On the day of Phil's graduation, Marian is wearing a dark-blue suit that looks like it's ten-years-old. Neal is wearing a worn, hand-me-down, brown sport coat that's too big, with gray, baggy slacks. Marian is powdering her nose at mirror above the sink. Grant is standing near the telephone.

MARIAN

Why doesn't Al answer his phone? If he's leaving for California, good riddance.

NEAL

But, then, I won't have a job this summer.

MARIAN

Quit feeling sorry for yourself. Phil's graduating with honors, and you're whimpering. Get some backbone.

NEAL

Maybe, Al drinks too much, but he's always been kind to me.

MARIAN

We wouldn't be in such sad shape, if your father was alive. Lots of the professors and the president of the college came to your father's funeral. Al is certainly not loved and respected like your father.

NEAL

You've been stringing Al along for months. He's frustrated.

MARIAN

If Al shows up sober today, I'll give him another chance. Go out and start my car.

NEAL

We're not going to get very close to the stadium. Can you walk a few blocks?

MARIAN

I'm not that old.

NEAL

We could have gotten a ride in Al's new car.

MARIAN

I hope my nephews don't drink too much. I don't want them to embarrass me in front of Betsy's parents.

NEAL

They always drink too much. And pick fights.

EXT. COLLEGE FOOTBALL STADIUM - AFTERNOON

Neal and Marian are looking for places to sit before the graduation ceremony begins. Marian places her hand on Neal's back and pushes him.

NEAL

Quit pushing me. The only seats left are near the top.

MARIAN

Ask someone to squeeze in. Hurry up. A gentleman would find a place for his mother to sit.

Neal and Marian climb to the top row of bleachers, losing their balance as they go. They finally sit down and look around.

MARIAN

When will the ceremony start?

NEAL

Just be patient. It's a beautiful day. Let's enjoy it.

MARIAN

I can't enjoy it. Four years is a long time to wait.

NEAL

Maybe, Phil won't graduate today.

MARIAN

You always say such dumb things.

NEAL

Maybe, it's the truth.

MARIAN

We forgot to get out programs. Hurry down and get one from the ushers.

NEAL

I'm going. You don't have to poke me.

Neal walks down the track looking for an usher with a program. He wanders to the end of the stadium and sees Al lurking behind a fence, so he walks over to talk to him. Al looks scruffy and hung over, wearing a faded Hawaiian shirt and smoking a cigarette.

NEAL

Are you coming to Phil's graduation party?

AL

(slurs)

Hell, no. I'm packed and leaving this tight-assed little town for California. Do you want to come with me?

NEAL

I'd like to. I want to graduate first. Did you ask about my job at the lumberyard?

AL

I've had too much on my mind. I forgot.

NEAL

Mom said she'd give you a second chance, if you come to Phil's graduation party.

AL

You've been just like a son to me. I wish you were coming with me.

NEAL

I can't Al. Maybe, I'll come out to visit you. Send me your address.

AL

I don't know where I'll be. I'm traveling light.

NEAL

Do you have a destination?

AL

No. I don't want to be dragged down by family.

NEAL

I have to get back to Mom. She'll kill me, if I'm gone too long.

AL

Tell Marian she's a great gal, but I ain't waiting around for her no longer.

Al staggers away from the fence. He flips his cigarette on someone's lawn and doesn't look back.

NEAL

Okay, Al. Have a good trip. Be careful driving.

Neal returns to his seat next to Marian.

MARIAN

Where in the devil have you been? Why were you gone so long?

NEAL

I didn't find a program. Guess who I saw? Al was standing behind the chain link fence at the end of the stadium. I was talking with him.

MARIAN

What's he doing here? He shows up now, but he doesn't have the decency to call me. Did you invite him to Phil's party?

NEAL

He wants me to go California with him. He's not coming to your party. He's a little tipsy. I hope he makes it out of town.

MARIAN

Did you tell him I'll give him a second chance, if he comes to Phil's party?

NEAL

I told him I want to go with him, but I don't have my suitcase packed.

MARIAN

You're hopeless. You're always lying to me. Now be quiet. Who's speaking?

NEAL

He's a Harvard mathematician. He's telling all the graduates how brilliant they are.

The speaker in the distance is barely audible as he drags out his speech. Then, there is the tedious reading of the graduates' names. Finally, the president of the college announces that the senior class is graduated.

EXT. ON THE GRASSY FOOTBALL FIELD - DAY

Out on the grassy field, the faculty and families are congratulating the graduates. Marian and Neal wander down to find Phil and Betsy and congratulate them.

PHIL

Dr. Hall, I'd like you to meet my mother.

DR. HALL

I'd personally like to congratulate you, Mrs. Olavson. You should feel proud that you've raised such a fine young son.

MARIAN

Dr. Hall, I want you to meet my son, Neal. He just started this year. Neal, shake hands with Dr. Hall.

NEAL

It's a pleasure to meet you Dr. Hall. Phil might not have graduated without your help.

DR. HALL

I know that Phil has the gift of integrity. That's why graduate schools and businesses so eagerly accept our students. Do you plan to go to graduate school yourself?

NEAL

I'd like to. I'll have to graduate first.

DR. HALL

Set your goals high and don't quit until you reach them.

DR. Hall turns his back and walks away.
Phil wanders off into the crowd to find Betsy's parents.

MARIAN

(to Neal)

Why did he talk to you like that? Does he know you?

NEAL

He says the same thing to everyone. Can we change the subject?

MARIAN

Wait here for me. I'll ask Phil if he wants to ride home with us.

Marian walks through the crowd of graduates to find Phil. Phil is visiting with Betsy's well-dressed parents. Marian and Phil have a conversation that can't be heard. Then, Marian returns to Neal's side and reports the results.

MARIAN

Phil doesn't want to ride with us. I suppose he doesn't want to be seen in my old car. I've never felt so insulted in my life. I wish I had never come to his graduation.

NEAL

You're crazy, Mom. No one is trying to insult you.

MARIAN

If Daddy Martin was here, no one would treat me like this. Why do they treat me like I'm an inferior person? I can't help it if I was born poor.

NEAL

I don't know where your dumb ideas are coming from. But get them out of your head.

MARIAN

I have just as many brains as they do. I wanted to be a nurse. But my parents told me we didn't have money for college.

NEAL

I wish you were a nurse. You'd be just as proud as the doctors and nurses who graduate from this college.

MARIAN

Why does Phil have all the luck? He's everyone's hero. Why aren't we as lucky as him? I'm his mother.

NEAL

Don't try to figure it out. You're over thinking this way too much.

MARIAN

Everyone here is looking down on me. It just isn't fair.

NEAL

They're all looking up to you, Mom. You're the mother of Phil Olavson. Everyone thinks Phil got his brains from you.

MARIAN

Well, he did. I'm glad you understand me. I hope my feelings don't show too much. I want to have fun at Phil's party.

NEAL

You will. Your family will be there. I hope they don't drink too much.

MARIAN

Don't worry. They all know I invited some very polite people.

EXT. INSIDE MARIAN'S CAR - DAY

Phil and Marian are riding home in Marian's old car. They're alone, so Neal talks to his mother in private.

NEAL

Do you want to know why Dr. Hall knows me? He's the adviser of the Student Honor Council. I don't know how to say this. But, someone in Phil's philosophy class accused him of cheating on a test. So, when Phil had to appear in front of the Student Honor Council, he asked me to come with him. I did, because I felt I had to be loyal to Phil. This one guy said he saw Phil pass a note to Betsy. Two of the council members believed him. Four of them didn't believe him. So, the Student Honor Council ruled that Phil was innocent. Phil could have been expelled before his graduation. Now, you know the truth.

MARIAN

Why did you tell me this?

NEAL

I thought you should know.

MARIAN

Why? Would it make you happy if Phil did something wrong? You shouldn't have told me.

NEAL

You've always told me to be honest, so, I told you what happened. You act like you're mad at me for telling you.

MARIAN

I am. You're trying to spoil my day. I never want to hear another word about it. Do Betsy's parents know about this?

NEAL

No, only Betsy. She supposedly copied a note from Phil.

MARIAN

She's too smart to do anything like that. Are you making this up just to irritate me?

NEAL

Sure. I like to make up stories just for you.

EXT. THE BACK STEPS OF MARIAN'S HOME - AFTERNOON

Neal is sitting alone on the back steps of his house eating a sandwich. Betsy comes out of the house to visit with him. There is a faint noise of the party inside. Betsy does not sit down.

BETSY

Don't get up. I'm not eating yet. I need a break from all the visiting. Can I talk with you?

NEAL

Congratulations. I'll bet you're excited about your wedding and moving to Chicago.

BETSY

Do you realize that the whole mess about Phil cheating was my fault? I don't know if he'll forgive me, if I tell him. I know you went to the trial with him. That was awfully loyal of you. Do you want me to tell you what really happened?

NEAL

It sounded fishy to me. I still haven't figured out why Robert Johnson accused Phil of cheating.

BETSY

Well, I'd dated Phil only a few times during our first year, and I had dates with a few other boys. One of them was Robert Johnson. When I told him that I didn't want to date him anymore, he got extremely jealous. But my girlfriends told me to refuse him, and he'd eventually have to give up. I tried to avoid him. But, I saw him staring daggers at me when I was with Phil. So when Robert accused Phil of cheating, I knew his goal was to spoil my happiness. Now, I can't decide if I should tell Phil.

NEAL

Phil has to learn that there are people in this world like Robert Johnson. He thinks everyone is good-hearted and honest. As long as you asked me, I'd say that Phil has to know the truth. He's a bit naive.

BETSY

If I tell him how sorry I am, I hope he'll understand. I'm glad I got your advice. I think you're smarter and have more common sense than Phil or anyone else I know. Thank you, Neal, from the bottom of my heart.

Betsy opens the back door and goes inside.

Soon, Marian opens the door and finds Neal sitting alone.

MARIAN

Why are you sitting alone out here? Come inside and join the party. We're having lots of fun. I want you to play the piano for us.

NEAL

Betsy's a music major. I'll feel like a fool.

MARIAN

Be a good sport. Do it for me. Betsy told me that one of your cute classmates from the college wants to meet you.

NEAL

Who's that?

MARIAN

You'll have to find out for yourself. She must think that you're attractive.

NEAL

All right. I'll do it just for you.

INT. LOUD PARTY IN THE DINING ROOM - DAY

Neal is sitting on the piano bench playing the sing-along songs that Marian taught him and hitting several clunkers. No one is listening to him.

Then, a cute blond sits down on the bench next to him and smiles as though she really likes him. Neal acts surprised and returns her wide smile. She sings along with him, and they harmonize beautifully together. She has a heavenly voice. Like an angel. Suddenly, they quit singing and whisper to each other.

NEAL

Let's hide from my mother.

MARILYN

Why? What's wrong with your mother?

NEAL

Nothing. She's going to ask me to do something else for her, if she finds me. We can hide in my room for a while.

MARILYN

Where's your room?

NEAL

Right at the top of the stairs. I have to get away from her for a few minutes. So we can talk.

MARILYN

If you just want to talk, it's all right. I really don't know you.

NEAL

You said you did. You said you know about Phil. Doesn't that mean you know about me?

MARILYN

Not really. But don't try anything.

NEAL

I'm not that kind of boy.

INT. NEAL'S KNOTTY PINE BEDROOM - EVENING

Marilyn looks at the knotty pine boards that surround her.

NEAL

My father built this room for me and Phil. We call it the boys' room. My father lives behind the walls. He comes out and talks to me when I get scared.

MARILYN

What are you afraid of?

NEAL

Failing him. I guess.

MARILYN

You're not failing him. Why do you feel that way?

NEAL

Everyone expects me to be like Phil.

MARILYN

You just have to be yourself. You don't have to be like Phil.

NEAL

I'm really tired. Do you mind if I lie down on my bed for a few minutes?

MARILYN

I don't mind. I'll sit at your desk.

NEAL

Just sit on the edge of the bed. You can gaze at the moon with me.

MARILYN

Can I trust you?

NEAL

Of course, you can.

MARILYN

All right. I believe you. What happened to your father?

NEAL

My mother and I both have visions of him returning to us in our dreams. But my mother is very sad. She can't seem to accept his death. She has a boyfriend, Al, but he's an alcoholic. He left today for California. I was going to work with him this summer at the lumberyard. Now I don't have a job.

MARILYN

That's too bad. How are you going to make any money this summer?

NEAL

Well, my father worked at the college as a highly skilled craftsman. So, I have a tuition waiver. How do you pay your tuition? It's expensive.

MARILYN

I work in the cafeteria. I have to borrow the rest. I've seen you. And Betsy told me about your family. I know our grandfathers lived on neighboring farms and played baseball together. I know lots of your cousins. I went to high school with them. I live in the neighborhood where your mother grew up.

NEAL

Can I ask you a personal question?

MARILYN

Okay.

NEAL

Do you believe in love at first sight?

MARILYN

Of course, I do. I liked you the minute I saw you. You're so tall and handsome.

NEAL

What do you want to do when you graduate?

MARILYN

I'd like to be an actress.

NEAL

That's not very stable, if you want to raise a family.

MARILYN

I know. But I'm a dreamer.

NEAL

What's your second choice?

MARILYN

I could be a teacher. Or an administrator. I think it will be boring. But I could do it, if I had to.

NEAL

So, are you completely committed to acting? Acting and teaching are completely different.

MARILYN

I know. You're right. If I want to raise a family, I'll have to give up my dream of being a famous actress.

NEAL

So, we're not very compatible.

MARILYN

I think we are.

NEAL

Why?

MARILYN

You seem like a very understanding person.

NEAL

What do you mean by that?

MARILYN

I don't know. Trusting. Reliable. Betsy said you have more common sense than Phil. She said she thinks you're a real hero.

NEAL

I'll never be in the spotlight like Phil. I'm not that kind of hero.

MARILYN

Do you think we're compatible?

NEAL

I think so. I hope so. I think we can have a good relationship. I'm not worried. I'm willing to bend. I not committed to a rigid set of beliefs, like Phil.

MARILYN

Betsy thinks you changed him. She said he's more willing to think for himself after you talked to him. That's why she admires you.

NEAL

That's interesting. My hero thinks I'm his hero. That's ironic. What do you think?

MARILYN

I want to get to know you better. I like what I see. You've already impressed me.

NEAL

I like what I see, too. You are really beautiful.

Marilyn turns her head to look at Neal lying prostrate on his bed. She turns her body and slowly bends over to kiss him. She gets closer and closer to him until she closes her eyes and stops just above his lips. Neal looks at her and sees his real angel. The moonlight highlights her blond hair, which is brushing her forehead. Her eyes are closed like she's dreaming. Neal stops her, so he can gaze at her porcelain complexion. She looks like Marilyn Monroe posing for an artist.

NEAL

Are we going to go steady? Are you interested in me?

MARILYN

If you're willing to compromise, I think we'll make a perfect couple.

NEAL

Are you willing to compromise some of your plans?

MARILYN

If I want us to have a relationship, I guess I'll have to. Are you willing to compromise, too?

NEAL

I didn't know I'd have to. I haven't thought about it before. But I can if I really have to.

MARILYN

It'll be hard for me. But I will if I have to.

NEAL

Are you committed to our relationship?

MARILYN

Yes? Are you?

NEAL

Yes.

NEAL

I'm going to say something that will surprise you.

MARILYN

What's that?

NEAL

I love you.

MARILYN

I love you too.

The moon is a blinding spotlight shining on them sharing a passionate kiss. They relax in each others arms.

NEAL

You look like Marilyn Monroe. You are really beautiful. You look like you're my angel in the moonlight.

The noise from the graduation party continues, as Marian and her friends and family laugh and jabber into the evening hours. Neal and Marilyn are left alone to share their intimacies.

FADE OUT:

THE END