

A TANGLED WEB

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FADE IN:

EXT. LOW WALL - SCHOOL - MORNING - YEARS AGO

The picture is grainy, color-saturated, indicating it's in the past.

In front of a school, TWO LITTLE GIRLS, in jeans, hurry along the sidewalk next to a low wall.

The SINCLAIR STEPSISTERS, ROBERTA, 5, and RACHEL, 4, argue.

RACHEL

Don't do it, Roberta. He won't like it.

ROBERTA

He likes my surprises. He always laughs.

The sisters stop. They see BILLIE, 5, walking towards them balancing like a tight-rope-walker on top of the wall.

RACHEL

Please don't do it. I know you'll be sorry.

ROBERTA

He's my boyfriend. I know he'll think it's funny.

Billie comes closer and closer.

Roberta grins and climbs onto the wall. She walks towards Billie.

Billie smiles back, and gives her a little wave.

ROBERTA

(teasing)
Hi, Billie.

Billie and Roberta meet face-to-face.

BILLIE

Hi.

Rachel tugs at Roberta's pants cuff.

Smiling a secret knowing smile to herself, Roberta ignores Rachel.

Suddenly, Roberta pushes Billie off the wall.

In midair, for a moment, Billie looks questioningly at Roberta. His face registers shock and disbelief. He falls backwards, screaming in pain and rage, landing hard on the grass.

Billie gasps for breath; he tries to sit up.

The girls kneel at his side.

BILLIE
 (tears run down his
 cheeks)
 Why did you do it?

RACHEL
 (shouting at Roberta)
 He's not laughing.

BILLIE
 (scowling at Roberta)
 I'm telling Mrs. Thompson what you
 did. You're bad, bad, bad.

Billie gets unsteadily to his feet and races towards the school.

ROBERTA
 Do you think he'll still be my
 boyfriend?

RACHEL
 Come on, we'll be late for school.

Rachel takes Roberta's hand and pulls her away.

EXT. MILWAUKEE SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY - NOW

Back to the present.

It's RAINING. LIGHTNING FLASHES this late fall morning.

A TAXI turns onto a quiet street lined with row houses.

INT. TAXI - DAY

Attractive, shy with a nervous smile, ROBERTA SINCLAIR, (age open), rides in the back seat.

She's carried away, eyes closed, lost in the fragrance of the bridal bouquet she holds.

DRIVER, MARK MAHONEY, 40's, turns. He's athletic-looking, handsome, with an easygoing manner.

MARK

So, you a newly-wed?

Roberta looks up, embarrassed.

MARK

That bouquet...I figured maybe you might be a new bride.

ROBERTA

No, no, I run a flower shop. This comes from a floral convention.

Mark turns back to his driving.

ROBERTA

We've been married two years next week.

MARK

Happy Anniversary.

ROBERTA

Thanks.

Roberta places the bouquet of red roses into a plastic bag and drops the bag on the floor.

MARK

Hang on.

Roberta braces herself.

The cab swerves through a deep puddle. Water arcs high on both sides.

ROBERTA

Wow.

MARK

They let you fly today in this kind of weather?

Roberta shakes her head.

ROBERTA

It was a bumpy ride.

Roberta sees her house. A VAN on the driveway carries the name, 'MILLARD'S FLOWERS' on its side.

ROBERTA

Mine's the house with the van. There.

Mark stops at the curb. He trips the meter.

Roberta pays.

MARK
Need any help?

ROBERTA
Stay dry. Thanks for the ride.

Roberta slips the worn shoulder strap of her designer handbag over her head. She exits the cab carrying an overnight case.

EXT. ROBERTA'S HOUSE, FRONT PORCH - DAY

Blowing RAIN. Roberta unlocks the door.

INT. ROBERTA'S HOUSE, FRONT HALLWAY - DAY

STORM continues.

Roberta enters the semi-darkened hallway. She quickly taps in the alarm release code on a wall pad and leaves her shoes and case on a welcome mat.

Ahead, shining hardwood floors gleam. Through open doors, the hallway gives onto the living room, dining room, and kitchen. A staircase rises into the darkness above.

She startles when the front door blows shut.

ROBERTA
(calling up the
stairs)
Dennis? I'm home.

She listens.

INT. ROBERTA'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Roberta's eyes move around the high-tech kitchen. All appears to be in perfect order. Rain slides down window panes.

ROBERTA
(talking loudly)
Thanks for cleaning up, Dennis.
(aloud to herself)
That was nice of him. I hate to
come home to a messy kitchen.

Roberta dries her handbag with a dish towel.

ROBERTA
(calling)
Dennis, I'll make us some
breakfast.
(more)

ROBERTA (cont'd)
 (aloud to herself)
 Something I rarely do, but I'm
 starving.

Roberta works quickly: dries her hair with the towel, washes her hands, gets out a pan, takes eggs from the fridge.

ROBERTA
 (calling)
 Dennis, time to wake up. Surprise,
 I'm cooking eggs and bacon.
 (aloud to herself)
 You love scrambled eggs and bacon.
 (cracking eggs into
 a hot pan)
 And, since you were very good to
 let me go to the convention, you
 have earned... breakfast in bed.

INT. STAIRCASE - DAY

Roberta carries a breakfast tray up the stairs.

INT. SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY - DAY

THUNDER and LIGHTNING.

Roberta stops.

ROBERTA
 Dennis, you okay?

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Rich fabrics, burnished woods reflect understated elegance. Plenty of windows across the room allow rain-streaked views of the street below.

Roberta pauses in the doorway. She notices the unmade king size bed.

ROBERTA (calling)
 Honey, you in the shower?

Roberta sees a note on a pillow.

She leaves the tray on a bedside table and reads the note.

The note says:

ROBERTA (V.O.)
 (reading aloud to
 herself)
 "Sorry, Robbie. Dennis."

A small gasp catches in her throat. Realizing, Roberta crumples the note.

She crosses to a bureau, pulls out all drawers. Empty.

In an open closet, she finds a silk necktie on the floor. Roberta hangs it up.

LIGHTS FLICKER OFF, then ON.

PHONE RINGS.

Roberta reaches for the phone. She knocks over the tray. Everything spills.

She picks up the receiver.

ROBERTA (on phone)
 Mom, hi... because I just got home.
 (wiping tears away)
 I am not crying.

Roberta takes a deep breath.

ROBERTA (on phone)
 Mom, I'm in trouble here. Dennis
 is gone. Isn't it strange, Mom,
 how people can lie, and cheat
 right to your own face, right in
 your own bedroom? Then, wham, out
 of nowhere - their mask slips, and
 you find out the truth. And now,
 it's happened to me twice.

ROBERTA (on phone)
 What? I can't hear you very
 well... no, let me call you back.

Roberta hangs up, then punches a number into the phone.

ROBERTA (on phone)
 Me again. You were right about
 him. No. I never dreamed anything
 was wrong.

She fights back more tears.

Roberta stands.

ROBERTA (on phone)
 Can I please stay at your house
 tonight? Thanks. Oh, Mom, is
 George, Dad, any better? I'm
 sorry, so sorry. Bye.

She hangs up. Roberta takes the receiver off the hook.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - DAY - LATER

Roberta sits on the floor surrounded by wet towels soaked in coffee and orange juice.

She picks up a small framed picture.

PHOTO SHOWS:

Dennis, handsome and confident, dressed in a pilot's uniform, stands in front of a 747.

EXT. ROBERTA'S HOUSE, DRIVEWAY - DAY - LATER

Despite steady RAIN, Roberta loads a small curio chest into the back of the van.

A hand touches her shoulder. She spins around to see Mark's puzzled face.

ROBERTA

What?

Mark holds up her bouquet bag.

MARK

Hi. You left your bouquet in my cab. I didn't see it till now. Can I help?

She takes the bag.

MARK

You all right?

ROBERTA

(thinking quickly)
I'm okay. I'm fine, really.
(noticing Mark's wet face)
You're getting all wet. Thanks again. Bye.

MARK

You're sure?

Roberta nods.

MARK

(hesitant)
All right, then. Bye.

Roberta watches the taxi pull away.

INT. ROBERTA'S VAN - DAY

RAIN POUNDS on the van roof.

Roberta starts the engine.

LIGHTNING BRIGHTENS everything.

A TERRIFIC THUNDER CLAP.

ROBERTA

No.

She guides the van into traffic.

EXT. TWO-LANE STREET - DAY

RAIN continues.

Roberta's van skids passing a truck on the right.

EXT. SPRUCE STREET PARKING LOT - LATER

Still RAINING.

Roberta's van pulls in and parks at a FLORIST SHOP. She gets out carrying the bouquet bag and her purse.

Sign above window reads 'MILLARD'S FLOWERS.' Inside -- only a night-light glows.

Roberta stares at the 'Closed' sign hanging on the door.

ROBERTA

(aloud to herself,
checking her watch)

Strange. It's too early to close.

INT. MILLARD'S FLOWER SHOP - DAY

Roberta enters with a BLAST of WIND and RAIN.

She locks the door and switches on a lamp.

Plants. Colorful flowers.

An empty parrot cage, door ajar, stands in a corner. Over the cage door hangs a neatly lettered sign that reads 'ENDANGERED'.

Roberta reaches in and pulls out a feather caught in the swing.

ROBERTA

(to the feather)

It's only 4:30. What day is this?

She drops the feather into her purse.

Roberta scans the titles of soft-cover romance novels stacked every which way on sagging bookshelves behind the register.

On the wall above the register, she notices many photos of happy wedding couples.

ROBERTA
So many happy weddings.

Roberta crosses to the cash register. Automatically, she prints out a daily sales tally.

ROBERTA
I'm so tired.

She sinks into a swivel chair and closes her eyes.

Her eyes pop open.

She notices penciled in on every week of the SEPTEMBER CALENDAR page, the name of a wedding couple.

Roberta's eyes widen. They focus on:

TODAY'S DATE, STARRED WITH A RED STAR

Roberta freezes.

ROBERTA
(realizing)
Oh no, the Conner wedding. It's --
now.

EXT. HOTEL RACINE, LOBBY ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Carrying her purse and the bouquet bag, Roberta races through the hotel lobby. There's a ripple of interest from Bell Boys as she runs by.

INT. HOTEL RACINE, GRAND HALLWAY - NIGHT

Roberta hurries along the hallway.

VOICE (O.S.)
Pssst.

Roberta stops.

The SOUND comes from a broom closet. The door opens a crack. A hand waves at her. It beckons her over.

ROBERTA
(moving closer to the
doorway)
What?

Roberta moves closer.

INT. HOTEL RACINE, BROOM CLOSET - DAY

Roberta finds herself pulled into the darkness. The door closes behind her.

The only SOUND -- Roberta, breathing hard from running.

A chain rattles. A low-watt bulb sheds dim light. Shelves filled with supplies line the sides of the small closet. Waitress uniforms hang from a pipe near the ceiling.

RACHEL sits on an overturned bucket. She's reading a romance novel. Younger than Roberta, Rachel looks plump and pretty in a waitress uniform a size too small.

ROBERTA

Rachel, why are you in here
reading in bad light? Dressed like
that?

Rachel drops her book into a tote bag.

RACHEL

Shhhh. They'll hear you.

ROBERTA

(lowering her
voice)
Who's going to hear me?

RACHEL

(in a loud
whisper)
I'm hiding from their wedding
planner.

ROBERTA

Why are you hiding?

RACHEL

I ran out of roses. They kept
adding more tables at the last
minute.

ROBERTA

I forgot all about their wedding.

RACHEL

We need to disguise Ourselves.
Here,
(reaching for one of
the waitress
uniforms)
put this on over your clothes.
Nobody knows what we look like.

Roberta pulls on the uniform over her head.

ROBERTA
Did you call Ken?

RACHEL
He's supposed to be on his way here. The rain and traffic slowed him. We've got to stall.

A KNOCK at the door. The handle turns.

The door opens. Roberta and Rachel look surprised.

WEDDING PLANNER, CANDY RADCLIFF, 40s, smiles. MRS. SHEPHERD, crowds into the closet behind Candy.

CANDY
Here you are, ladies. May I introduce Mrs. Shepherd, mother of the bride?

Mrs. Shepherd stares at Roberta and Rachel.

MRS. SHEPHERD
Why are you in here wearing those uniforms? Candy, why are they dressed like waitresses?

CANDY
They came highly recommended. 'Weddings are our speciality.' That's their slogan.

MRS. SHEPHERD
Nice. But, we've been looking all over for you.

Candy moves into the hallway with Mrs. Shepherd. Roberta slings her purse strap over her shoulder and picks up the bouquet bag. Rachel takes her tote. They exit the closet.

INT. HOTEL RACINE, HALLWAY TO DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Roberta and Rachel follow Candy and Mrs. Shepherd into the hallway.

MRS. SHEPHERD
Fifteen minutes. The wedding starts in fifteen minutes.

CANDY
We need the bride's bouquet.

Roberta hands Candy the bouquet bag.

MRS. SHEPHERD

We ordered all white roses for the bouquet. White roses for the entire wedding.

CANDY

You've bright red roses. This is it?

ROBERTA

We're very sorry.

Candy and Mrs. Shepherd push through crowds with Roberta and Rachel close at hand.

RACHEL

I did the chapel room and the bridesmaids' flowers, boutonnieres for the ushers and groomsmen are done.

MRS. SHEPHERD

Have you seen the dining room? The tables are not even set up yet.

CANDY

And the flower arrangements for each table are missing.

INT. HOTEL RACINE, EAST DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Roberta and Rachel slip through the double doors.

Roberta scans the brightly lighted room.

She counts eight round tables and chairs scattered about the space. Waiters wheel in two more tables.

Other kitchen help hurl large white cloths over the tables. Kitchen workers add plates, glassware, and silver.

A BAND sets up on a dance floor at one end of the room.

DININGROOM MANAGER

Hey, you two.

(pointing to Roberta
and Rachel still in
waitress uniforms)

Get in here and help set up. You know the drill.

Roberta and Rachel drop their bags on a chair.

Under the stern gaze of the Manager, Roberta and Rachel follow a snaking line of waitresses placing napkins and glassware as they march around each table in time to the BAND MUSIC.

ROBERTA

I feel like I'm on trial.

KEN, (age open), dressed in jeans, tee-shirt and dripping raincoat, bursts into the room. He's nice looking, well built.

Now ten round tables, fully set, hold empty flower vases.

Ken joins the line behind Roberta.

BAND PLAYS ANOTHER DANCE TUNE.

KEN

Hey, Roberta, what's the plan?

Rachel smiles at Ken.

He gives Roberta a big hug. She manages a weak smile.

KEN

Roberta, Baby. Hey, I'm getting you all wet here.

The Manager looks away. Roberta, Rachel, and Ken move to the side of the room.

ROBERTA

Am I glad to see you.

RACHEL

Me too.

INT. HOTEL RACINE, HALLWAY TO DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Roberta and Rachel (no longer in uniforms) help guide Ken and his rolling wagon loaded with white roses.

INT. HOTEL RACINE, DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Roberta, Rachel, and Ken rush from table to table snipping the ends off roses and stuffing them into the vases.

Roberta checks her watch; her eyes roll.

Mrs. Shepherd and Candy confront Roberta.

MRS. SHEPHERD

(to Roberta)

These vases look awful. You're ruining my daughter's wedding.

Rachel and Ken continue clipping and stuffing roses into vases. Ken's hands shake.

MRS. SHEPHERD
 (to Roberta and
 Rachel)

The flowers are a disaster. You've made us look foolish to our guests and the groom's family.

CANDY

Right.

ROBERTA

We're sorry. We'll do our best to make things right for you.

Roberta takes a deep breath.

KEN

(To Roberta)

Roberta, I just remembered I've got to make another delivery. I really can't stay.

ROBERTA

Thanks for your help.

KEN

Sorry. I'll take the wagon back with me. One less thing to worry about.

ROBERTA

Okay.

Ken turns to Rachel.

KEN

Hey, Kid, don't forget to come down to my gym. Remember, this month I'm offering one free session.

RACHEL

I'll think about it.

Ken exits dragging his empty wagon.

INT. HOTEL RACINE, DINING ROOM - NIGHT

GUESTS at the tables eat wedding cake and icecream. A guest taps his glass. Bride and groom kiss. APPLAUSE.

Roberta and Rachel pack their tools and trash.

USHER TED
 (whispering to
 Roberta and Rachel)
 The bride is captain of a women's
 basketball team.

Rachel and Roberta exchange glances.

INT. HOTEL RACINE, DINING ROOM - NIGHT

MUSIC PLAYS. Wedding guests finish dessert.

Candy whispers to the bride, then she takes the mike.

SOUND OF DRUM ROLL from the band.

CANDY (V.O.)
 Everybody, it's time to toss the
 bouquet.

Roberta and Rachel watch five muscular BRIDESMAIDS bob and
 weave before the bride.

BRIDESMAIDS
 (all shouting)
 Hey. Heads up. This way. Karyn, to
 me... pass it to me.

The athletic BRIDE, KARYN, 20s, raises her arms above her
 head and shoots the bouquet over their outstretched arms and
 onto Roberta's open hands.

INT. HOTEL RACINE, DINING ROOM - NIGHT

With terrific force, the bouquet bounces off Roberta's hands
 and smashes into her eye.

From Roberta's POV:

HURLING RED ROSES FILL THE SCREEN SEEMING TO SWELL IN SIZE

Roberta screams. She falls to the floor unconscious.

Concerned-looking guests crowd around Roberta. Rachel kneels
 beside her.

A well-dressed WOMAN, followed by a young GIRL, pushes
 through.

NANCY BAKER, 60s, kneels beside Roberta. MURIEL, 20s, thin,
 nervous, hovers over Nancy's shoulder.

AUNT NANCY
 (to the crowd)
 She'll be fine. I'm this woman's
 aunt. Please, step back. Give her
 some air.

Guests move away. They resume their CONVERSATIONS.

Rachel stands.

AUNT NANCY
 (to Roberta)
 It's aunt Nancy, Darling. Wake up
 now.

Muriel leans forward.

MURIEL
 Oh dear, is she all right?

Roberta moans. She regains consciousness. She recognizes her aunt and Muriel and manages to sit up slowly.

ROBERTA
 Aunt Nancy, is that you?

AUNT NANCY
 Yes, Dear. It's me and Cousins
 Muriel. You're all right, my dear.
 Aren't you?

ROBERTA
 My eye hurts.

AUNT NANCY
 Tell me, can you see out of it?

ROBERTA
 Yes.

Aunt Nancy grasps Rachel's hand. Rachel and Muriel help Nancy up.

Aunt Nancy signals a passing WAITER for some water. He hurries over with a glass.

Roberta takes a few sips. Rachel and Aunt Nancy help Roberta to her feet.

AUNT NANCY
 Let's find a rest room.

INT. HOTEL RACINE, LADIES ROOM - NIGHT

Roberta lies on a couch propped up on some pillows. She moans when Aunt Nancy places a wet towel over her eye.

AUNT NANCY
 (to Rachel)
 What a strange coincidence, just
 when Muriel and I are registering
 at the desk, I hear screams.

RACHEL

Should I get Roberta another cold towel?

AUNT NANCY

Good idea, Rachel. Thanks. And what do I see? Why, it's Roberta, my sweet niece.

Rachel goes to a sink.

AUNT NANCY

My my.

Rachel hands a wet towel to her aunt, who applies it to the eye.

ROBERTA

Ooo. Ow. That hurts.

Candy enters.

CANDY

Is she feeling better?

AUNT NANCY

Oh yes, thank you for checking. She'll be fine. I just want to get her home.

CANDY

(to Roberta)

I would suggest that you not charge for your services this evening. You were so late. And your flower arrangements weren't really very nice.

Rachel stares at Candy.

Roberta, tears welling in her eyes, gives Candy a polite smile.

ROBERTA

Thanks for your advice, Ms. Radcliff. I'll consider your suggestion.

Candy exits.

AUNT NANCY

What a cruel woman.

MURIEL

She's a meanie.

RACHEL

Kick us when we're down.

Roberta appears to feel better.

Mrs. Shepherd looks in. Aunt Nancy waves her away with a menacing glare. Mrs. Shepherd closes the door.

Aunt Nancy takes Roberta's left hand and gives it a reassuring pat. She glances at Roberta's ring finger.

With a questioning look in her eye, Aunt Nancy turns to Rachel. Rachel looks down.

INT. SINCLAIR HOUSE, ROBERTA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A comfortable looking room. Keepsakes from college and high school cover the walls.

Roberta lies in bed with an icepack on her eye.

Aunt Nancy, and Muriel sit near the bed. Rachel sits by Roberta.

PARROT BINNIE talks to himself in a cage.

BINNIE

Hello, Binnie. Hello, good bird.

ROBERTA

This is not my day.

AUNT NANCY

You need a good night's sleep, my dear.

Aunt Nancy takes a card from her purse.

Roberta and Rachel look up.

AUNT NANCY

Before we go, I've been carrying this card with me for some time. How is your dad?

RACHEL

The same.

ROBERTA

He's really very ill. He's in a hospice now.

Rachel nods.

AUNT NANCY

Here's the name of a special doctor, someone who might be able to help your father.

Rachel and Roberta register surprise.

AUNT NANCY

I understand the risks. You never know. I've talked to your mother about this. She's, shall we say, too weary to make such a decision.

RACHEL

What kind of doctor is he?

AUNT NANCY

The doctor is a woman, Dear. She claims to have discovered a cure for this particular terminal illness. It's all very hush, hush, to avoid publicity.

JEAN SINCLAIR, 50s, the ideal mother, enters. She looks very tired, but brave.

JEAN

I'm sorry, I fell asleep for awhile. Hello, Muriel.

MURIEL

Don't worry, Aunt Jean. We're here to help you so you can rest.

JEAN

Thank you both for coming.

(to Roberta)

Maybe we should have a doctor look at that eye.

ROBERTA

I think it's better, Mom.

JEAN

Let me know now. You're going to have a black eye for awhile.

AUNT NANCY

That's understandable. How's my little sister doing?

JEAN

So so.

AUNT NANCY

Yes.

Jean sees the open suitcase on the floor.

JEAN
 (to Roberta)
 Rachel says your van is full of
 furniture. Has Dennis really
 ...left?

Roberta nods.

ROBERTA
 I'm not going back there ever.

JEAN
 Oh, Roberta.

RACHEL
 How's Daddy?

JEAN
 He wants me to stay home for now.

Aunt Nancy and Muriel hug Roberta, Rachel, and Jean.

AUNT NANCY
 It's getting late. We'll let you
 all get some sleep.

JEAN
 We'll talk tomorrow. Call me.

They exit.

Jean sits on the bed near Roberta. Rachel perches on a chair.

Roberta hands the doctor's card to Jean.

ROBERTA
 Aunt Nancy gave us this card.
 Maybe we should check this out.
 What if it works?

Jean shakes her head.

JEAN
 I don't know what to do anymore.

ROBERTA
 We'll call in the morning and make
 an appointment. Rachel and I can
 fly out tomorrow.

JEAN
 (reading the card
 again)
 This card says, 'New Orleans.'

INT. PLANE - DAY

The following day. The plane steadies at 30,000 feet.

Rachel lifts Roberta's sunglasses. The eye looks much better.

Roberta smiles.

RACHEL

How do you feel?

ROBERTA

I feel weird. Better, but weird.

RACHEL

What do you mean?

ROBERTA

I feel like bursting my skin and skipping everything.

Rachel looks surprised.

ROBERTA

I want to open a door and walk on the clouds, like something odd is going to happen any minute, just around the next corner.

Rachel returns to the romance novel in her lap. Roberta stares out the window.

ROBERTA

You're always reading those novels.

RACHEL

You learn so much from them. Take Biff and Tangerine, for instance. I just finished that one. Let's see, they were in 'I'll Cry When I Get Home'.

ROBERTA

You can't be serious.

RACHEL

I knew Biff was being unfaithful. He was always falling asleep at odd moments. It's the little details you pick up on that signal hidden secrets.

ROBERTA

I don't believe I'm having this conversation with you.

RACHEL

It's a 'no brainer'. You're not a romance reader. That's your problem.

ROBERTA

Everything I need to know about men comes from reading these novels?

RACHEL

Look, if a veterinarian falls asleep while delivering a litter of pigs, you know he's not getting enough sleep at night. See what I mean?

ROBERTA

Yeah. Then I wish I could read the best, most magical mother of all love stories -- the greatest romance novel ever written in whole world.

Rachel stares in disbelief at Roberta.

RACHEL

Wow.

A Flight Attendant hands Roberta a pillow.

EXT. AIRPORT - NEW ORLEANS - DAY

Plane lands.

EXT. AIRPORT - RENTAL PARKING LOT - DAY

Roberta pulls her rental car through the airport exit into traffic.

INT. RENTAL CAR - DAY

Rachel studies an open map.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS CITY STREET - DAY

The rental car makes its way through heavy traffic.

Roberta and Rachel admire the city through open car windows.

EXT. MARIPOSA DRIVE - DAY

Roberta parks on a quiet tree-lined street before a mansion.

Roberta and Rachel leave the rental car.

The sisters fail to notice a MAN in an unmarked CAR parked across the street.

INT. AGENT'S CAR - DAY

FBI AGENT TOM ANDERSON, (age open) smiles to himself when he sees Roberta and Rachel.

He takes a closer look through a high-powered telescope.

EXT. TELESCOPIC LENS VIEW, DOCTOR'S WALK - DAY

Agent Tom observes Roberta and Rachel walking up to the doctor's front door.

EXT. MARIPOSA DRIVE, MANSION'S FRONT WALKWAY - DAY

Roberta and Rachel study the facade and beautiful landscaping.

ROBERTA
(checking her watch)
Time for our appointment.

RACHEL
Let's help Dad.

The sisters march up the front steps.

Rachel rings the doorbell.

A uniformed MAID, JENNY MONROE, answers.

JENNY
Yes?

ROBERTA
We're Roberta and Rachel Sinclair.
We have an appointment with the
doctor.

Jenny looks uneasy.

JENNY
Doctor can't take any appointments
today.

RACHEL
What?

ROBERTA
We've come all the way from
Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

JENNY
I can't let you in.

RACHEL
We made an appointment. We came on
a plane.

JENNY

I have my orders, Miss.

ROBERTA

Then, we'll stand out here on your
doorstep and scream until she sees
us.

JENNY

Wait a minute.

Jenny shuts the door.

Rachel and Roberta nod to each other. They give each other a
quick high five.

Jenny reappears; she ushers the sisters inside.

INT. AGENT'S CAR - DAY

Agent Anderson watches through a high tech camera focused on
the front door.

EXT. CAMERA VIEW - DAY

A magnified view of the front door appears.

The heavy door locks behind Roberta and Rachel.

EXT. DOCTOR'S HOUSE, BACK VERANDA - DAY

While waiting, the sisters admire elaborate gardens and the
thick hedge, that forms a tall maze throughout the backyard.

A nearby fountain spouts water patterns.

Jenny serves a tray of ice water in crystal goblets.

DOCTOR MASON appears on the veranda. She's an imposing
figure, well-dressed. Her hair is quite long.

Roberta and Rachel exchange significant glances.

Doctor Mason strides over to shake hands with Roberta and
Rachel. She notices Roberta's handbag.

DOCTOR MASON

I find I'm able to see you after
all. Sit down here, please.

(her eyes rivet on
Roberta's purse)

That's a Cartier original from
Paris isn't it?

ROBERTA

Yes it is.

Doctor Mason touches Roberta's bag.

DOCTOR MASON

Do you mind if I examine it? It's vintage Cartier, quite costly.

ROBERTA

It is? I mean I found it at a thrift shop in Wisconsin.

DOCTOR MASON

I can hardly believe that. How fortunate for you. It's worth thousands in good condition. I see the strap is worn.

ROBERTA

Yes. Thanks. But we should talk about why we're here.

DOCTOR MASON

Right. Let's take a little stroll. Bring your drinks along.

Doctor Mason rises.

DOCTOR MASON

Follow me. You can leave your bag here it's quite safe, I assure you.

Roberta takes her purse and glass.

ROBERTA

I'd rather take it along after what you said.

Rachel and Roberta follow Doctor Mason.

EXT. GARDENS, DOCTOR'S GROUNDS - DAY

Roberta and Rachel accompany the doctor through several gardens.

DOCTOR MASON

From your call, I'm certain my special medicine would have a very good effect on your father, but time is running out.

RACHEL

What do you mean?

DOCTOR MASON

To be most effective, he should take my medicine immediately.

ROBERTA

We're supposed to return in a few days.

They walk knee-deep through Day Lilies.

DOCTOR MASON

Never mind. I can send it overnight to your home. It will arrive before you do.

RACHEL

Mom can give it to him.

DOCTOR MASON

Good. Very good. It's settled then. Why don't you continue your little walk through our hedge maze, while I... Method of payment?

ROBERTA

Will you take a credit card?

DOCTOR MASON

Of course, my dear.

Doctor Mason takes Roberta's credit card.

Roberta and Rachel hesitate, then wander into the maze.

EXT. DOCTOR'S GROUNDS, MAZE - DAY

When their path becomes blocked by still another hedge, Roberta and Rachel appear confused. Every turn brings them deeper into the maze. Again and again the path twists and turns, leading them to another hedge wall.

ROBERTA

Wait. This isn't right.

RACHEL

Should we yell for help?

The sister run back the way they came.

RACHEL

Roberta. What if we never get out?

ROBERTA

We'll get out. Don't worry.

The girls turn down another path. Blocked again.

Out of nowhere, it seems, Doctor Mason reappears around a corner.

The veranda stretches out before them. They look relieved.

Jenny enters. Roberta and Rachel return their glasses to a tray on the table. Jenny waits nearby.

DOCTOR MASON
(smiling)
I'm sure you'll agree; our maze is
deceiving.

RACHEL
I've never been in a real maze
before. It's scary.

DOCTOR MASON
Yes. Everything is in order now.
Here is your receipt and your
credit card. Sign right there.
(Doctor furnishes a
pen. She gives the
card back to
Roberta.)

ROBERTA
Thanks.

Roberta signs the receipt and tosses the credit card and
receipt into her purse.

DOCTOR MASON
We've already shipped the
medicine. Jenny will show you out.

The sisters shake hands with Dr. Mason.

INT. HALLWAY, DOCTOR'S HOUSE - DAY

Jenny leads Roberta and Rachel passed the lavish living room
and dining room to the front door.

RACHEL
(whispering)
How much did she charge?

ROBERTA
Don't ask.

EXT. FRONT DOOR, DOCTOR'S HOUSE - DAY

Roberta and Rachel appear at the open front door. Jenny
closes the door behind them.

RACHEL
Whew, it's so humid here.

ROBERTA
Let's go back to the hotel.

Rachel and Roberta don't notice THIEF HARRY hiding in the bushes near the door.

INT. AGENT'S CAR - DAY

Agent Anderson studies a report. He looks through his telescope. Anderson startles.

EXT. TELESCOPIC LENS VIEW, HARRY - DAY

A highly magnified picture of Harry's face fills the field.

AGENT TOM

Who is that? How did he get by me?

EXT. FRONT STEPS, DOCTOR'S HOUSE - DAY

HARRY snatches Roberta's purse.

Roberta and Rachel scream.

Like a water skier, Roberta clings to the purse's long shoulder strap.

Harry pulls Roberta across the street.

Rachel follows screaming.

RACHEL

Help. Someone help us.

Roberta stumbles, then regains her footing. She trips again.

Harry drags her along.

HARRY

(in a hoarse voice)

Let go. Let go the strap will you.

ROBERTA

(breathless, half-sobbing)

This is a Cartier bag, a real designer bag. I'll never let go.

INT. AGENT'S CAR - DAY

Agent Anderson speaks into a cell phone.

AGENT TOM

(on phone)

I'm going to take a short break from surveillance.

WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

No. Stay put.

AGENT TOM
 (on phone)
 There's a damsel in distress here.
 I'll be right back.

He pockets the cell phone. He's out of the car in pursuit of the girls and Harry.

Roberta falls again.

ROBERTA
 (aloud to herself)
 Head hurts. I can't run anymore.
 I feel dizzy.

Rachel catches up. She helps Roberta to her feet.

RACHEL
 You okay?

They race after Harry.

She loses her hold on the purse strap.

Harry runs faster without Roberta hanging on the strap.

A woman, walking her dog, stops to stare.

Harry crosses the street. He runs on, the purse tucked under his arm.

Rachel and Roberta follow with Anderson gaining on them.

Roberta trips and falls scraping her knee.

Rachel stops. She's breathing hard.

Anderson follows Harry down a steep ravine.

ROBERTA
 Who was that chasing him?

RACHEL
 I don't know. He came out of
 nowhere. Should we go down there?

ROBERTA
 I want my purse back.

EXT. RAVINE - DAY

Anderson close behind, Harry enters a small park at the foot of the ravine.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Harry brandishes a gun.

Anderson struggles with him. The GUN GOES OFF.

AGENT TOM
Is it worth your life?

Harry, wild-eyed, throws away his gun and takes out a knife.

HARRY
A knife is safer.

Anderson knocks the knife away with professional expertise.

In three beats, Anderson pins Harry to a tree, and handcuffs him.

Anderson reaches into his pocket for his cell phone.

EXT. TOP OF RAVINE - DAY

The girls peer down through trees and foliage into the ravine.

EXT. PARK - DAY

A black and white police car rolls up, lights flashing. Two uniformed policemen leap out and run towards Anderson.

Anderson shows his FBI identity card to OFFICERS BISHOP and LAVERY.

AGENT TOM
FBI agent on surveillance. Agent Tom Anderson.

Officers nod.

AGENT TOM
I'll take this purse as evidence.
I'll return it to the young lady later.

OFFICER BISHOP
What should we tell her?

AGENT TOM
Leave me out of this. Tell her you'll be in touch about the purse.

OFFICER BISHOP
Okay.

Anderson exits carrying the purse.

The officers direct Harry to climb the ravine.

OFFICER LAVERY
This time we got you for good, Harry.

Harry shoots Officer Lavery a dirty look.

The girls wait, then turn to follow the policemen up the hillside.

Roberta pulls on Officer Lavery's arm.

ROBERTA
(pointing to Harry)
He took my purse.

OFFICER BISHOP
We're glad to get him. He's been
snatching purses in this
neighborhood for quite some time.

RACHEL
But where's her purse?

OFFICER LAVERY
Not now. You'll get it.

ROBERTA
Don't you need to know our names
and what hotel we're in?

OFFICER BISHOP
Not really. We have that
information.

Officer Bishop pushes Harry's head down. He guides Harry into the squad car.

The officers jump in. They drive off with Harry, looking dazed, staring out the side window.

Roberta and Rachel, with puzzled expressions, watch the police car disappears into traffic.

INT. HALLWAY, NEW ORLEANS HOTEL - DAY

Rachel unlocks the door. The tired-looking sisters lean against the wall outside their room.

INT. ROOM, NEW ORLEANS HOTEL - DAY

With one arm over Rachel's shoulder, Roberta limps into the room.

Roberta discovers her purse on the bed. Smiling, she grabs her bag and waves it at Rachel.

ROBERTA
Oh my...look at this. On the bed.

RACHEL
What?

Roberta carefully picks up her purse.

Rachel approaches the bed.

ROBERTA

No strap.

Roberta searches her suitcase and finds a felt bag with a designer logo printed on it.

RACHEL

No strap.

Roberta looks around the room for the missing strap.

ROBERTA

Why no strap?

The girls sit on the bed.

RACHEL

Look inside. Maybe the strap is rolled up in there.

Roberta dumps the contents of the purse out on the bed.

ROBERTA

Is everything here?

Both girls give the contents a closer look.

Roberta rises and paces back and forth.

ROBERTA

Who was that other guy? Did you see his face?

RACHEL

He ran by so fast. He was in good physical condition.

ROBERTA

Well, was he cute?

Rachel lies back on a small pillow.

RACHEL

Can't say.

RACHEL

I am going to take a nap.

ROBERTA

I'm going out for a walk and look around.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS HOTEL, FRONT ENTRANCE - DAY

Roberta leaves. She joins a group of TOURISTS.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS STREET - DAY

Roberta strolls along. She notices a small bookshop.

An old man, SHOP OWNER, MORRIS VINTNER, sweeps the sidewalk. Seeing her, he bows, gestures towards the door. Roberta enters.

Vintner follows her in.

INT. VINTNER'S BOOKSHOP - DAY

SIGN OVER THE DOOR: EST. in 1830

COBWEBS hang from windows and beams. Entire shop is covered in dust. Antique books, stacked everywhere on shelves, tables, and chairs.

MORRIS VINTNER

May I help you? Oh my, you've hurt your face. Your cheek is bruised. What happened to you?

ROBERTA

Somebody tried to steal my purse, and when I ran after him, I tripped. See?

(showing him her handbag)

I lost the shoulder strap.

MORRIS VINTNER

No, I meant...

He points to her eye.

ROBERTA

Oh, you mean my eye.

MORRIS VINTNER

You have a black eye, too.

ROBERTA

You'll never believe this.

MORRIS VINTNER

What?

ROBERTA

I was hit in the eye by a bridal bouquet a few days ago.

Vintner looks disturbed.

She examines her eye in a dusty mirror on the wall.

ROBERTA

It is healing.

MORRIS VINTNER

You've had a very rough time,
young lady. I know what you need.

ROBERTA

What?

MORRIS VINTNER

You need a good story to carry you
away to another time and place.

Roberta picks up one of many books on a table.

MORRIS VINTNER

A book is nice to read on a plane
or in your hotel room. You forget
your troubles. One moment...

Mr. Vintner turns away. He finds a book in a special section.

MORRIS VINTNER

Here's the one. It's only fifty
cents.

ROBERTA

I'm, I've never really been a
reader. I can't pick a good story.

MORRIS VINTNER

This book is quite different.
You'll see. It will read you.

ROBERTA

Oh, alright. If you --

MORRIS VINTNER

It's definitely a "must" in your
case.

Roberta buys the book.

Mr. Vintner puts it into a bag.

MORRIS VINTNER

Don't read it for too long at a
time. If you want to stop
reading, say aloud, 'I wish to
stop reading, right now.' And it
will be so.

Roberta's eyes reflect her delight.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS STREET - BOOKSTORE - DAY

Roberta hurries along with the bag under her arm.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS HOTEL - DAY

Roberta enters the hotel clutching the bag close.

INT. LOBBY, NEW ORLEANS HOTEL - DAY

After sinking into a comfortable chair and a writing desk, Roberta opens the old book.

She kicks off her shoes and wiggles her toes.

Gradually, she relaxes into the story.

EXT. ROAD, NEW ORLEANS - 1845 - DAY - FANTASY

The day dawns sunny and hot. Roberta walks along a rutted road.

TWO TRAVELERS, dressed 1840's-style accompany her. Roberta adjusts her own mid-century cape and hood.

The group stops before a PAWN SHOP.

EXT. PAWN SHOP - 1845 - DAY - FANTASY

A wooden SIGN features a picture of three golden balls.

SIGN READS: "PAUL TANNER'S PAWN SHOP."

RICHARD BLACK, glances up at the sign.

RICHARD BLACK

I say we stop and get some money
here in this shop. I have
something to sell, do you?

SAM GOODMAN, nods his head several times.

SAM GOODMAN

Good idea. My father's watch
should do and you, Ms. Sinclair,
what do you say?

Roberta's eyes widen in surprise.

She follows them into the small shop.

INT. PAWN SHOP NEW ORLEANS - 1845 - DAY - FANTASY

Roberta looks around and notices that this is an earlier version of Morris Vintner's shop.

Roberta finds some papers in her cape pocket.

A sudden gust of wind blows through the shop.

The papers take flight.

Roberta dives to get them before they blow out the open window. She gathers the papers from the dusty floor.

Shop owner and money lender, PAUL TANNER, watches her from behind the counter.

PAUL TANNER

Do you have all the documents?

Roberta, from a kneeling position, hands the papers one at a time to Mr. Tanner.

PAUL TANNER

You are missing one of the papers you need.

Roberta watches a small folded paper take form on her empty hand.

ROBERTA

(amazed)

Could this be the paper?

Paul studies the page.

PAUL TANNER

Yes. That's the one. How much do you want today?

ROBERTA

How much?

PAUL TANNER

Can you read?

ROBERTA

Yes, Sir.

Richard and Sam wait quietly. They observe Roberta with puzzled expressions.

Paul gives Roberta a bag of coins.

Roberta freezes when she pulls one of the coins from the bag. It's made of solid gold.

PAUL TANNER

Isn't that enough? There's much more if you needed.

Suddenly, the bag of gold TRANSFORMS to pages of a book.

Roberta is reading a book. This book.

ROBERTA
(panicked)
I wish to stop reading right now.

INT. LOBBY, WRITING DESK, NEW ORLEANS HOTEL - DAY

Instantly, Roberta finds herself in her chair in the hotel lobby.

EXT. BLUE ORCHID - DAY

Early evening. Rachel, sits at a small table studying a menu.

Breathless, Roberta enters and sits at the table. She studies her menu.

WAITER BRANDON approaches.

BRANDON
May I take your order?

Roberta examines the prices.

ROBERTA
(to Rachel)
Can we split something?

Rachel shrugs her shoulders.

ROBERTA
We'll take sandwich number five.
One each. No, no. We'll split it.
Bring two plates.

BRANDON
Drinks?

ROBERTA
Water. We'll just have water.

BRANDON
We have charged, flavored, still?

Rachel looks down at her menu.

ROBERTA
Look, we'll have water, plain
water you get out of faucet.

BRANDON
Let me tempt you with some wine.

ROBERTA
Water, please.

Brandon hurries off with menus.

Rachel leans back in her chair and watches people walking by.

RACHEL

I called mom. Dad's not doing very well.

Roberta studies the cover of her new book.

ROBERTA

Mm.

Rachel looks over.

RACHEL

What is that book? You don't read books. I read books.

Roberta stuffs the book back in its bag.

ROBERTA

Forget about it.

Roberta studies the cover of her new book.

EXT. BLUE ORCHID - DAY

A beautiful sunset.

Brandon returns with a tray with two tall glasses of water, a lemon on each rim, and a small, floating orchid in the glass he places before Roberta.

RACHEL

My, oh my.

BRANDON

I detect a certain Northern flavor to your speech.

Roberta looks up.

BRANDON

Yes?

A pause. Brandon shakes his head and hurries off.

Rachel smiles.

RACHEL

Look at your water glass.

She takes a sip through her straw.

RACHEL

You didn't get a flower.

ROBERTA

Right.

RACHEL

It's because you're all math and science. You're not a novel reader. It all goes back to that, even as kids. Non-novel-readers don't understand things like "simple civilities." Nevermind.

ROBERTA

Wait a minute. What are you saying?

RACHEL

For one thing, you never say 'Hello' to me. Even dad's parrot, a humble bird, says, 'Hello'.

ROBERTA

You're saying that Binnie, a humble parrot uses "simple civilities?"

RACHEL

Maybe.

Roberta sips her water through its colorful straw.

EXT. BLUE ORCHID - NIGHT

The sun sets. Customers come and go. Passersby stroll along.

Roberta nibbles at her half. Rachel studies her smaller half.

A BAG LADY, WILAMINA, pushes her worldly belongings slowly by in a grocery cart. She glances at the sisters and their dinner plates.

ROBERTA

Rachel. See that woman? Sometimes I'm scared that someday I'll end up that way.

RACHEL (with her mouth full)

(Shaking her head,
no; she swallows)

How can you say that?

ROBERTA

I have been doing a lot of thinking on this trip.

RACHEL

About what? Dad?

ROBERTA

Yes, about George. But more.
About Dennis and about Tim. The
list goes on and on. Even Ken,
and we grew up with him.

Rachel takes a piece of bread from the basket and spreads
butter on it.

Roberta shakes her head no.

Rachel scrapes a little butter off and looks to Roberta for
her approval.

ROBERTA

Men.

RACHEL

A theory?

ROBERTA

It's true. Two failed marriages.
My judgment when it comes to
picking men... forget it.

Rachel drops her fork. She looks at Roberta in surprise.

Suddenly, Roberta looks into the crowd.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS STREET - NIGHT

ROBERTA

Look, look there.

RACHEL

Where? Who is it?

Roberta's up. She throws down money on the table. She grabs
her purse and book bag. She runs into the crowd.

RACHEL

Where are we going.
(breathing hard)
Can't we split dessert? Who is it,
Roberta?

Roberta runs on after a MAN, in a tee shirt. He turns when he
catches sight of Roberta's reflection in a shop window.

PEOPLE around make way for the sisters. Rachel catches up
with Roberta.

RACHEL

Who is it?

Roberta runs faster.

The man ducks into a drugstore.

Roberta follows. Rachel follows her.

INT. CLIVE'S DRUGSTORE - NIGHT

Roberta turns to Rachel.

ROBERTA

It's him. The guy who took my
purse.

They corner the man when he runs into a locked door in the
drugstore.

RACHEL

It can't be him.

The man leers at Roberta.

ROBERTA

Help. Police. Grab that man. He's
a thief.

SECURITY GUARDS step in. They grab the man's arms and spin
him around.

Harry smiles.

HARRY

No trouble, Officers, just a
mistake. I've never seen these
gals before in my life.

ROBERTA

You've got my purse strap. I want
it back. Where is it? You were
arrested today. You're out free
now?

Rachel looks embarrassed.

RACHEL

Maybe it isn't him. I'm not sure,
now.

ROBERTA

How can you think that. You were
there. You saw him. The police put
him in their squad car.

PEOPLE stare at Roberta and Rachel.

Guards hurry them along. They lead Harry and the girls to a
small office.

INT. DRUGSTORE OFFICE - NIGHT

JACK RECKER hangs up the phone.

JACK

No record of such an arrest when
and where you say. Sorry.

Harry smiles.

HARRY

See. It's all a mistake.

Roberta stares at Rachel.

Roberta lunges at Harry. One of the guards grabs her arm.

ROBERTA

Give me back my strap.

INT. PLANE - DAY

The plane steadies at thirty thousand feet.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT, SUSAN NORRIS, hands Roberta a pillow.

SUSAN

Pillow?

Roberta reads the book.

Rachel dozes in the next seat.

The story commences.

EXT. WHARF, NEW ORLEANS - 1845 - DAY - FANTASY

Roberta in an 1840's costume embraces COLONEL BART MCBANE.

Bart looks dashing in his uniform. He's an imposing figure.

ROBERTA

I will miss you, Bart. How long
will you be gone this time?

BART MCBANE

Roberta, my love, I'm not sailing
for a week. There's still time
for us, sweet lady.

Roberta smiles up at Bart.

INT. SHIPBUILDING OFFICE - 1845 - NIGHT - FANTASY

Candlelights flicker throughout the room. Bart, handsome in
uniform, sips a glass of water.

Roberta, in another vintage gown, her hair up in curls and jewels, looks closely at a model ship.

Bart watches her with pleasure in his eyes.

BART MCBANE

Do you like my latest project, my dear? I've named her "Roberta" after you.

ROBERTA

I love it.

He gathers her into his arms.

BART MCBANE

Then sail away with me on a forever voyage.

ROBERTA

I, I'm not sure.

BART MCBANE

Not sure about Bart Mcbane. Impossible.

ROBERTA

Not about you. About me. You see, I have a sort of a history of bad judgment when it comes to men.

BART MCBANE

What do you mean? You've been living at Sanborn all your girlhood. I know for a fact, you've had plenty of admirers.

ROBERTA

I know. I know. You don't understand. I seem to have two lives.

BART MCBANE

All the more mysterious, my dear. A secret love life, men like a girl with secrets.

He reaches toward her. She dodges. He gathers air into his arms.

Roberta looks out the window over the wharf.

ROBERTA

Bart, Bart, I mean this life and my life in the future. There I live in America.

(more)

ROBERTA (cont'd)

I work in a flower shop with my sister. I have a poor record with men there.

Bart smiles.

BART MCBANE

You live here and you live there in the future. Well, I know only the one who lives at Sanborn with her mother and father. And this one has captured my heart.

He embraces Roberta. She struggles a bit then succumbs to the passion of the moment. They break.

BART MCBANE

Now. Which life as you claim do you prefer?

ROBERTA

I cannot deny it. This one of course.

Roberta smiles and Bart laughs with a look of vindication.

INT. BALLROOM - 1845 - NIGHT - FANTASY

A ball bursts with merry feelings. Lines of grandly dressed MEN and WOMEN move through the elaborate dance patterns of their day.

An even more lavish gown makes Roberta dazzle. She stands at the side of the room, swaying her long skirts with the beat of the music.

Across the dance floor, Bart Mcbane., in a white uniform, talks with TWO elderly MEN.

Dancers move in step with the music.

Bart McBain notices Roberta. He he heads toward Roberta. She admires the flower displays nearby.

Bart bows before Roberta.

BART MCBANE

May I have this dance, Roberta.

Roberta hesitates. Then nods, 'yes' to Bart.

She dance with Bart.

The sound of ORCHESTRAL MUSIC intensifies as the couple turns and spins and turns.

Other COUPLES swing by, smiling, laughing.
 As they dance, Roberta glances around the room.
 She brushes perspiration from her forehead.
 Bart holds her close. His face gleams.
 Roberta blushes, pleased at his attention.

ROBERTA
 May we stop for a minute? I'm
 dizzy.

BART MCBANE
 We'll never stop, Roberta. We'll
 go on dancing like this forever.

ROBERTA
 No, no. I wish to stop reading
 right now.

INT. PLANE - NIGHT

Instantly, Roberta's back on the plane. A FLIGHT ATTENDANT
 passes down the aisle. Roberta stops her.

ROBERTA
 What time will we land?

SUSAN
 We will be landing in an hour and
 a half.

Roberta glances over at Rachel dosing next to her.

ROBERTA
 Sure, thanks.

Roberta riffles through the seat pocket in front of her.
 Finding nothing, she digs into her carry-on. She finds the
 romance novel.

With a curious smile, she opens to page one.

Paper is thin and yellowing. Lots of pages.

She looks up and takes a deep breath, slowly she flips the
 pages toward the last one.

Temptation flashes over her face.

ROBERTA
 (to herself)
 Better not peek.

Quickly, she snaps the book shut. Roberta reopens the book.

She glances at her sleeping sister.

With a smile of anticipation, Roberta gradually relaxes into the story.

INT. PLANE - NIGHT

Immediately, Roberta is back on the plane.

PASSENGERS file out carrying their baggage.

Roberta grabs her bag. She follows Rachel.

INT. AIRPORT, BAGGAGE - NIGHT

PASSENGERS crowd the Baggage area.

Mom breaks through. She rushes over. She hugs each one.

JEAN

It's too late for the medicine.

Roberta and Rachel cling to each other.

ROBERTA

Mom.

JEAN

Come on, we'll get your bags.
We're going home.

INT. LIVING ROOM, SINCLAIR HOME - DAY

Ken arrives with a beautiful bouquet of flowers. Rachel comes in and thinks the flowers are for her. Ken doesn't have the heart to tell her that they aren't.

INT. JEAN'S HOUSE, BATHROOM - DAY

Rachel and Roberta stand over the sink.

Rachel tears open a small package. She passes a bottle of medicine to Roberta.

Roberta pours most of the medicine down the drain.

ROBERTA

We'll hold on to this for awhile.

RACHEL

I know what you're thinking.

ROBERTA

What's that?

RACHEL
 You think he wouldn't have taken
 this medicine anyway.

Roberta rewraps the medicine in its package.

ROBERTA
 Right.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Roberta, Rachel and Mom walk back to their car.

FAMILY MEMBERS follow.

SUPER LEGEND: "ONE MONTH LATER."

INT. FLOWER SHOP, WORKROOM - DAY

A hot summer day. A fan turns on the ceiling.

Rachel reads her book on a high stool.

Roberta opens her mail. She pulls out a packet of legal papers.

RACHEL
 What's that?

ROBERTA
 My second set of divorce papers.

Binnie is in his cage in the corner of the workroom.

BINNIE
 Where's George? Where's George?

Rachel walks over to the cage.

RACHEL
 George isn't here anymore. He's
 gone to heaven. He's with the
 angels.

BINNIE
 With the angels. George with the
 angels.

Binnie squawks.

INT. SINCLAIR'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

All's quiet. The room is packed with boxes almost to the ceiling. One of the boxes stands open on her bed.

Rachel combs her hair at a dressing table.

Roberta's in her pajamas working at her computer.

RACHEL
You ever going to really move in?
I mean all unpacked?

ROBERTA
I'm working on it. I'm doing one
box a night.

RACHEL
There's so many boxes.

ROBERTA
You could help if you want.

Mom peeks in.

JEAN
Good night, girls.

ROBERTA
Night.

Mom continues down the hall.

ROBERTA
That's odd.

RACHEL
What is it?

ON COMPUTER SCREEN:

An E-mail comes in from the FBI.

E-mail reads:

"DEAR MS. SINCLAIR:

Roberta does a double take.

ROBERTA (to herself)
FBI?
(reading out loud)
Dear Ms. Sinclair, our agent is
investigating a scam perpetrated
by a Dr. Mason in New Orleans.

Roberta stops reading.

ROBERTA
Rachel, Rachel, come here.

Rachel reads the message.

ROBERTA
 FBI Agent Anderson requests that
 you immediately return the
 medicine bottle for evidence in
 this case.

RACHEL
 What are you going to do?

ROBERTA
 I don't want to get involved.

RACHEL
 But it's the FBI. A scam. You
 can't just ignore it. Can you?

ROBERTA
 Watch me.

Roberta pushes the "delete" key on the FBI message.

Binnie squawks from his cage.

INT. SINCLAIR'S HOUSE, ROBERTA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Roberta is asleep in her bed.

Shadows. Night-light reveals parrot's cage with Binnie
 inside swinging.

Binnie's POV through bars. He sees Roberta asleep on a twin
 bed. Something wakens her. She sits up. Still in Binnie's POV.

Roberta's face close to cage. Through bars, Binnie sees her
 looking at him.

ROBERTA
 Hi, Binnie. Hi, little one. How
 are you? I forgot to cover your
 cage. I'm sorry.

Roberta adds some water to Binnie's cup.

ROBERTA
 Thirsty?

Binnie looks away.

Roberta lifts a cloth cover.

SCREEN GOES TO BLACK

ROBERTA (V.O.)
 Good night, now.

WIND MOANS outside the window.

VOICE (O.S.)
Where's George? Where's George?

Roberta sits straight up in her bed.

Binnie squawks.

ROBERTA
George is with the angels. He's
with my real dad.

Roberta cries.

INT. NEW ORLEANS FBI OFFICE - DAY

Agent Anderson works at his desk. The door opens and AGENT ROSS leans in at the door. Anderson looks up.

AGENT ROSS
Any more replies on that scam case?

AGENT ANDERSON
I'm working on it.

INT. SINCLAIR'S HOUSE, ROBERTA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Roberta sits cross-legged on her bed. Binnie ruffles his wings then perches on the railing at the foot of the bed.

The sound of the DOORBELL in the distance.

Roberta looks up. She listens at the door.

JEAN (O.S.)
She's out. No. No. She's not here.

Alarmed, Roberta hides in the closet.

A YOUNG ATTRACTIVE MAN bursts into the room.

DENNIS, blond, very tan, 40's, looks under the bed.

Binnie flies to the top of his cage.

DENNIS
Come on, Roberta. I know you're in
here.

Roberta emerges from the closet. She struggles with the zipper on her robe. She smooths her hair.

Jean peeks in the room.

JEAN
Can I get you some coffee, Dennis?

ROBERTA

Thank you very much, Mother. But
Dennis isn't staying for coffee or
anything.

Jean smiles and disappears.

Roberta marches toward Dennis. She's ready to punch that
smile off his face.

DENNIS

Hey, wait, wait. Now Robbie, wait
let me explain why I'm over here.

Roberta stops.

ROBERTA

Well?

Dennis pulls a small note from his jacket pocket.

DENNIS

You're in trouble, Baby.

ROBERTA

Don't call me 'Baby'. I hate that
name.

He hands the note to her. She reads it.

ROBERTA

So?

Roberta tears up the note and drops the pieces on the floor.

DENNIS

Shouldn't have done that, Honey.

ROBERTA

Don't 'honey' me.

DENNIS

You're in big trouble. That was a
phone-call from the FBI. I feel
obligated to tell you. They're
looking for you.

Roberta looks nervous.

DENNIS

(smiling down at her)
You better call them back.

ROBERTA

Go, Dennis. Leave my room now.

Dennis holds his ground.

Binnie spreads his wings.

DENNIS

They leave a message for you every day, Baby. They're not going away.

ROBERTA

It's none of your business. Leave.

DENNIS

I'm going. But just for the record, Roberta. It wasn't your fault. I'm not a nice guy. That's all.

Roberta registers surprise.

ROBERTA

What do you mean?

Dennis pauses at the door.

DENNIS

I mean, don't blame yourself for our little break-up. I take the whole blame, that's all.

Dennis smiles and exits the room. Roberta sits down on the bed.

INT. JEAN'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

The next night.

Roberta's computer screen glows in the darkened bedroom. She reads another E-mail from the FBI.

Binnie is out of his cage. He perches on the back of Roberta's chair. With keen eyes, Binnie peers over Roberta's shoulder at the Monitor screen.

Binnie squawks. He ruffles his feathers.

ROBERTA

(reading aloud
quickly)

Dear Ms. Sinclair, we have not heard from you and we want to inform you that some thirty families have been cheated by this doctor. We need your evidence. Please send same to Agent Thomas Anderson.

Roberta reads at a slower pace.

ROBERTA

P.S. I am Agent Anderson. You can trust me. I promise not to hassle you. Please help us. Tom

BINNIE

I do. I promise. I do.

Roberta looks at Binnie and chuckles.

She gives him a cookie.

EXT. SINCLAIR'S HOUSE - DAY

A few days later.

Roberta runs up the front steps and into the house.

INT. SINCLAIR'S HOUSE, HALLWAY - DAY

Roberta limps up the stairs.

INT. SINCLAIR'S HOUSE, ROBERTA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Fewer packing boxes line the walls.

With a sigh, Roberta tosses her purse onto her bed. She moves to her dressing table and brushes her hair.

Binnie appears restless in his cage.

Roberta notices Binnie's reflection in the mirror.

ROBERTA

What's wrong? Oh, it's time for your lesson.

Roberta takes Binnie from his cage.

ROBERTA

Come on. Pretty bird.

BINNIE

Hello.

She takes out a parrot CD entitled "TEACHING YOUR PARROT TO TALK."

Roberta boots up her computer.

CD-ROM PLAYS. VIDEO comes up on computer screen.

A cartoon parrot appears wearing glasses. A pencil and notebook are tucked under his wing.

ROBERTA
 (V.O.)
 My name is Baylor. I will teach
 you how to talk. Learn this: 'It's
 always darkest before the dawn.'

With a look of interest, Binnie perches on the back of
 Roberta's chair.

BINNIE
 Darkest dawn.

ROBERTA
 Very good.

ROBERTA
 It's always darkest before the
 dawn.

BINNIE
 Darkest before the dawn.

ROBERTA
 Wow, Binnie. Want a cookie?

BINNIE
 Binnie wants a cookie.

Roberta gives him a cookie.

E-mail FLASHES ON.

Roberta clicks to open her E-mail.

ROBERTA
 Who could it be?
 (to screen)
 Come on. Hurry up.

ROBERTA
 (reading aloud)
 Dear Ms. Sinclair, Thanks for the
 medicine bottle. But, there will
 be more questions to come...

Roberta looks at Binnie.

ROBERTA
 More questions?

Roberta hits the "Reply" button.

ROBERTA
 (composing aloud)
 Dear Agent Anderson, Thanks for
 your promise that we won't be
 bothered by the doctor. I'm happy
 to answer any questions you may
 have.

Roberta hesitates.

ROBERTA
 Darkest before the dawn.
 Sincerely, Roberta.

Roberta hits send.

Computer posts a sign saying "Your message has been sent."

Roberta flops on her bed and idly picks up the romance novel
 from New Orleans.

Immediately she is into the story.

ROBERTA TAKES TRIP TO CA. HE CALLS HER THERE.

ROBERTA THINKS ABOUT HARRY. NO RECORD OF ARREST. SHE MENTIONS
 THIS TO TOM ON E-MAIL COMPUTER.

TOM EMAILS ROBERTA THAT THE DR. HAS RETURNED THE MONEY AND
 PLEADED NO CONTEST. AND NOW AWAITS HER TRIAL. ROBERTA'S MONEY
 TO FOLLOW THAT.

GRAVESIDE SCENE, JEAN TELLS ROBERTA ABOUT HER STEPFATHER.

ROBERTA MEETS BART MCBANE AT THE BALL. SOMETHING HAPPENS TO
 SHOW ROBERTA HER TRUE ABILITIES TO JUDGE MEN. ALSO, IT IS
 NEEDED LATER TO CAPTURE JENNY AND HER BROTHER AND BROTHER-IN-
 LAW. THIS FRIGHTENS BART MCBANE AND ROBERTA. SHE CONFIDES IN
 BART MCBANE, THAT SHE IS NO JUDGE OF MEN.

SHE TRIES TO EXPLAIN THAT SHE COMES FROM THE FUTURE.

ROBERTA RETURNS TO THE PRESENT. BART MCBANE, SHE LEARNS AT
 THE LIBRARY, HAS ENEMIES AFTER HIM. ROBERTA WORRIES ABOUT
 BART AND HIS DESTINY.

TO KEEP BUSY, SHE UNPACKS BOXES AT HER MOTHER'S HOUSE.

ROBERTA, RACHEL, AND JEAN HEAR GEORGE'S WILL AT THE LAWYER'S
 OFFICE. ROBERTA REALIZES THAT MILLAR'S FLOWERS AND BINNIE
 HAVE COME TO HER, BECAUSE GEORGE DID LOVE HER AND RESPECTED
 HER INTELLIGENCE TO RUN THE SHOP AND TAKE CARE OF BINNIE FOR
 HIS LIFETIME.

SHE CONTACTS FBI MAN MORE AND MORE EXCHANGING SENTIMENTS BACK
 AND FORTH.

RACHEL AND KEN WATCH MRS. BUSH OR ONE LIKE HER TALKING ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF READING TO CHILDREN AND ADULTS.

RACHEL AND KEN AT GYM.

RACHEL AND KEN AT LIBRARY. KEN LEARNING TO READ.

ROBERTA LEAVES MESSAGE LATE AT NIGHT ON TOM'S ANSWERING MACHINE. TOM GETS TRAPPED IN HIS OFFICE BY 3 VILLAINS. ROBERTA SAVES HIM SECRETLY.

TOM NOT AWARE THAT SHE'S THE ONE THAT SAVED HIM. HARRY CAPTURES HIM.

WHEN ROBERTA IS IN THE PAST, TOM CANNOT TRACE HER. SHE LEAVES THE PRESENT.

ROBERTA HURRIES BACK TO SAVE BART IN THE SAME MAZE THAT THE DR. HAD RESTORED. ROBERTA LEADS MCBANE OUT TO THE MAZE AND OUT OF DANGER. HIS MEN CAPTURE THE THREE CRIMINALS.

ROBERTA RETURNS IN TIME TO MEET TOM AT THE HOTEL. JEAN COMES DOWN AND READS ROBERTA'S BOOK. ROBERTA THINKS THE MOTHER IS CAUGHT IN THE PAST. SHE CRIES THAT SHE LOVES HER MOM AND NEVER SAID IT. SHE REALIZES THAT HER TWO HUSBANDS LEFT BECAUSE THEY EACH HAD THEIR OWN REASON, WHICH DID NOT HAVE ANY THING TO DO WITH ROBERTA'S SHORT COMINGS.

JEAN AWAKENS AND 911, ROBERTA REALIZES THAT THE BOOK MAY NOT EFFECT EVERY READER AS IT DID TO HER.

RING, STRAP, RED ROSES

SHE THROWS THE BOOK IN THE TRASH

BAG LADY PICKS IT UP. AS TOM AND ROBERTA STROLL ON. ROBERTA DOESN'T REALIZE IT.

FANTASY FLASH OF BART MCBANE. WAITING ON DECK. AND THE BAG LADY CLIMBING THE GANG PLANK TO MEET HER DESTINY

HE CAN'T FIGURE THIS OUT. "IT'S AS IF SHE VANISHED FROM THE FACE OF THE EARTH."

ROBERTA REALIZES THAT JENNY AND TWO POLICEMEN ARE AFTER THE FBI MAN.

ANOTHER AGENT PICKS HER UP.

INT. FLOWER SHOP - DAY

Roberta and Rachel are working on a large bouquet.

ROBERTA

I'm going to take a break. I want to do some reading.

RACHEL

For someone who never read a book in school, you're sure making up for it. What's so great about that book? Let me see that book.

Roberta stands. She holds the book behind her back and looks down and away from Rachel.

ROBERTA

No. This book is not for sharing. Sorry.

Rachel tries to grab the book from Roberta. Roberta dodges out of reach.

ROBERTA

Never mind. I'll be back in a little while.

ROBERTA

Reading another book I see.

RACHEL

Dad gave it to me.

ROBERTA

How nice for you.

RACHEL

It's a good romance. You might like it.

ROBERTA

He gave it to you. It's yours.

RACHEL

You are too much. I could lend it to you.

ROBERTA

That's okay. You know I'm not a reader.

RACHEL

No. Haven't you noticed? He's quiet since dad went into the hospice.

ROBERTA

I'm sorry. I didn't really notice,
I guess.

INT. BEDROOM - 1845 - DAY - FANTASY

Roberta writes at her desk with her quill pen in a beautiful white-laced robe.

ROBERTA

(reading aloud)

"My dear Bart.

(she dips her quill.)

THAT BUSY SATURDAY, AGENT ANDERSON CALLS ON PHONE TWICE. HE ANNOUNCES THAT HE'S FALLEN IN LOVE WITH HER AND CAN'T GIVE UP THE FUN OF HER CONTACTS.

AT FIRST, ROBERTA'S NOT TOO SURE SHE SHOULD PROCEED WITH THEIR CORRESPONDENCE. SHE READS ON IN THE BOOK FOR LONGER PERIODS OF TIME, TRYING TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS. RACHEL SUGGESTS SHE PEEK AHEAD. BUT SOMETHING STOPS ROBERTA FROM LOOKING AHEAD.

HAVE A SMALL FUNERAL FOR GEORGE. MOM TELLS ROBERTA AND RACHEL WHO MILDRED IS. BINNIE WILLED TO ROBERTA TOO. ROBERTA CALLS HIM "DAD" NOW.

FINALLY, A SERIOUS CASE TAKES ANDERSON AWAY AND UNABLE TO CONTACT HER. SHE REALIZES HOW MUCH SHE MISSES HIM. WHEN HE SURFACES AGAIN, ROBERTA DECIDES THEIR RELATIONSHIP IS TOO PRECIOUS TO RISK ANY MORE TIME GOING BY, BETTER TO MEET ONCE AND FOR ALL.

THEY PLAN TO MEET IN NEW ORLEANS WHERE HE IS BASED. SHE MAKES RESERVATION AT HOTEL. ROBERTA AND RACHEL SHOP FOR JUST THE RIGHT DRESS AND SHOES. SHE STILL USES HER PURSE WITHOUT THE STRAP AS A CLUTCH.

THE NIGHT OF THE MEETING, RACHEL ARRIVES AT THE AIRPORT. SHE TAKES A CAB TO THE HOTEL. SHE HURRIES UPSTAIRS TO HER ROOM WITH THE BELL BOY LEADING. SHE BATHES AND PUTS ON MAKEUP. INTO THE GORGEOUS DRESS. STILL WONDERING WHAT WILL HAPPEN. THE PHONE RINGS. HE'S IN THE LOBBY. "SHOULD I COME UP" ROBERTA SAYS SHE'LL COME DOWN. SHE CHECKS THE DRESS AND SHOES, THE LOOK IN THE LARGE MIRROR. SHE SMILES.

ROBERTA TAKES THE ELEVATOR DOWN. DOORS OPEN. SHE SEES A MAN WITH FLOWERS STANDING NEAR THE CHECK-IN DESK. HE LOOKS UP AND SEES HER. HE STRIDES TOWARD THE ELEVATORS.

THE DOORS CLOSE. ROBERTA RIDES BACK UP TO HER ROOM. SHE'S TOO NERVOUS TO GO THROUGH WITH THIS. THE PHONE RINGS. "GET DOWN HERE NOW." SHE LAUGHS.

THE ELEVATOR DOORS OPEN AND THIS TIME ROBERTA RUNS TOWARD ANDERSON...THEY EMBRACE, FLOWERS AND ALL.

THEY LOOK AT EACH OTHER AT LAST. HE'S NICE LOOKING. SHE'S GORGEOUS. SHE NOTICES THE FLOWERS ACCOMPANIED BY A BOX FROM CARTIER. THEY SIT, WHILE SHE OPENS THE PACKAGE. SHE FINDS A NEW STRAP FOR HER PURSE. "I HAD YOUR STRAP REPLACED."

TEARS ROLL DOWN HER CHEEKS. TOGETHER, THEY ATTACH THE NEW PERFECTLY MATCHING STRAP TO ROBERTA'S PURSE. THEY STAND. HE GIVES HER A LONG PASSIONATE KISS. THEY TURN AND WALK TO THE FRONT ENTRANCE OF THE HOTEL. SHE STOPS, FINDS THE BOOK IN HER PURSE. SHE TOSSES IT IN A NEARBY TRASH CONTAINER. THEY EXIT WITH HIS ARM AROUND HER.

ON THE BUSY NEW ORLEANS STREET, THEY WALK SMILING HAPPY AT LAST

FADE OUT.

THE END.