

But You Can Learn To Play

by Mark Lyons

markielyons@yahoo.com

EXT. INDIAN RESERVATION - MORNING

Winter. Woods surround the tiny village.

The reservation begins its day. Newspapers are delivered to doorsteps. The breakfast diner is getting busy. Children walk towards the school.

Ojibwe Chippewa Reservation. Grand Portage, Minnesota.

SICILY MANUTE, nine, walks the edge of the woods, dodging snowballs and taunts from the other kids on their way to the schoolhouse.

Movement catches her eyes deep in the woods. Two WHITE MEN wearing orange coats hunt. Sicily watches them disappear through the trees.

She sneaks off --

INTO THE WOODS

-- and waits until most of the kids are out of sight. She slips off further into the brush after the hunters.

Soon, she picks up their trail in the snow. Instead of following, she tracks the prints back they way they had come.

Eventually, she finds their --

CAMPSITE

-- and noses around.

Nothing much. A fire burnt out and a tent still set up.

Sicily peers inside and sees their sleeping bags still spread. She checks down inside one of them, but nothing.

In the other, she finds a small Kel-Tec .32 auto hand pistol. She tucks it into her coat.

EXT. SCHOOLHOUSE

Sicily walks up the steps and gets beamed upside the head with a snowball point blank by a group of students standing outside the doors.

LOMA

Think we forgot about you, you little
hag?

Sicily hurries into the school and the group laughs.

INT. CLASSROOM

Everybody talks to each other. Sicily just sits, head buried in her elbows.

ELSIE COTTER raises her high-pitched voice from the front of the class.

COTTER

All right. Quiet down, please. We
have a lot to get through today.

A few last second whispers and giggles and the class is quiet.

COTTER

Did everybody read their chapters
last night?

Most nod or give an exuberant 'yes'.

COTTER

All right. I don't see anybody's nose
growing right now, but we'll find out
for sure later.

Giggles.

COTTER

Did everybody bring their object
in for show and tell?

The kids hold their objects up. Some hold their favorite toy. Some a common household utensil. One lazy kid just holds up his bookbag.

Sicily holds up a wristwatch.

COTTER
All right. Who wants to come up
first and talk about what they
brought?

Two eager beavers, both sitting in front and both girls, shoot
their hands into the air. One is LOMA.

COTTER
Go ahead, Isabel.

ISABEL holds a small blanket in her hands.

ISABEL
This was my baby blanket.

COTTER
And what are blankets used for?

ISABEL
To keep you warm. Or bring babies
home from the nursery like my mom
did with me. We've kept it ever
since.

COTTER
Do you know what blankets are usually
made from?

ISABEL
Cotton or polyester nowadays. This
one's bearskin, though. That's why
it's so soft. Our ancestors usually
used deer hide.

COTTER
Very good job, Isabel.

ISABEL
Thank you.

She takes her seat. The second eager beaver gets up, but Sicily
beats her to it.

SICILY
I'll go next, Miss Cotter.

COTTER
Okay, Sicily. You can go after,
Loma.

Loma is the girl who nailed Sicily in the face with the snowball.

Sicily takes her spot in front of the whole class and holds up her watch.

SICILY
I brought my dad's watch.

The class takes a deep, irritated breath.

COTTER
And what are watches used for?

SICILY
To tell time.

A voice speaks up from the middle of the class.

ARRON
So her dad knows when she turns
eighteen and can kick her out.

The class laughs and Cotter shushes them.

COTTER
Be nice, guys. Do you know what
watches are made from, Sicily?

SICILY
I think quartz, and leather. I also
found this-

Sicily pulls out the pistol and waves it across the class.

COTTER
Sicily! Don't point that! Why'd you
bring that here?

SICILY

I don't know what it's made from, but
I think the bullets are lead. Or
copper. It's used to protect yourself.

Cotter steps towards Sicily, unsure.

SICILY

Or if you don't like somebody, you
can use it on them, if they're mean
to you.

Sicily points the gun at Loma explicitly, who leans back in her
desk helpless.

Cotter slowly creeps up on the young girl pointing the gun.

COTTER

Okay, Sicily. You can put the gun
away now. Thank you for bringing
your items in for show and tell.

SICILY

Or you can just use it on yourself
if you don't like you. Like this--

Cotter is too far away to help.

Sicily sticks the gun in her own face, three inches from the tip
of her nose, and pulls the trigger.

COTTER

Sicily!

Tissue and brown brain splatter the chalkboard behind her,
smearing sentences where the nouns have been circled and the
verbs underlined.

SLAM CUT TO BLACK

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

HOWARD McCABE and DEANNA STERLING, mid-30's, make love.
Sometimes slow and passionate, sometimes straight hardcore.

Their teeth gnash together and he cups his hands around her soft breasts. She whispers in his ear.

DEANNA
Finish inside me.

HOWARD
Okay.

He bites his lower lip and does. They collapse side-by-side on the bed, breathing heavy.

He looks over to her and she looks at the alarm clock. 6:24. She smiles.

DEANNA
Perfect timing.

Howard laughs. She leans over and pecks him on the lips, gets up, and walks into the bathroom.

The clock changes to 6:25 and the alarm goes off. Sounds like a semi backing up.

INT. KITCHEN

Howard drinks a glass of vegetable juice and reads the paper.

Deanna walks in, her hair wet and smoking a cigarette. She wears a pink blouse, skirt, and apron.

HOWARD
A little girl shot herself yesterday.
In front of her whole class.

DEANNA
Oh my God. Where at?

HOWARD
Up in Minnesota.

DEANNA
(shakes her head)
That poor girl.

HOWARD
Imagine the other kids.

She takes a last drawl from the cigarrete.

DEANNA
All right, babe, I gotta go.

HOWARD
Okay. I'll be up there in a few.

She stubs the cigarette in the ashtray on the table, blows him a kiss, and leaves.

He coughs and waves the smoke away. Finishes the paper.

INT. KITCHEN

He washes the juice sediment out of the glass and places it brim down in the dish rack. Dries his hands.

Behind him, the telephone rings. He lets the answering machine get it.

CAVENDER
(filter)
Howard. Ah, this is Doc Cavender.
Umm... I was just wondering if you heard what happened at that indian reservation. We're a little worried about the situation up there, and, well, we just want to see if they need any help. We scheduled you an appointment there for tomorrow. Give me a call back when you get this. I hope everything's been good with you.

The machine hangs up and Howard nods to himself.

INT. BATHROOM

Howard soaks in the bathtub, relaxing.

LATER

He shaves in front of the mirror.

INT. KITCHEN

He wears a gray buttoned-down shirt and brown dress pants, steps out onto the --

FRONT PORCH

-- and locks the door behind him. The sun reflects off the snowy ground and blinds him.

CUT TO:

INT. BUSY BEE DINER

Howard sits down at a table, turns the coffee cup rightside up. Deanna approaches, a smile on her face and apron already smudged.

DEANNA
Hey, stranger.

He smiles.

DEANNA
Vegetable juice?

HOWARD
Please.

DEANNA
Be right back with it, sweetie.

She disappears into the kitchen while he settles into the booth and reopens the paper.

ALBERT BENTON, mid-30's, white shirt with checkered pants, walks in. Sleeve tattoos adorn both arms. He carries a greasy white chef coat over the crook of one elbow.

He walks past Howard and behind the counter to punch his time card. Deanna comes out the kitchen, sees him, and pecks Albert quickly on the cheek.

DEANNA
Hey you.

ALBERT
Hey.

Albert walks into the kitchen, slipping his chef coat on, and Deanna brings Howard the thick juice.

DEANNA
I haven't seen you for the past couple days.

Howard laughs loud and shrugs.

HOWARD
Well, with work and all, you know...

She smiles back at him.

HOWARD
Actually, I'm probably going to be leaving for a little while.

DEANNA
Really? Where ya going?

HOWARD
You remember this morning? The school shooting on that reservation?

DEANNA
Yeah, the one yesterday. I heard people talking about it. Up in Minnesota. That's so sad.

HOWARD
The boss called this morning. I gotta go up. We're going to try and set up a counseling service for any of the students having a hard time with it. Help them cope with the loss.

DEANNA
That's sweet.

Howard nods.

DEANNA

It's good that you like what you do.
Not many people do things like you.
How far is it up there, anyway?

HOWARD

About fifteen hours from here.

DEANNA

That's a pretty good drive. You're
leaving today, you said?

He holds his juice up in a toast.

HOWARD

As soon as I eat.

DEANNA

Well don't worry. I'll save you
your seat for ya.

He smiles.

EXT. WINDING HIGHWAY - DAY

A recent model Honda Acura RL, tan, drives a snowy, lonely road.

INT. GAS STATION

Howard walks in and stomps the snow off his shoes. Nods to the
bearded CLERK behind the counter.

He grabs beef jerky and a bottled water.

HOWARD

How are you doing today?

CLERK

Good. You?

HOWARD
I'm all right. I'll take these and
can I get ten on --
(looks out to his car)
-- I didn't even see what pump it
was. Ten on the Acura out there.

The clerk looks outside at the only car parked at the pump island.

CLERK
Which one?

Howard laughs. He hands the money out and the clerk takes it.

HOWARD
Are there any hotels close by?

CLERK
There's a Motel 6 just a little down
the way.

HOWARD
Anything maybe a little bit nicer?

The clerk looks out to Howard's car again.

CLERK
Not really.

HOWARD
All right. Thank you.

CLERK
(shakes his head)
Have a good one.

Howard walks out.

EXT. RESERVATION - DAY

The Acura parks in front of the Welcome Center.

INT. MAIN OFFICE

JANE ELDRICH, middle aged, greets Howard with unsure reserve.

JANE
Hello. Can I help you?

HOWARD
Yes. I'm here for the Humility of
Mary Health Partners.

He hands over a letterhead and she scans it.

HOWARD
They contacted the school yesterday
about additional counseling services
for the children.

JANE
Yes, we were contacted by several
groups. I'm sorry they didn't tell
you, Mister, ah--

HOWARD
McCabe.

JANE
-- McCabe. We close the reservation
to outsiders during these times of
mourning. We're very thankful for
you and your company's concern, though.

She looks closer at the paper.

JANE
I'd like to introduce you to the
chairman of the reservation, though.
He may like a few words with you on
the matter.

HOWARD
I'd like that very much, please.

She walks around from behind the desk.

EXT. RESERVATION

Outside an old-fashioned wigwam, sitting beside a small fire, MAZONMANI, in his 80's, threshes grains of wild rice in an old pottery bowl.

Jane and Howard approach. She still holds the paper he had given her.

HOWARD
(quietly)
Chairman?

JANE
The chief. Don't be fooled. He's actually very modern. But we still believe in some of the old techniques of our ancestors.

Mazonmani looks to his visitors and Jane bends down to him.

JANE
Dad. He's come to the school today, to make sure the children are okay.

She hands him Howard's paper and he scrutinizes it. He nods.

MAZONMANI
(looks to him)
Please, have a seat.

HOWARD
Thank you.

Howard sits across from the old man. Jane leaves them alone.

MAZONMANI
Are you warm enough?

HOWARD
Oh yes. I'm fine.

MAZONMANI

The children are doing well with their emotions. Once they get the image of seeing inside somebody's skull out of their mind, they'll be fine.

HOWARD

I understand. It's just, from past experience, when tragedies like this occur, they affect children in a way no one really understands. And when a situation isn't dealt with properly, it can lead to more, often escalating casualties.

The old man studies Howard.

MAZONMANI

We're very private mourners. We won't appreciate being disturbed during this tragic time. I assure you, Mr. McCabe, the children are being watched out for.

HOWARD

You can call me Howard.

He looks down at Howard's paper Jane had given him.

MAZONMANI

Perhaps there may be something we are able to help you with, so your trip here isn't a waste.

HOWARD

I'm sorry?

MAZONMANI

I saw the vehicle as you drove in.
Ohio's a long way to come and I
assure you, your genuine concern
for the children touches me.
Believe me, our students are fine
with the situation. Perhaps, if
it's okay with the family, we can
work something out so you may be able
to help children having trouble in
outside schools. Perhaps find signs
how to spot the trouble in a child's
soul before anything like this
happens again.

HOWARD

I'm sorry. I think it's me, but I
don't understand.

MAZONMANI

Please, follow me.

The old man stands straight from his sitting position. Doesn't
wince the slightest bit. Howard follows.

EXT. MANUTE RESIDENCE

A small house. Howard waits outside. An Ojibwe woman,
thirties, peeks through drapes at him, then disappears again.

After a few more moments, Mazonmani appears from inside the
house with OLIVER, a man in his thirties.

MAZONMANI

Please meet Oliver Manute. He was
Sicily's father.

Howard holds out his hand and the two men shake.

HOWARD

I'm pleased to meet you. I'm so very
sorry about your loss.

Oliver only nods.

MAZONMANI

I've told you we cherish our privacy here, but I've talked to Sicily's family and told them your situation.

HOWARD

(unsure)

Okay.

MAZONMANI

They've agreed to let you into their home and explore through Sicily's belongings, in hopes you can find clues in the young girl's behavior to serve as warning signs to other children.

Howard nods.

HOWARD

Wow. Thank you. I can't tell you how grateful I am. I'm honored.

Oliver nods and leads him into the house. Mazonmani follows.

HOWARD

Thank you, again.

INT. MANUTE HOUSE

Inside, the woman who had peeked out the drapes, BETHANY, reluctantly welcomes Howard.

An older couple, Sicily's GRANDPARENTS, sit in the living room. They nod.

HOWARD

Hello.

BETHANY

I'll show you to my daughter's room.

INT. SMALL BEDROOM

Just an ordinary little girl's bedroom. The sheets and blankets have been stripped from the bed, but everything else is in order.

Howard noses, especially the bookshelf.

HOWARD

She was a very advanced reader.

BETHANY

Yes. She loved it. She always read.

He notices a lot of empty spaces on the bookshelf, and missing gaps between the dolls and the way they were set up.

HOWARD

Was there anything different about her behavior in the past few days?

BETHANY

Sicily has always been odd. Her behavior's been different from other children her whole life.

HOWARD

How's that?

BETHANY

She's never gotten along with other children.

HOWARD

She was teased a lot?

BETHANY

Yes. But, I hate to say this... Many times she brought the teasing on herself.

Howard looks at her.

HOWARD

I'm sorry?

BETHANY

She often smartmouthed people. Everyone. Her teacher. Other students. Us. She could never make friends. She's very insulting. Sicily used to come home from school telling us the teachers and the students were punching her and touching her. And she went to school telling them we were hitting her and threatening her with knives.

Howard looks to Mazonmani.

BETHANY

In fact, the only way that Sicily was acting different was that she did stop her attitude.

HOWARD

When did she start settling down?

BETHANY

It's been on and off.

HOWARD

There's a lot of books and dolls missing. Did she take them somewhere?

BETHANY

No. They're with Sicily on the porch.

Howard furrows his brows.

INT. BACK PORCH

Oliver lets them out the back door. Only Howard and Mazonmani walk out. Oliver and Bethany stay inside and watch.

MAZONMANI

It's old tradition. The family keeps the loved one for four days. In the beginning, this was to assure that the body had passed on to the spirit world and wouldn't resuscitate.

Mazonmani opens a square birch box and Sicily's body lays inside, wrapped in the sheets presumably stripped from her bed. Her face is wrapped in heavy gauze.

MAZONMANI

Today, we do it because the journey from this world to the spirit world takes four days, and the family supplies the body with nourishment and support.

Books, dolls and crafts surround the body. Also wild rice and blueberries, now dried.

MAZONMANI

The family feels this is in vain, though. They're acting out tradition for their faith. They believe Sicily's is a tormented soul, cursed to wander the physical world lost and invisible.

Howard looks at the books.

MAZONMANI

She'll still be buried in two nights, but she won't be celebrated.

HOWARD

Celebrated?

MAZONMANI

We dance and scream in rejoice for a soul passing into the spirit world. Sicily's will not. Her ceremony will be quiet and sad.

Howard especially concentrates on one book propped close to the gauze-wrapped face. A book with a dark blue cover and gold lettering.

Looking out the porch door, Bethany turns her head to Oliver, who watches Howard on the porch lean over the box and study the book without touching it.

EXT. WELCOME CENTER - LATER

Howard walks back to his car. Mazonmani hurries to make up the distance.

Howard opens the Acura's door and sees him approaching.

HOWARD

I want to thank you again. I can't tell you how grateful I am for that opportunity.

Mazonmani nods.

MAZONMANI

The Manutes would be very appreciative if you had this.

Mazonmani holds out the book.

MAZONMANI

After you left, they gave it to me. They saw your interest in it. They'd like for you to have it.

Mazonmani hands it over and Howard looks at the gold lettering. **'but you can learn to play'** in all lower-case. Underneath it, in smaller print: **'a memoir'**

He flips to the back. A photograph of the author, a woman in her 30's with dark hair and very striking blue eyes, even in black and white.

HOWARD

I thought I read it before. It just looked so familiar.

He stares at the author. **'Mary Beth MacDonald'**.

Mazonmani watches him.

MAZONMANI

You have a wild soul.

Howard laughs.

HOWARD

That's the first time I've ever heard that. Usually, people say they can only hear crickets in my personality.

MAZONMANI

You look at things, Mr. McCabe, and you see things that others don't.

Mazonmani hands him the letterhead from Humility of Mary back.

MAZONMANI

That's not always a good thing.

Howard looks at him.

MAZONMANI

You have a long journey back. I wish you well.

HOWARD

Thank you.

MAZONMANI

You're a good man. You're always welcome back.

They shake hands. Howard nods softly.

Mazonmani turns and leaves. Howard gets in, laying the book on the passenger seat.

INT. TRUCKSTOP - DUSK

Howard sits at a table by himself, a glass of water in front of him. He opens the navy blue book to the beginning.

MARY BETH (V.O.)

I guess the main thing I want people to know is that I was never harmed. The people who took me; they never hurt me or hit me. They never touched me in any way I didn't want to be touched or in any way that was improper for a little girl. These people loved me like I was family...

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Howard walks in and sits on the bed to take his shoes off.

HOWARD

Hey, sweetheart. I'm home.

DEANNA (O.S.)

You back already, babe?

HOWARD

Yeah.

He walks into the --

BATHROOM

-- and leans against the sink.

Deanna soaks in the tub, relaxing and smoking a cigarette.

DEANNA

I thought you'd be gone a lot longer.

HOWARD

I thought so, too. They close the reservation during mourning. The children are fine, though.

DEANNA

That's good.

Deanna takes a drag from her cigarette. Howard takes an ashtray off the sink and puts it on the side of the tub for her. She ashes into it.

HOWARD

Anything exciting happen while I was gone?

DEANNA

Nope. Just sat here waiting for you to get back into my loving arms.

He smiles.

INT. BEDROOM - PAST MIDNIGHT

Howard sits up, reading by the lamplight. Deanna sleeps on her side.

MARY BETH (V.O.)

I don't remember a lot about my life before I was taken. I know that for some while, I had images in my head of those other people. Those strangers from my other life I never got to know. Soon, though, the images of them faded and became nothing but shadows with features I can't even make out anymore. They've been only shadows for a very long time now...

INT. KITCHEN

He sits at the kitchen table and reads by a soft light.

MARY BETH (V.O.)

I kind of remember another young one that was in my life. I can't remember if it was a brother or a sister, or even a friend. I don't even remember if they were older or younger or my age. I don't know why it was only me

that was taken. Maybe the other child wasn't with me at the time. Or maybe the people who became my mother and father didn't like them or couldn't take care of them and only wanted me...

Howard rubs his eyes, sleepy.

MARY BETH (V.O.)

In my other life, I only remember a woman's shadow. A woman's shadow and the other young one. I don't remember a man's shadow, so I don't think I had a father in my old life. And sometimes I remember a park. And sometimes I don't. Everything gets muddled sometimes... Between my old life and my new one.

INT. LIVING ROOM

He sits on the couch and reads as he eats a piece of toast.

MARY BETH (V.O.)

But I'm not here to tell you about that other life. The life that's only shadows for me now. I'm here to tell you what happened after I was kidnapped. I'm here to tell you that I loved the people who took care of me and raised me. They shouldn't have taken me, no. But I love the people I've been calling mommy and daddy since I was four. They're dead now, and that's the reason it's taken me so long to write this, because they can't get into any trouble anymore. And because I miss them. Writing helps me remember...

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Alone in bed, he stares at the ceiling.

MARY BETH (V.O.)

I said I've always been remembering my shadowed world ever since I was a little girl. But I never started questioning anything until I realized that there weren't any baby pictures of me. Sometimes I wonder about the people who do have my baby pictures and what they're like. I wonder what my life would've been like with them. Sometimes I think about looking for them, but then I always lose the courage. I'm scared of what they'll think of me. Maybe I will one day, though. Or maybe they'll find me. I wonder if they've been looking. I wonder if they'll forgive me for finding a new family. I wonder if they'll be mad at me for not trying to get back to them. I wonder if I can learn to play along that I'm their daughter.

Deanna comes out of the bathroom, her hair wrapped in a towel.

DEANNA

You been up all night, baby?

HOWARD

Most of it.

She puts her work clothes on.

DEANNA

(to the book)

It any good?

HOWARD

It's interesting. I'm actually trying to get everything clear in my head.

DEANNA

What?

HOWARD

It's about a woman who was kidnapped when she was little. She learns to love the people who took her and holds nothing against them.

She sits down next to him and unravels her hair from the towel.

DEANNA

Reminded you of your sister?

HOWARD

I think it is her.

DEANNA

Really?

She dismisses him and puts on her shoes.

HOWARD

The story's really close. She remembers being taken from a park.

DEANNA

I'm sure your sister's not the only kid that's ever been taken from a park.

HOWARD

She remembers a lone woman and a child. My grandmother and me. In the book, she thinks the woman is her mother. But it was my grandmother who took care of us. Our mom died when we were still little babies. It's just too familiar.

DEANNA

I think you're looking too deep into it, Howard. You're seeing things that aren't there.

She leans over and pecks him on the lips.

DEANNA

You coming in to eat breakfast today?
I'll keep your booth open.

HOWARD

I don't know. I think I might see
what I can do to try and look her up.
Just in case.

Howard holds the blue book up. Deanna smiles and shrugs. She puts her hand on his chest and kisses him again.

DEANNA

I'll be here when you get back.

He smiles, but stares at Mary Beth's picture in the book.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Howard sits at a computer on a search engine website, a list of Mary Beth MacDonald's on the screen.

One's from Oregon. Another Wyoming. He writes down the one with a Poughkeepsie, New York, address.

EXT. HIGHWAY

In the recent model tan Acura, Howard drives. Passes a 'Welcome to New York' sign.

INT. DIVE BAR

He picks at a greasy hamburger nestled on soggy fries. Plays with a limp pickle.

He digs out a couple quarters and walks over to the pay phone. Looks up M's in the phone book and dials.

SPENCER

(filter)

Hello?

HOWARD

Yes, may I speak with Mary Beth MacDonald, please?

SPENCER

(filter)

I'm sorry, she's not able to come to the phone right now. Can I give her a message for you?

Howard's stumped.

HOWARD

Um. Actually, I'm contacting her about the book she's written.

SPENCER

(filter)

Her book?

HOWARD

Yes. I just read it and I have a couple questions I'd like to ask her.

SPENCER

(filter)

I think-

HOWARD

I don't have a number where she can reach me at, but I can try calling back in a little bit. Do you know when she'll-

The line's cut.

OPERATOR

(filter)

We're sorry. To continue your call, you must first deposit seventy-five cents for one minute.

Howard checks his pockets, then hangs his head and the phone.

HOWARD
God, I hate this state.

He walks back to his meal.

EXT. RESIDENCE - DUSK

Dignified. Isolated. Neighbors are obscured by rows of landscaped pine trees.

Howard rings the doorbell and waits. A very long time. He rings again.

Finally, MARY BETH answers. Mid-30's. Straight black hair and striking blue eyes like in the book jacket photo. But she's weak. Disheveled.

Tubes help her breathe through her nose. She talks meekly, but polite.

MARY BETH
(clears her throat)
Can I help you?

HOWARD
Mrs. MacDonald?

MARY BETH
Yes.

Howard laughs nervous.

HOWARD
I don't even know where to start.
I tried calling first. But there
was trouble with the line. Or rather,
the price of the line.

She looks at his gray button-down shirt and dress pants.

HOWARD
I'm Howard McCabe... I think I'm your
brother.

MARY BETH
I'm sorry?

HOWARD
Your book? 'But You Can Learn to
Play'?

She nods.

HOWARD
My sister was taken when she was
little.

She takes in a deep breath.

HOWARD
I think you're her.

She doesn't know what to think.

MARY BETH
I'm so very sorry. I'm afraid I'm
the one who doesn't know what to say
now. Will you come in, please?

She lets him in.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Now a makeshift bedroom. Medications by the portable hospital
bed. A dialysis machine sits in the corner.

She leads him to the sofa.

MARY BETH
I'm sorry for the mess. I wasn't
able to make it up the stairs there
for a bit, so we moved everything
I needed down here so I could get
around.

HOWARD
I'm sorry.

MARY BETH

(shrugs)

Everyone gets sick. We all have to deal with it sooner or later.

HOWARD

Usually not this young, though.

MARY BETH

(laughs)

Are you usually this smooth of a talker?

HOWARD

No. Not really.

He looks at the dialysis machine.

MARY BETH

I don't need it anymore.

HOWARD

I'm glad you're getting better.

MARY BETH

Well, I'm happy. That's all I can say about that.

Silence.

MARY BETH

I'm very sorry about your sister. I never had any siblings growing up, but I imagine it must have been difficult.

HOWARD

(nods)

Yeah. It was. We missed you.

Mary Beth coughs violently. A tube is blown out her nose and she hurries to reattach it.

Howard looks at the pictures on the wall. Some are of Mary Beth. Some are of an older couple.

MARY BETH
I don't-

HOWARD
Are those the people who took you?

She looks at the picture he pointed to.

MARY BETH
That's my husband, Mr. McCabe. I
was raised by my parents.

He looks at the gray-haired man in the picture, then back to the
sick woman twenty-some years younger.

HOWARD
You were wrong in the book.

MARY BETH
I wrote that a long time ago.

HOWARD
The woman shadow you remember. It
wasn't your mother.

MARY BETH
A very long time ago.

HOWARD
It was our grandmother you remember.
She's who raised us.

Mary Beth closes her eyes and rubs a temple.

HOWARD
I think she'd like to see you. I
think she'd like to see you all
grown up.

MARY BETH
You're not listening to what I'm
saying, Mr. McCabe. And I'm sicker
than what you see.

HOWARD

It's really not that long of a trip
at all. It's only a half day's drive.

She puts her head in her hands, frustrated and lost at what to say. He gets up and looks at all the pill bottles sitting on the table.

HOWARD

Which medications do you need to
bring?

MARY BETH

None of them.

She looks at him and he smiles back.

HOWARD

You really are getting better, huh?
I'll help you get some clothes together.
She's going to flip when she sees
you.

CUT TO:

EXT. RESIDENCE - DUSK

A large Lincoln pulls up and SPENCER DOUGAL, mid-60's, gray hair, steps out. He carries a bag of groceries.

He looks at the other tiretracks in the snow, where Howard's car was parked, and the footprints leading back and forth from the house.

Spencer searches for the house key on his ring.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DUSK

The Acura drives along.

INT. CAR

Howard drives. Mary Beth props her head with a hand. Her clothes are strewn about the back seat.

HOWARD
Are you hungry?

MARY BETH
Honestly, it's been forever since
I've had a beer. I think I'd like
one, please.

He looks at her and smiles. She just stares ahead at the road.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Spencer closes the door behind him and looks around for Mary Beth.

SPENCER
Honey?

He checks the--

KITCHEN

-- where he leaves the bag of groceries. He checks upstairs but immediately comes right back down and looks around the bed.

He finds a note on the table by all the medications. Mary Beth's chicken-scratch handwriting.

'his last names macabe i cant remember what he said his first name is i dont think he means any harm'

Spencer looks around the room, confused.

INT. TGI FRIDAY - NIGHT

Howard and Mary Beth sit at a tiny table. She coughs.

HOWARD
I'm a therapy specialist.

She looks at him.

MARY BETH
I could've used you about a year ago.

HOWARD
(smiles)

No, no. Not physical therapy. I'm clueless when it comes to that. I work for a health group based out of Ohio. I get contracted out to different places and set up support systems. Mainly psychological.

She gives him a curious eye.

HOWARD
And mainly to children.

MARY BETH
Were you inspired by your sister being taken to help?

HOWARD
You mean you? Yeah, I think so.

She closes her eyes. Their SERVER arrives.

SERVER
Hey, guys. How are we today?

Howard looks at Mary Beth and nods.

HOWARD
We're good now.

SERVER
Excellent. Can I start you out with a drink or appetizers tonight? Our artichoke dip is to die for.

MARY BETH
A Budweiser please. Tall.

SERVER
A large Bud. Got it. And for you, sir?

HOWARD
Just a bottle please. Of the same.

SERVER

(writes it down)

And a bottle. No problem.
I am afraid I'm gonna have to ask
for your ID, sir.

HOWARD

Yeah.

He gets it out.

HOWARD

Wow. I haven't been carded in
I don't know how long.

SERVER

Don't take it personally. It's just
that with all the fines with underage
drinking now, management asks that we
card everybody who looks under fifty.

Howard hands over his driver's license and the server barely
glances it over.

Another coughing fit from Mary Beth.

HOWARD

You okay?

SERVER

Are you sure you want a beer? I'm
sure I can dig up a tall Robitussin
for ya.

Mary Beth smiles and shakes her head. Talks through the phlegm
in her throat.

MARY BETH

Oh no. This is going to be my first
beer in I don't know how long. I'm
drinking it.

SERVER

I'll grab that for you right away.

The server walks off.

HOWARD

So how about you? How long have you been a writer for?

MARY BETH

I hardly have. I haven't written a book in eight years.

HOWARD

Eight years?

MARY BETH

I've only written three novels.

Howard looks at her.

MARY BETH

I only wrote for fun. Real estate's my true passion. I had to call it quits when I got sick. Almost two years ago, now.

HOWARD

You gonna go back to it now that you're getting better?

MARY BETH

(sad)

I don't think so.

The server sets the beers in front of them.

SERVER

You guys still need a little time to order?

HOWARD

Yes, please.

The large glass is at Mary Beth's lips before the server can leave. Howard takes a sip of his.

HOWARD

How long have you been with your husband?

MARY BETH

Almost ten years. It's the second marriage for both of us.

HOWARD

Second? You were divorced?

MARY BETH

A long time ago. Spencer was widowed when we met.

HOWARD

Oh. That was his first wife in that picture.

MARY BETH

What picture?

HOWARD

I'm sorry, I just didn't know about the age difference between you two at the time. That's why I thought they might have been the people who kidnapped you.

MARY BETH

My parents raised me, Mr. McCabe.

Howard drinks.

INT. DEN - NIGHT

Spencer sits at his desk, head in hands. ANASTASIA BONGCO and ROBERT STRAUSS stand across from him, badges over their hearts.

SPENCER

I was gone--
(shrugs)
-- barely an hour.

BONGCO

And that was the only note, the one from her? No ransom or anything?

SPENCER

No. There's not much they can ask for. She hasn't worked for a few years, and I'm retired. With all the doctor bills, we barely scrape by. The house is about all we have.

BONGCO

You said a man tried contacting her this afternoon?

SPENCER

Yes. He said it was about her new book.

BONGCO

She didn't get calls like that very often?

SPENCER

She hasn't written a book in years. She wasn't very prolific. She's only made the Bestseller List once and that was years and years before I even met her.

Bongco and Strauss look at each other.

STRAUSS

I got a man tracking the number now.

Bongco nods.

BONGCO

She never took your last name when you two married?

SPENCER

We met pretty late in life. By the time we did, she was already booming with clients. Made no sense to have to go and change all the poster signs out in the front yards of her houses.

BONGCO

I'm sorry about your wife's sickness, Mr. Dougal. How long's she been sick for?

SPENCER

A couple years. It's winding down now. She's prepared, though.

BONGCO

I saw the dialysis machine in the living room. She hasn't gone on it, yet?

SPENCER

She just came off it. About a week ago.

BONGCO

Came off it?

SPENCER

(nods, sad)

She only has days left. She's lucky if she makes the weekend.

The detectives look at each other, then back.

BONGCO

They're putting traces on your phone wire now, Mr. Dougal. If whoever it is who took her does want a ransom, he'll probably contact you very soon. We'll be here all night to trace the line. Other officers'll be staying too.

EXT. RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Hustle-bustle. Cop cars parked everywhere. Forensics examines the tire prints where Howard's Acura was parked.

Bongco and Strauss step out the house.

STRAUSS

Doesn't make much sense. A man kidnaps a woman on her deathbed? Crazy fan, you think?

BONGCO

Possible. Maybe he doesn't know she's not worth any money.

STRAUSS

Maybe she sold him a bum house.

BONGCO

Anything come back on the last name?

STRAUSS

Nothing of help.

One FORENSICS EXPERT sees the detectives and walks over to them.

EXPERT

We're not going to be able to get too much from the tracks. The tires on the car were almost bald. They haven't been changed in probably years.

BONGCO

That everything?

EXPERT

If you want this guy, keep an eye out for someone broke down on the side of the road.

STRAUSS

How do you figure that?

EXPERT

The back right tire's wobbly as hell.
Tireprints are strewn back and forth.

Bongco writes in her notepad.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

The Acura's by itself on the dark road. Drives smoothly.

INT. CAR

Howard looks over to Mary Beth. She maneuvers and remaneuvers in the seat, trying to get comfortable.

HOWARD

You all right?

MARY BETH

I'm lightheaded.

HOWARD

That tallboy get you woozy?

She shakes her head and grabs her stomach.

MARY BETH

It feels like I'm seasick. I haven't rode much in a car lately.

Howard looks for signs on the side of the road.

HOWARD

We didn't get as far as I wanted,
but I saw a sign a while back.
The reststop's only another twenty
miles. We can pull over for the
night.

Mary Beth nods and tries to get comfortable again. Finds it's useless.

MARY BETH

You asked me about Spence. Do you have anyone special in your life?

HOWARD
(smiles)
Yeah.

MARY BETH
How long have you been together?

HOWARD
Not long. But we're close.

MARY BETH
Married?

HOWARD
I haven't asked her yet.

MARY BETH
You plan on it?

HOWARD
Absolutely. Very soon.

MARY BETH
What's her name?

HOWARD
Deanna.

MARY BETH
What does she do?

HOWARD
She's a waitress. She'll be going
back to school, though, now that
we're getting things together.

She nods. Leans her head back and tries to sleep.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - PAST MIDNIGHT

Bongco and Strauss sit on the couch. Watch T.V. Spencer
watches from the love seat.

The phone rings and Spencer looks to the detectives. They all get up and Spencer answers the phone on the table.

SPENCER
Hello?

MACHINE
(filter)
Hello. You have received a collect call from--

MARY BETH
(filter)
... Mary Beth...

MACHINE
(filter)
If you wish to accept the charges for this call, please press one now. If you do not wish to accept the charge, please hang up and you will not--

Spencer presses the button.

MACHINE
(filter)
Your call is connecting...

MARY BETH
(filter)
Spence?

SPENCER
You all right, Mary?

MARY BETH
(filter)
I'm fine. Just a little weak.

SPENCER
Where are you?

MARY BETH

(filter)

I'm at a payphone at a reststop.
He's taking me to his grandmother's
house. I don't know where it is,
though.

(coughs)

He hasn't told me.

SPENCER

Who is he?

MARY BETH

(filter)

He says his name's Howard McCabe.
His sister was kidnapped when she
was younger. He thinks I'm her.

Bongco looks to Strauss, who gets on his phone immediately.

SPENCER

You don't know where you're at right
now?

MARY BETH

(filter)

I just know we're going west. He's
not hurting me, Spence. He's acting
regular. I have to go now; he's
coming.

BONGCO

Tell her to just put the phone down.
Don't hang up.

SPENCER

Don't hang up, Mary. Just put the
phone down so we can trace the call.

MARY BETH

(filter)

I love you, Spence.

SPENCER
I love you too, sweetheart. We'll
find you, okay?

No answer.

EXT. RESTSTOP

Mary Beth sets the phone down under the receiver. Howard walks behind her from the restrooms.

The Acura is the only car there.

HOWARD
Who'd you call?

MARY BETH
My husband. I wanted to tell him
goodnight, and that I'm feeling okay.
He's such a worrywart.

Howard smiles.

HOWARD
Come on. Let's get some sleep.

They turn to get back in the car, but Howard stops and notices the phone off the hook.

HOWARD
Uh-oh.

He walks to it and hangs it up.

HOWARD
Phone fell off the hook.

He smiles and opens the door for her.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Strauss still has his phone to his ear.

SPENCER
She's talking about one of her
books.

BONGCO
One of her books?

SPENCER
It's about a little girl who's kidnapped,
but sympathizes with her new family.

Strauss hangs up his phone.

STRAUSS
McCabe's name isn't in the system.
We're doing a national search now
for any young girls named McCabe
reported missing.

BONGCO
(to Spencer)
Do you think your wife could be the
man's sister?

SPENCER
I doubt it. Her book's gotta be over
twenty years old, now.

The forensics expert comes out of the kitchen. Takes his
headphones off.

EXPERT
She wasn't on the line long enough.
We couldn't get anything.

BONGCO
We know they're going west.

STRAUSS
West to where?

BONGCO
(shrugs)
Grandma's house.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

The Acura drives along, surrounded by morning traffic.

INT. CAR

Mary Beth doesn't look any better. Howard is well rested.

HOWARD

She doesn't live where we grew up,
anymore. She lives in North Lima,
now. Has her own little private lake
and everything.

MARY BETH

(hoarse)

Sounds relaxing.

HOWARD

It's quiet. She's going to be so
excited to see you.

MARY BETH

I don't know.

A coughing fit.

MARY BETH

Is it the grandma on your mother's
side? Or your father's?

HOWARD

Our mother's. We never met our dad.

MARY BETH

How do you know I didn't? If you
haven't noticed, I'm a lot older
than you.

HOWARD

Not by much.

MARY BETH

You're sicker than I am, Howard.
What happened to your mother?

HOWARD

Never met her either. Grandma
said she got to hold me for a
couple minutes, though. She said
that at least she passed with a
smile on her face, and her lips
on my cheek.

MARY BETH

I'm sorry.

HOWARD

You had to go through it, too.

MARY BETH

No I didn't.

HOWARD

Just because you don't remember it
doesn't mean you didn't go through
it.

MARY BETH

I wasn't there, Howard.

HOWARD

I didn't like growing up without
you. I always thought about you.

MARY BETH

What was your sister's name?

Howard thinks. Laughs.

HOWARD

Oh my God. I can't even remember
right now.

MARY BETH

Because it's not in the book.

HOWARD
I'm so used to calling you Mary
Beth these past few days.

MARY BETH
Think about it, Howard.

HOWARD
Elizabeth?

MARY BETH
Are you sure?

HOWARD
I don't know. I can't think right
now. Maybe just because it has
Beth in it, that's why I think.

MARY BETH
Please take me home, Howard. I'm
really not feeling good.

HOWARD
We're almost there. Just a couple
more hours.
(smiles)
She's going to be so excited. She'll
remember your name.

Mary Beth coughs and gags.

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Regular hustle-bustle. Bongco sits at a desk. Strauss stands.

STRAUSS
Still nothing strong on Howard McCabe.
The national search brought up a
bunch of McCabe's, but couldn't
pinpoint anything. Even checked
MySpace and Facebook. Still nothing
solid.

BONGO
Nothing on the little girl kidnapped?

STRAUSS

None with the lastname McCabe. So unless she had a different last name...

BONGCO

What about libraries or bookstores? Any recent purchases of the book you could find?

STRAUSS

The book's not even in print anymore. Not for a good fifteen years. And so far we haven't found it in any of the library systems.

BONGCO

We need to find something to figure out where this guy's from.

Strauss shrugs.

EXT. ISOLATED ROAD - DAY

Acura drives a road surrounded by woods.

INT. CAR

Mary Beth sweats in the passenger's seat. Struggles for breath.

Howard reaches over and puts the back of his hand against her forehead.

HOWARD

You're clammy. She'll have a rag we can put on your forehead. She was always real good taking care of me when I was sick.

Howard turns the car up a steep, gravel hill and spins his tires. Needs to give it heavy gas to get up it.

HOWARD

It's really bothering me I can't remember what your name was.

Mary Beth strains to look at him.

Finally, he makes it up the hill.

EXT. BALCONY PORCH

MARGARET McCABE, 70's, watches the sun set over the lake. A car's loud exhaust rattles her attention.

EXT. GRAVEL DRIVE

The Acura winds through trees and veers towards a clearing where Margaret's tiny house stands, all by its lonesome.

Howard sees his grandmother on the porch.

HOWARD
There she is.

He parks the car and gets out. Margaret leans over the banister to see them.

HOWARD
Hey Grandma.

MARGARET
You should have told me you were coming. I would've had dinner ready.

Howard helps Mary Beth out of the passenger's seat and drapes a coat over her. She shivers against the cold.

HOWARD
I have a surprise!

Margaret locks eyes on the woman Howard escorts up the stairs to the--

BALCONY PORCH

MARGARET
Howard, who is this? Get her inside before she freezes to death.

HOWARD

Bet you can't figure out who she
is in three guesses.

Howard can't get the smile off his face.

MARGARET

Are you all right?

MARY BETH

(nods)

I just need to sit, I think.

They lead Mary Beth into the--

HOUSE

-- and sit her down.

Howard takes his grandmother in his arms.

HOWARD

You're not going to believe it.

MARGARET

What's wrong with her, Howard?

HOWARD

She's getting better.

Margaret looks to the young sick girl sitting in front of her.

MARGARET

Can I get you anything?

MARY BETH

Some water, please.

HOWARD

I'm going to get a cold towel for her,
too. She just has a little bit of a
fever.

MARGARET

You lay right back and relax, okay?

Margaret helps Mary Beth lay back. Mary Beth grabs the old woman's arm.

MARY BETH
He's confused.

Margaret stops and looks at her. She looks to Howard, already merrily on his way to the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN

Howard rinses out a rag.

MARGARET
Who is she?

HOWARD
You don't recognize her? Those blue eyes?

She only looks at him.

HOWARD
I don't remember her name. It's been so long. What was my sister's name?

She looks back to Mary Beth laying on the couch.

MARGARET
Howard...

There's nothing else to say.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Mary Beth sleeps. Howard puts the cold compress on her forehead.

MARGARET
You have to bring her back home.

HOWARD
I am bringing her home.

MARGARET

She doesn't live with you.

HOWARD

She used to.

MARGARET

No, she didn't. She has a husband,
Howard.

HOWARD

And now she has a brother.

MARGARET

You're going to take care of her
yourself? She needs medication.

HOWARD

She said she doesn't need her medications
anymore. And Deanna can help me. She's
getting back into nursing.

MARGARET

Deanna? The waitress you told me
about the last time we talked?

HOWARD

Things are going really good with
us. We're trying to have a baby.

MARGARET

You just met her, didn't you?

HOWARD

No. It's been awhile.

MARGARET

Howard. Please, listen to me. This
woman needs to go to the hospital,
okay?

HOWARD

I'm going to take her. I want her to
meet Deanna first.

Margaret only looks at him, then her.

MARGARET

(more to herself)

I don't understand why she would ever agree to leave with you.

HOWARD

Because she's my sister. And she hasn't seen me in a long time.

Mary Beth shivers in her sleep.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Howard drives. Mary Beth tosses and turns.

MARY BETH

I need to sleep, Howard. I can't sleep in here anymore.

HOWARD

We're only a half hour away from my place. We'll get you inside and get you a bath.

MARY BETH

I just want to sleep.

HOWARD

You can have the bed. I don't think the couch folds out, but Deanna and I'll figure out somewhere to sleep.

MARY BETH

She believes I'm your sister, huh?

HOWARD

Deanna? Of course.

MARY BETH

I'm talking about your grandma. I'm sorry I slept. Did she tell you my name?

HOWARD

No. She couldn't remember.

MARY BETH

Because I'm not your sister, Howard. Look at us.

HOWARD

Yes you are. I just feel it.

Mary Beth shakes her head.

INT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Bongco sits at a desk. Strauss walks in and over to her.

BONGCO

She hasn't called him again, yet?

STRAUSS

No.

BONGCO

How's he holding up?

STRAUSS

He's sad. He knows she doesn't have long. He just wants to see her again. I don't understand why we can't find him. We have nothing on the guy.

BONGCO

We're going national right now. It'll be all over the news in the morning. Hopefully, we'll get something from that.

Strauss nods.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Howard walks Mary Beth in and sits her at the kitchen table.

HOWARD
Deanna. We're home. I brought
somebody.

He looks at the full ashtray on the table, then back to Mary Beth.

HOWARD
Hope she'll be okay with having to
take that shit outside.

Mary Beth looks at the ash tray, confused.

He walks into the--

BEDROOM

-- and finds nothing.

HOWARD
You in the tub, baby?

He walks into the bathroom, but comes right back out. Mary Beth walks in weakly.

MARY BETH
She's not here?

HOWARD
Probably over her mom's. I'll try
giving her a call in a bit. Tell
her we're home.

MARY BETH
Can I lay down, please?

HOWARD
Of course. Help yourself. You sure
you don't want me to run you some
bathwater?

She falls into the bed.

MARY BETH
I just need to sleep.

HOWARD
I'm going to go out to the car and
bring your stuff in. If you need
more blankets, just yell.

She's already almost dead to the world. He smiles at her.

HOWARD
Good night, sis.

He switches off the bedroom light and leaves her to sleep.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - PAST MIDNIGHT

Howard startles in his sleep and sits up on the couch. He looks around for Deanna.

She's still not there. He checks in the bedroom on Mary Beth. She's sound asleep, her clothes at the foot of the bed. She doesn't make a noise.

He looks out the living room shades to the driveway. Nothing. Just his Acura.

FLASH:

INT. BUSY BEE DINER

Howard sits at his table. Behind him, Deanna gives Albert Benton a quick peck on the cheek.

END FLASH.

INT. LIVING ROOM

At the window, Howard shakes his head and lays back down on the couch.

CUT TO:

INT. ATTIC - MORNING

Margaret searches an old collection of books. Finally, she chooses one and blows the dust off. A dark blue book with gold lettering.

INT. MARGARET'S LIVING ROOM

Margaret lays the book out on the coffee table and examines Mary Beth MacDonald's picture.

She shakes her head and flips back to the cover of the book.

On T.V., she notices the same exact picture of Mary Beth as on the author page. She turns the volume up.

REPORTER
(filter)
-- has been missing for going on
two days now.

On T.V., it cuts to a picture of Spencer and an old woman. The picture hanging in the MacDonald's living room.

Margaret puts her hand over her mouth.

REPORTER
(filter)
If anyone has any information on the whereabouts of the woman, you are encouraged to please contact your local authorities. The husband wishes for a safe, quick return for the sick woman.

Margaret picks up the phone and dials.

EXT. RESERVATION - MORNING

Mazonmani threshes the grains of wild rice. Bethany Manute approaches him in the snow.

BETHANY
Mazonmani? I'm very sorry to disturb.

MAZONMANI

Yes?

BETHANY

There's something you should see.
It's about the book we gave to the
young man.

He puts down the thresh.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Howard rinses the vegetable juice sediment out of his glass and
puts it brim down on the dishrack.

The phone rings behind him and he answers it.

HOWARD

Hello?

MAZONMANI

(filter)

Mr. McCabe?

HOWARD

Mr. Mazonmani? How have you been?
I certainly wasn't expecting a call
from you.

MAZONMANI

You left your number for the school
to reach you.

HOWARD

Yes, I did. Is everything okay?

MAZONMANI

(filter)

How are you?

HOWARD

I'm doing good.

He looks into the bedroom and sees Mary Beth sleeping.

HOWARD
Very good. Actually, I have kind of
a funny story for you.

MAZONMANI
(filter)
You were right. The children are not
doing well. We can use your help.
When can you be here?

HOWARD
Um, I can be there tonight, if you
need.

MAZONMANI
(filter)
Please. I would really appreciate it.

HOWARD
Absolutely anything. I will see you
by nightfall.

He hangs up.

INT. BEDROOM

Howard walks in bundled in his coat. Mary Beth sits up and
looks at him, a smile on her face.

HOWARD
Hey. I was just taking the last of
your stuff out to the car. I packed
it nice and neat and careful. You
feeling better?

MARY BETH
Much.

HOWARD
You look a lot better.

She does. Howard gestures to the bathroom.

HOWARD

I left a change of clothes for you,
if you want to wash up before we
head out.

MARY BETH

Thank you. Where are we off to?

She gets out of bed, energized.

HOWARD

How do you like Minnesota?

MARY BETH

I don't think I do. It's too cold.

HOWARD

(laughs)

Neither do I. But I have some work
up there. Do you want to join me?

MARY BETH

Sure.

He smiles.

HOWARD

I have all your things packed nice
and neat in the trunk.

MARY BETH

Thank you. I'll be out in a few.

She walks into the bathroom, taking her shirt off.

CUT TO:

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

Bongco pumps gas into the sedan. Strauss gets out of the car.

STRAUSS

We're off to Ohio.

BONGCO
We get a hit?

STRAUSS
Better. McCabe's own grandma called,
said he stopped by her house lastnight,
with the vic in tow.

BONGCO
Was she all right?

STRAUSS
She said she looked really weak.
She doesn't know what her grandson's
thinking.

BONGCO
Did she say where they were headed?

STRAUSS
Back to his house, in Youngstown.
He wants to introduce her to his
fiance. Local cops are on their
way there now.

BONGCO
We're only a couple hours out.

They get in the car.

INT. CAR - DAY

Howard drives. Mary Beth breathes in the fresh air from the
window. Looks tons healthier.

MARY BETH
I can't believe how good I slept
lastnight.

HOWARD
You look a lot better.

MARY BETH
I didn't meet your girlfriend. She
never came home, lastnight?

HOWARD

No. She probably didn't think I'd be home, so I imagine she slept over her mom's.

MARY BETH

Wouldn't she've came home this morning?

HOWARD

She probably woke up late and had to hurry to work.

MARY BETH

You like to imagine a lot, don't you? Let's visit her at work.

HOWARD

Naa. We got to get out there. I have work to do.

MARY BETH

You mean I can't meet my future sister-in-law?

HOWARD

(blushes)

I haven't even asked her yet.

MARY BETH

But you are, aren't you?

HOWARD

Yeah. Eventually.

Mary Beth breathes the air in again and smiles.

CUT TO:

INT. SEDAN - DAY

Bongco drives. Strauss answers his phone.

STRAUSS
Yeah?... All right, did anybody talk to her yet?... Where's she at right now?...

(writes it down)
All right. We're close... We'll talk to her when we get there.

He hangs up.

STRAUSS
There wasn't anybody at his place.

BONGCO
Was that his girlfriend you were talking about?

STRAUSS
His grandmother said the fiance's name is Deanna Sterling, she thinks. We ran it and got a hit.

BONGCO
She wasn't home?

STRAUSS
She works at some diner, not far from McCabe's place.

Bongco nods.

INT. GAS STATION - DAY

The bearded clerk takes some CUSTOMER's money. Howard walks in and holds the door for the exiting customer.

HOWARD
Looks like I'm making your place a regular pitstop everytime I come up this way.

Howard grabs two beef jerky sticks and two waters. The clerk looks at him, then smiles and looks out the window to the pump island.

CLERK

Let me guess, ten on the Buick
Acura?

Howard looks puzzled, but still smiles.

HOWARD

It's Honda.

The clerk laughs and takes the money.

EXT. BUSY BEE DINER - DAY

Deanna and Albert, in their work clothes, stand outside. She smokes a cigarette and cuddles to keep warm in Albert's tattooed arms.

Bongco and Strauss' black sedan pulls in.

INT. SEDAN

Bongco parks.

BONGCO

That's not him, is it?

Strauss pulls out a picture of Howard.

STRAUSS

Doesn't match the picture the grandma
gave to police.

They get--

OUT THE CAR

-- and approach the two. Deanna stays in Albert's arms.

BONGCO

Excuse me. Miss Deanna Sterling?

DEANNA

Yeah. Is everything okay?

They show their badges.

BONGCO
We just have a couple questions we'd
like you to answer if you could.

Bongco looks to Albert.

DEANNA
(nods)
Yeah.

She flicks her cigarette and turns around to Albert.

ALBERT
I'll grab your coat.

DEANNA
Thank you.

He goes inside. Bongco and Strauss look at each other.

DEANNA
I'm not in any kind of trouble,
am I?

She lights another cigarette.

STRAUSS
Not with us.

BONGCO
I'm sorry, but we're here to talk
to you about your fiance.

DEANNA
Albert? He's just my boyfriend
right now. Did he do something?

STRAUSS
(points inside)
That was Albert?

DEANNA
Yeah.

BONGCO
We'd like to know about your fiancée,
Howard McCabe.

DEANNA
I don't have a fiancée.

Bongco and Strauss look at each other.

STRAUSS
Maybe he didn't ask her yet.

Albert comes back out and wraps Deanna's coat around her.

ALBERT
Everything all right?

DEANNA
Yeah. I think they have me confused
with somebody else.

Albert nods and she pecks him on the lips. He goes back in.

BONGCO
We'd like to know where your other
boyfriend is, then. Howard McCabe.

DEANNA
You really have me mixed up with
somebody else. I don't even know
anybody named Howard.

Strauss pulls out Howard's picture.

STRAUSS
You've never seen this man before?

She looks closely at the picture of Howard.

DEANNA
Yeah. I've seen him. He's kind of
a regular here, but I don't know much
about him. He's pretty shy.

BONGCO

And you don't have any kind of
relationship with him?

DEANNA

No. I mean, he seems like kind of
a nice guy, but, he's not exactly
my type.

STRAUSS

Has he been in recently?

She flicks her cigarette into the dirt parking lot.

DEANNA

Not for days now. Sorry. He's been
going around telling people we're
gettin' married?

Strauss nods.

BONGCO

We're sorry to bother you, Miss
Sterling.

Bongo and Strauss get back--

IN THE CAR

-- and look back to Deanna, who lights another cigarette.

STRAUSS

Think she's lying? Think she
knows him?

BONGCO

Doesn't seem like she is. Let's
check out his house. Maybe there's
something there.

Bongco backs the sedan out.

CUT TO:

INT. ACURA - DAY

Howard drives. Mary Beth's still healthy.

HOWARD

You get along with kids good?

MARY BETH

I like 'em. I don't know if I get along with them. I've never really been around any.

HOWARD

So I don't have any nephews?

MARY BETH

Nope. Not from me. Unless you got any other kidnapped sisters running around anywhere.

HOWARD

I'm pretty sure you're the only one.

MARY BETH

I bet you can't wait to have kids.

HOWARD

What makes you say that?

MARY BETH

Well, you seem so determined to help children.

HOWARD

Yeah, actually. I can't wait to have kids.

MARY BETH

Deanna want kids, too?

HOWARD

We never really talked about it. Although she's said things to make me think she wants 'em.

They drive in silence.

MARY BETH

I spy with my little eye something
dark purple and white with lights on
top.

Howard furrows his brows.

EXT. ACURA

A STATE TROOPER pulls up behind the Acura on the highway.
Instead of turning on its siren and lights, it pulls up beside.

INT. ACURA

Howard looks to Mary Beth as the trooper pulls up.

HOWARD

I don't think I was doing anything,
was I?

MARY BETH

Not that I saw.

In the cruiser next to them, the trooper points to the side of
the road and mouths 'Pull over!' to Howard.

HOWARD

Think his siren's broken?

MARY BETH

Maybe. Maybe Minnesota cut their
state funding.

They laugh and he pulls over.

EXT. STRETCH OF HIGHWAY

The Acura's parked along the side, the trooper's car behind it.
Howard rolls his window down as the trooper glances at the back
and passenger's seat.

He approaches and bends down to Howard.

HOWARD

How are you doing today, sir?

TROOPER

Good. I didn't want to put my lights on and scare you.

HOWARD

It doesn't matter. You did anyway.

Howard and Mary Beth laugh. The trooper joins them.

TROOPER

Sorry about that.

(points to the back tire)

I just wanted to let you know you might want to stop and get the back passenger's tire adjusted. It looks like it's about to wobble right off.

HOWARD

Oh, thank you, very much. It's a pretty new car, so I didn't even think to check the tires yet.

The trooper just looks at him.

TROOPER

Really? You can't feel the car jerking at all?

HOWARD

No. It's been pretty smooth, actually.

TROOPER

All right.

The trooper looks at the back seat and passenger's side again.

TROOPER

Where are ya headed?

HOWARD

Grand Portage.

TROOPER
(shrugs)
You should make it that far. I'd
get it looked at before you leave
there, though.

HOWARD
We will. Thank you, again.

The trooper looks to the passenger's seat again.

TROOPER
Have a good one. Be careful.

He walks back to his cruiser. Howard starts the Acura and pulls
off.

HOWARD
It feels fine to me.

MARY BETH
I don't feel any jerking.

Mary Beth shrugs.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Bongco and Strauss walk into Howard's place. Strauss reaches
back outside and grabs an envelope out of the mailbox.

STRAUSS
Well. It looks like every other
white trash trailer I've seen.

Dishes unwashed in the sink. Mainly glasses with crusted
vegetable juice sediment. The dishrack is empty.

The carpet and kitchen tile are dingy.

BONGCO
Except one thing. No stale cigarette
smell. Did you see the way the girl
was chainsmoking?

Strauss looks to the empty, immaculate ashtray on the kitchen table.

BONGCO

I don't think she was just lying to get herself out of trouble with her boyfriend. I really don't think she's ever been here before.

STRAUSS

He could've washed it.

BONGCO

Then why not the glasses in the sink?

Strauss picks up the ashtray and turns it over. A dollar store sticker still on the bottom. He pulls it off easily.

STRAUSS

Why would a nonsmoker need an ashtray?

BONGCO

Maybe he planned on asking her over, and he bought it just in case.

Strauss looks at the envelope he had taken out of the mailbox. Reads 'Humility of Mary Health Partners'.

BONGCO

What's that?

STRAUSS

I don't know. Paycheck, maybe.

Bongco walks into the--

BEDROOM

-- and looks at all the clothes on the floor and the mussed sheets on the bed. She walks in the--

BATHROOM

-- and picks up the ashtray on the edge of the tub. It's also empty and the sticker still on the bottom.

Her cell rings and she answers it.

BONGCO
Hello?

INT. KITCHEN

Strauss stands by the counter. Bongco rushes in.

BONGCO
He's going to Minnesota. A chair-
person at one of the reservations
connected McCabe to Mary Beth.
McCabe was up there a couple days
ago, trying to pass himself off as
a therapist.

STRAUSS
He's off his medications.

He throws the ripped envelope on the counter and holds up a
check.

STRAUSS
It's his social security check. You
should listen to the answering machine.

Bongco does.

MACHINE
(filter)
One new message. Message one:
Tuesday at 8:16 a.m.

CAVENDER
(filter)
Howard. Ah, this is Doc Cavender.
Umm... I was just wondering what's
been going on with ya. I've been a
little worried I haven't gotten any
calls to renew your prescriptions

and, well, I just want to see if you need any help. I'd like to schedule you an appointment to see me, okay? Give me a call back when you get this. I hope everything's been good with you.

MACHINE

(filter)

End of message. There are, no more new messages.

BONGCO

We have to get in touch with him. Think he should fly up there with us?

STRAUSS

Fly?

BONGCO

McCabe's got too much of a headstart. I want to be there before he is. We're releasing both his and Mary Beth's photo to Minnesota State Police now. Still no make or model on his car?

STRAUSS

He told his grandma he just got a new Honda Acura. She said she saw it, but doesn't know anything about cars. She said it wasn't new, though. There's nothing at the DMV of him even owning a vehicle.

BONGCO

All right. Let's go find this Cavender.

STRAUSS

They're finding where his office is now. They'll text me when they have it.

They leave.

EXT. HIGHWAY - LATE AFTERNOON

The Acura's on the side of the road, jacked up. Howard tightens the spare on. Mary Beth watches him.

MARY BETH
Guess the cop was right, huh?

HOWARD
Yeah, I'll admit it. This isn't my most proudest moment.

He laughs. He finishes and jacks down the Acura. Takes the jack and tire iron to the open trunk.

He leans down to make room.

HOWARD
Wow, your stuff's heavy. Did you pack enough?

MARY BETH
I didn't know how long we'd be gone for.

HOWARD
Yeah. It's been longer than we thought, huh?

MARY BETH
Not really.

He puts the tire iron and jack in.

CUT TO:

INT. AIRPLANE CABIN - EVENING

Bongco and Strauss sit around a table with CAVENDER. The engine buzzes around them.

BONGCO
His grandmother said that she owned the book when it first came out.

CAVENDER

(nods)

He most probably did read it as a child. When he came across the book just recently, it may have triggered the memories of when he read it when he was younger. However, now, since being off his medications, it's possible he might have interpreted those memories in his confused mind as part of his actual childhood. Especially if he had a strong interpretation of the book in his mind as a child.

STRAUSS

Why would he have gone off his meds? Has he asked before to be taken off them?

CAVENDER

He's never had any problems with them. My guess is that he may have run out and, before he realized it, got too caught up in his fantasy of being a children's therapist and a lover to a woman who doesn't even know his name.

BONGCO

And having a sister who never existed.

Cavender nods. Bongco's phone goes off and she picks up.

BONGCO

Hello?

INT. MINNESOTA STATE POLICE DEPARTMENT

The state trooper sits at a desk, a fax of Howard in front of him.

TROOPER

Yes, Agent Anastasia Bongco?

BONGCO
(filter)
This is her.

TROOPER
This is Adam Bachman of the
Minnesota State Police. I just got
the wire of one Howard McCabe you're
looking for in connection to that
kidnapped woman.

BONGCO
(filter)
Yes?

TROOPER
I just wanted to let you know that
I pulled him over earlier today. He
wasn't doing anything wrong, I was
just warning him about a loose tire
that looked pretty bad. But he did
tell me he was on his way to Grand
Portage. We got cruisers going that
way now to see if we can pick him up.

BONGCO
(filter)
Thank you, officer Bachman. How
did the woman look that he had
with him? She's very sick and
we're very worried about her health.

TROOPER
Well that's the thing, Mrs. Bongco.
I knew the woman was missing and I've
been on the lookout for her. I
would've recognized her right away
with those blue eyes.

He looks to the picture he received of Howard.

TROOPER
But there was no woman with him.

INT. AIRPLANE CABIN

Bongco pockets her phone.

BONGCO

She's not with him anymore.

Strauss shakes his head.

STRAUSS

What if we pick him up and he doesn't remember her at all? Doesn't know where she is. Or where he buried her.

CAVENDER

Once the medication's in him, he'll be able to differentiate between what's real and what's not easily. That includes memories. He will be able to remember both the way he saw things happen, and, in his mind's eye, the way they really happened.

Strauss looks to Bongco.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - DUSK

The Acura pushes falling snowflakes out of the way.

INT. CAR

Howard drives. Mary Beth sits in the passenger's seat. Both are quiet. Suddenly, she bursts out in excitement.

MARY BETH

Christopher Lloyd was in 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest' with Jack Nicholson, who was in 'Wolf' with Michelle Pfeiffer, who was in 'I Am Sam' with Sean Penn, who was in 'Mystic River' with Kevin Bacon!

Howard laughs.

HOWARD

Damn. That one was easier than I thought.

They drive in silence, smiling.

HOWARD

Were you really happy growing up?

MARY BETH

Yeah. I was. Were you?

HOWARD

(thinks about it)

I don't know. I mean, I loved my grandma. But, I always wondered what it was like to have parents. A dad to play football with. A sister to... I don't know. Pull her hair or something.

She laughs.

HOWARD

I just grew up without so much.

MARY BETH

It could be worse, you know. You could be a father who doesn't have his daughter anymore.

He nods.

MARY BETH

There's always someone in the world who has it worse than you. I know it's sad to think of that as comforting, but it's supposed to remind you to take advantage of what you do have.

Howard looks to Mary Beth and takes her hand. He smiles.

HOWARD
So. You've only written three
novels, huh?

MARY BETH
Yep. Just three.

HOWARD
How many non-fiction books? Or
memoirs?

MARY BETH
None.

HOWARD
None?

MARY BETH
(shakes her head)
I've never written any.

He looks at her, surprised. He reaches in the back seat and
picks up the dark blue book with the gold lettering. Looks at
the cover.

'but you can learn to play - a memoir'

He looks back at her.

MARY BETH
You're not seeing things that others
can't see again, are you?

He puts the book down and drives.

CUT TO:

EXT. INDIAN RESERVATION - DUSK

The snow comes down. The Acura drives through the streets and
parks at the Welcome Center.

Howard gets out and hurries inside.

INT. MAIN OFFICE

Howard walks in. No one's behind the desk. Finally, Strauss walks out from a back office.

STRAUSS
Can I help you?

HOWARD
Yeah, Mr. Mazonmani asked me to come.

STRAUSS
Where's Mary Beth?

Howard looks at him.

HOWARD
I'm sorry?

STRAUSS
Mary Beth. Where is she?

Howard gestures out the window.

HOWARD
She's waiting in the car. I'm sorry, do I know you?

STRAUSS
Turn around.

Howard just stands there, confused.

STRAUSS
I said turn around.

Strauss draws his gun and points. Other OFFICERS appear from the back office, already pointing theirs.

STRAUSS
Turn around and kneel on the ground.

Howard does.

HOWARD

I think there's some kind of mistake.

Strauss looks out the window.

STRAUSS

There's no one in the car.

One of the other officers cuffs and frisks Howard. Howard looks out the window to his Acura. Officers, including Bongco, approach it cautiously.

The passenger's seat is empty.

HOWARD

She was waiting for me.

Strauss holds a walkie-talkie to his mouth. It crackles.

STRAUSS

Search the Buick.

HOWARD

It's a Honda.

They look outside to the car. Bongco and the officers open the doors and search inside. They see Bongco hold her walkie-talkie up.

BONGCO

(filter)

Nothing up front.

Strauss motions to the officers still inside.

STRAUSS

There's a holding cell down the street on the right. We have permission to keep him there until the storm lets up.

The officers lead Howard outside and Strauss follows.

Both Howard and Strauss watch as Bongco and the officers open the trunk.

EXT. WELCOME CENTER

Howard's led away through the snowstorm. The officers lift a form of a body out of the trunk of an old Buick Century and lay it on the ground. Bongco bends down to check the vitals.

It's an old woman, mid-60's, gray hair matted to her forehead. The woman in the picture with Spencer hanging in the MacDonalds' living room.

Striking blue eyes stare lifelessly at nothing.

Bongco lifts her hand after checking for a pulse and looks to Strauss. She shakes her head.

Strauss turns back to Howard.

HOWARD

I don't understand. What did they pull out of the trunk? There were only clothes and a tire jack in there.

STRAUSS

Howard McCabe. You're under arrest for the kidnapping and death of Mary Beth MacDonald. You have the right to remain silent...

Strauss leads him off down the street.

Bongco still kneels. Snowflakes fall on a very old Mary Beth's lifeless face. Instead of melting once they touch the skin, they stick.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ROOM - NIGHT

A makeshift interrogation room. Howard sits handcuffed at a folding table. Cavender sits across from him.

CAVENDER

Is the medication making you sleepy?

HOWARD
I don't know. I was pretty tired
anyway.

CAVENDER
Are you starting to remember things?

HOWARD
(shrugs)
A little. Everything's all jumbled
right now.

CAVENDER
Let's talk about it. Get everything
sorted out.

INT. ADJACENT ROOM

Bongco and Strauss watch and listen through a two-way mirror.

BONGCO
The body'll be held here until the
snow lifts. Autopsy'll be done
tomorrow or the next day. Either
way, we'll have the results in a
couple days.

He nods.

BONGCO
I'm pretty sure it'll come back
natural cause due to illness though.

STRAUSS
We still got to get him for the
kidnapping, though. He'll probably
do most of it in a hospital ward.

She nods.

BONGCO
You think he shouldn't be doing the
time from there?

STRAUSS
I don't know. I don't get into ethics
too much. I just like getting the guy.

Bongo flips through the dark blue book with gold lettering. In it, she finds a folded piece of paper. Unfolds it.

STRAUSS
What's that?

BONGCO
It's Mary Beth's handwriting.

INT. ROOM

Howard relaxes.

CAVENDER
What do you remember?

He thinks.

FLASH:

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Howard and Deanna making love. He cups his hands around her breasts.

END FLASH.

INT. ROOM

Howard looks to Cavender.

HOWARD
Deanna.

FLASH:

INT. DINER - DAY

Howard eats at a booth. Deanna bends over and wipes a table across the diner, exposing her cleavage.

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Howard masturbates in his bed. He cups his hand in the air and grabs at nothing.

HOWARD
Okay.

He bites his lower lip and finishes. He collapses on the bed, breathing heavy.

He looks over at the alarm clock. 6:24. He laughs and pecks his lips at the air. The clock changes to 6:25 and the alarm goes off.

END FLASH.

INT. ROOM

CAVENDER
Do you have a relationship with her?

Howard thinks.

FLASH:

INT. DINER - DAY

Howard sits at a booth. Deanna approaches him, her apron already smudged.

DEANNA
Hey, stranger...

INT. DINER - LATER

DEANNA
I haven't seen you for a couple of days.

Howard laughs hard.

END FLASH.

INT. ROOM

He looks at Cavender.

HOWARD

No.

FLASH:

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Howard leans against the sink. The tub's empty.

HOWARD

I thought so, too. They close the reservation to outsiders during mourning. The kids are fine, though.

He takes an ashtray off the sink and sets it on the side of the empty tub.

HOWARD

Anything exciting happen while I was gone?

No one answers. He smiles.

END FLASH.

INT. ROOM

Howard clears his throat.

HOWARD

No. She just waited on me.

Cavender nods.

CAVENDER

What do you do for a living?

HOWARD

Nothing right now. I'm receiving a social security check until I can start back at Goodwill full time again.

CAVENDER

In what capacity do you work for Goodwill?

HOWARD

The laundry. We fold towels and blankets for hospitals and ambulance services.

CAVENDER

You've never been a children's therapist?

HOWARD

No.

CAVENDER

Why did you tell people you were?

He thinks.

FLASH:

INT. WELCOME CENTER MAIN OFFICE - DAY

Howard hands Jane Eldrich a letterhead. She looks closer and realizes it's a Humility of Mary social security check stub.

JANE

I'd like to introduce you to the chairman of the reservation, though. He may like a few words with you on the matter.

EXT. WELCOME CENTER

Mazonmani talks to Howard at his car.

MAZONMANI

You look at things, Mr. McCabe, and
you see things that others don't.

He hands Howard the checkstub from Humility of Mary back.

MAZONMANI

That's not always a good thing.

END FLASH.

INT. ROOM

HOWARD

I really thought I was a therapist.

Cavender takes notes.

CAVENDER

Where did you get the car from?

HOWARD

I had money from my checks saved
up. I saw it parked in somebody's
driveway a couple weeks ago. It
was only eight hundred dollars.

CAVENDER

What kind of car was it?

Howard thinks.

FLASH:

INT. GAS STATION - DAY

HOWARD

Ten on the Acura out there.

The bearded clerk looks outside at the only car parked at the
pump island. A '92 Buick Century.

CLERK

Which one?

Howard laughs. He hands the money out and the clerk reluctantly takes it.

END FLASH.

INT. ROOM

HOWARD
I thought it was a Honda.

CAVENDER
It wasn't?

Howard shakes his head.

FLASH:

EXT. HIGHWAY - EVENING

A tan '92 Buick Century drives down the road. The back tire wobbles violently.

EXT. WELCOME CENTER - DUSK

Snow falls. Bongco and a few officers lift a form of a body out of the trunk of the Century and lay it on the ground.

Howard watches them.

END FLASH.

INT. ROOM

HOWARD
No. It was a Buick Century.

CAVENDER
What made you think it was a Honda?

HOWARD
I saw advertisements for an Acura RL. I wanted to get one.

CAVENDER
Why couldn't you control your thinking?
What made you lose your sense of reality?

HOWARD
I wasn't taking my medications.

CAVENDER
Why not?

HOWARD
(thinks)
I forgot to refill them. I got
so caught up with everything, I
forgot about them.

Cavender nods and writes again.

CAVENDER
Did you ever have a sister growing
up?

HOWARD
No. I thought I did, though.

CAVENDER
Why did you think that?

HOWARD
I was so into the story. It felt so
real. I read it when I was little.
I used to pretend that I was the
young shadow the author was talking
about. Reading the book again confused
me. I thought it really happened when
I was little. That my sister was taken.

FLASH:

INT. BUICK CENTURY - DUSK

Howard drives. Mary Beth sits in the passenger seat.

HOWARD
How many non-fiction books? Or
memoirs?

MARY BETH
None.

HOWARD
None?

MARY BETH
(shakes her head)
I've never written any.

EXT. WELCOME CENTER - DAY

Howard and Mazonmani stand by the Century.

Mazonmani hands Howard a dark blue book. He looks at the gold
lettering. **'but you can learn to play'** in all lower-case.
Underneath it, in smaller print: **'a novel'**.

END FLASH.

INT. ROOM

Cavender studies Howard.

CAVENDER
How old were you when you read the
book as a child?

HOWARD
Eleven. Maybe twelve.

CAVENDER
And how old are you now?

HOWARD
Thirty-five.

CAVENDER
How old is Mary Beth MacDonald now?

HOWARD
I don't know. She said she was
older than me.

Howard thinks.

FLASH:

EXT. RESIDENCE - DUSK

Mary Beth answers the door. Mid-30's. Straight black hair and striking blue eyes like in the book jacket photo.

END FLASH.

INT. ROOM

HOWARD
Thirty-six, thirty-seven?

CAVENDER
Think hard about it.

He does.

FLASH:

INT. LIVING ROOM

Mary Beth coughs violently. One of the breathing tubes blows out her nose and she hurries to reattach it.

EXT. RESIDENCE

A very old Mary Beth answers the door. Gray hair, weak, and disheveled.

Tubes help her breathe through her nose. She clears her throat weakly.

MARY BETH
Can I help you?

INT. LIVING ROOM

Gray-haired Mary Beth leads him into the living room.

MARY BETH

Everyone gets sick. We all have to deal with it sooner or later.

HOWARD

Usually not this young, though.

MARY BETH

(laughs)

Are you usually this smooth of a talker?

END FLASH

INT. ROOM

HOWARD

She was in her sixties.

CAVENDER

Why did you think she was in her thirties?

HOWARD

I was confused. I thought she was my sister. I saw her as my age.

CAVENDER

You do realize now the difference between what you saw and what really happened?

Howard nods sadly.

CAVENDER

Howard. This part is very serious now, okay? You have to tell me exactly what happened.

HOWARD
(nods again)
Okay.

CAVENDER
How did Mary Beth die?

Howard takes a long pause.

FLASH:

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Howard's bundled in his coat. The young Mary Beth sits up in bed, a smile on her face.

HOWARD
You feeling better?

MARY BETH
Much.

HOWARD
You look a lot better.

She gets out of bed, energized.

END FLASH.

INT. ROOM

Howard stares at the wall.

HOWARD
She died in her sleep.

CAVENDER
When?

HOWARD
The night that she slept at my trailer.

FLASH:

INT. LIVING ROOM - PAST MIDNIGHT

Howard startles in his sleep and sits up on the couch. He looks.

He checks in the bedroom on Mary Beth. She's old. She doesn't make a noise or move. Or breathe.

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Howard walks in bundled in his coat. The bed's empty.

HOWARD

Hey. I was just taking the last of your stuff out to the car. I packed it nice and neat and careful. You feeling better?

No one's there to answer.

HOWARD

You look a lot better.

END FLASH.

INT. ROOM

HOWARD

I woke up in the night and checked on her. She wasn't breathing.

CAVENDER

You had nothing to do with her dying?

HOWARD

No. I thought she was still alive. I thought that she got better.

Howard stares blankly at nothing. Cavender looks to the two-way mirror.

CUT TO:

EXT. RESERVATION - PAST MIDNIGHT.

Bongco strolls down the main street. She hears whooping and hollering in the woods. Through the trees, she sees a fire and people dancing around a burial ground.

Mazonmani comes out of the brush, in celebration-dress.

MAZONMANI

I'm sorry if you were awoken.

BONGCO

(shakes her head)

I couldn't sleep anyway. And I kind of wanted to take a walk.

Mazonmani nods.

BONGCO

The storm let up. So we'll be out of your way tomorrow.

MAZONMANI

It's no trouble.

She looks through the woods again at the dancing.

BONGCO

What's happening? It doesn't look like an ordinary everyday powwow.

MAZONMANI

It's a celebration. One of our people has passed over into the spirit world.

Bongco nods.

MAZONMANI

You said you couldn't sleep?

BONGCO

Just trying to make sense out of everything.

MAZONMANI
How's it going?

BONGCO
Not good. I just wish we would've gotten the woman back to her husband before she passed away. I just don't see any reason to why this happened the way it did.

MAZONMANI
There could be a lot of reasons.

BONGCO
None that make sense.

MAZONMANI
None that make sense to you.

Bongco shrugs and nods.

MAZONMANI
Take our ceremony tonight, in instance. The family's already had a much sadder ceremony lastnight for the little girl who passed on.

Mazonmani looks to the family dancing and whooping in the woods.

BONGCO
That's a child they're celebrating?

MAZONMANI
The mother had a dream tonight that her daughter was led into the spirit world by another. Hence, the celebration.

Mazonmani and Bongco look at each other.

MAZONMANI
Maybe the woman's body had a purpose here in this village tonight.

Bongco laughs.

MAZONMANI

The little girl's mother said the book by the woman was read over and over by her daughter. She loved the book. Mr. McCabe found the book near the head of the little girl in her coffin.

Bongco stops laughing.

MAZONMANI

(shrugs)

Who knows? What's important to remember, is that nothing has to make sense to you or me or anyone. But we have to accept it and go on from there.

BONGCO

We have to learn to play along.

Mazonmani nods.

MAZONMANI

I wonder if the woman realized at the time she wrote it, that the book would become nonfiction one day.

Bongo thinks about it for a moment.

Together, they watch the Manute family dance and holler on the burial ground. Embers from the fire fall around them like orange snowflakes.

Bongco takes out the folded piece of paper she had taken out of the dark blue book with gold lettering.

MARY BETH (V.O.)

I guess the main thing I want people to know is that I was never harmed. The person who took me; he never hurt me or hit me. He never touched me in any way I didn't want to be touched or in any way that was improper for a woman. He loved me like I was family.

Bongco folds the piece of paper again and shoves it in her pocket before the snow can get it too wet. Her and Mazonmani continue to watch the celebration through the trees on the burial ground.

Behind them, the Buick Century sits in the street, watching them with its eyes off.

END