

THE BRIDGES OF MADISON COUNTY

screenplay adaption by

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Our story begins in 1965, on a hot afternoon in August.

FADE IN

EXT. IOWA LANDSCAPE - DAY

Rolling green hills, lush farmland, vast open space. Not a house or sign of life in sight. On a long dusty road, a TRUCK is driving across the screen. Clouds of dirt follow in its tracks -- its motor, the only sound we hear.

INT. TRUCK - DAY

FRANCESCA JOHNSON is sitting in the front seat of the pick-up truck. Her expression is distant. Her eyes are sad, as if hiding a burden she can hardly bear. Her husband, RICHARD JOHNSON, is driving.

RICHARD
You feeling better Franny?

FRANCESCA
Yes. I'm fine. It's just this heat I think.

He nods, satisfied. He turns on the radio as the VOICE OF DINAH WASHINGTON sings a bluesy, haunting love song, "I'LL CLOSE MY EYES."

DINAH WASHINGTON
(SINGS)

"I'LL CLOSE MY EYES... TO EVERYONE
BUT YOU... AND WHEN I DO... I'LL SEE
YOU STANDING THERE..."

(CONTINUES)

RICHARD

(surprised)

What station is this?

FRANCESCA

It's a Chicago station. I found it
the other day.

RICHARD

Kinda pretty. Is this uh... jazz
kinda singing?

FRANCESCA

(nicely)

I don't know. Can we turn it off? I
have such a headache.

RICHARD

Sure.

Richard shuts it off. Francesca turns her face away from him
to look out at the vast expanse out of the countryside.

EXT. JOHNSON HOUSE - DAY

The truck stops in front of an isolated FARM HOUSE. A wooden
gate stands twenty yards from the front door. A barn and a
hot house sits on either side, surrounded by acres and acres
of beautiful pasture.

CAROLYN JOHNSON, a sixteen-year-old girl, steps out from the
vegetable garden with an arm full of vegetable. She watches
her parents exit the truck.

Francesca carries her groceries, walking briskly through the
front gate and entering the house.

Richard grabs a bag of feed from the flatbed and strolls more
leisurely. When he walks through the front gate, he notices

something on the ground and picks it up. It is a BUTTON with RED NATURAL surrounding it. As if it had been torn from a piece of clothing. His daughter approaches him.

RICHARD

Your mother isn't feel well. I want you to help her out tonight with dinner.

(she nods)

Tell Michael to put this feed away.

He puts the feed bag down. She exits. He enters the house.

INT. FRONT HALL - DAY

Richard enters the front hall opposite the stairs to the second floor. To his left is the living room. To his right, through an archway is the kitchen. He moves towards the stair when he suddenly hears the kitchen radio turned on and "I'LL CLOSE MY EYES" continues. It puzzles him. He looks to the kitchen. Francesca is obviously there but we can't see her. He is about to call to her when his son, Michael, yells:

MICHAEL (O.S.)

Dad! You bought the wrong feed!

RICHARD

(irritated)

What?!

He exits through the house to the back door.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

The family-- Francesca, Richard, Carolyn and their seventeen-year-old son MICHAEL -- are eating supper. No one speaks.

FRANCESCA

So what are you going to do with the prize money?

CAROLYN

I don't know. I might save up for one of those hi-fi stereo players like

Peggy has.

Francesca nods. Silence again. She asks her son:

FRANCESCA
Are you seeing Betty tonight?

MICHAEL
(eating)
Nah.

Silence. She is used to her son's one syllable answers.

RICHARD
Oh! Frannie, is this yours?

He places the button with red material on the table. Hiding her surprise, Francesca takes the button.

FRANCESCA
You found it! I got my dress caught
on that damn gate. You must have eyes
like a hawk.

FRANCESCA (cont'd)
You must all be tired. You got home
so early. What time did you leave
Illinos this morning?

RICHARD
'Bout 4:30.

FRANCESCA
Well you should all go to bed early.
I'll do the cleaning up.

This last remark she addresses to her daughter. Everyone returns to their silent eating.

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - NIGHT

The house is asleep and dark except for a bright light coming from the kitchen. Carolyn quietly exits her bedroom in her nightclothes. She was awakened by noises coming from the

kitchen downstairs.

INT. KITCHEN -

She enters to find the lights are on. An empty cake pan and a half-used bowl of frosting sitting unwashed in the sink. She hears the motor of the truck being turned on. She moves to the front hall and looks out through the door to see:

The truck driving away. She calls out:

CAROLYN

Mom!

But she gets no response. She stands there wondering where her mother could possibly be going this time of night, as we -

DISSOLVE TO:

THIRTY YEARS LATER - SAME LOCATION

Carolyn, thirty years older, stands in the same doorway of the same house thinking back to that evening her mother acted so strangely.

A LAWYER is unpacking a briefcase in the living room off the front entrance.

Carolyn sees a car with Florida plates driving up to the house. She smiles.

EXT. JOHNSON HOUSE - DAY

Carolyn steps out of the doorway and heads for the car, out of which exit her brother Michael and his country girl wife BETTY, a stout buxom chatterbox. Both boast Florida tans and fashion styles.

MICHAEL

(to Carolyn)

Explain to me again why we didn't do this in Des Moines in an air conditioned office?

CAROLYN

Mom's orders.

MICHAEL

Lawyer here?

CAROLYN

(nods)

I have some sandwich fixings if you're hungry.

BETTY

(proudly)

No, we just had lunch at the hotel with my brother and his new wife. She told me all the dirt. I forgot how interesting things can get around here. It was so good to see them. The last time we visited they were in Europe. He is doing so well. He ordered champagne. For lunch! I nearly died.

MICHAEL

I nearly died when we split the bill.

BETTY

Michael doesn't understand. People who make the kind of money my brother makes don't carry money on them. They keep it all in various accounts.

MICHAEL

Then we should have had lunch at the bank.

Carolyn tries not to laugh. Betty shoots him a dirty look, then stops to take in the house and its surroundings.

BETTY

Boy. It sure has been a long time.

MICHAEL

(correcting her)
We were here two Christmases ago.

BETTY
Well, that's a long time.

MICHAEL
It's not that long.

BETTY
(suddenly upset)
Well, why don't I just say black so
you can say white!
(to Carolyn)
Don't be surprised to find your
brother hasn't changed an iota. He
hardly ever talks and when he does
it's in that tone! You should have
heard him at lunch -- not two words
until the bill came and then he says,
"Worth every penny."

MICHAEL
(defensive)
SO!

BETTY
(angry)
You said it in that tone! Like you
were angry at me, my brother, at
the world for forcing you to eat a
nice lunch!

MICHAEL
Oh Jesus.

BETTY
(staring to cry)
I simply can not stand that tone!

CAROLYN
(sympathetically)
Come inside. You're just tired from
the trip.

She comforts Betty who indulges in the attention.

BETTY

I am so sick and tired of apologizing
and not knowing what I've done!

CAROLYN

I'm sure you haven't done anything.
Have some iced tea. How are the kids?

MICHAEL

He dropped them off at Betty's mom.
Where's Steve?

CAROLYN

(uncomfortably)

He's not coming.

Betty suddenly stops crying and abrasively focuses on
Carolyn's problems.

BETTY

Aw, is he still cheating on you,
hon?

Carolyn suddenly hoses sympathy for her.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

The lawyer hands Michael a document.

LAWYER

Just sign here as having received the
contents from the safe deposit box.

(Michael does)

And this one, which clears the bank
of all further responsibility fo0r the
contents.

Betty whispers to Carolyn.

BETTY

This is kind of exciting. You think

we'll find out your mother had
secret millions lying around?

Carolyn smiles weakly. Michael hands back the papers.

LAWYER

All right. Why don't we begin.

He takes out Francesca's Last Will and Testament.

LAWYER (cont'd)

Your mother has been interred at
Lakeside Funeral Home until
arrangements can be made.

MICHAEL

(to Carolyn)

I thought everything WAS arranged.

CAROLYN

Well, there's a problem.

MICHAEL

What problem?

LAWYER

Your mother left explicit
instructions that she wished to be
cremated.

MICHAEL

Cremated?!

BETTY

Eeww!

CAROLYN

I know. I don't understand it either.

MICHAEL

When did she decide this?

LAWYER

(reading will)

Apparently just before her death.

MICHAEL

Well, that's crazy. I don't know anybody who gets cremated.

BETTY

My Jewish friend's grandmother did.

MICHAEL

Well, no one in my family did! Dad bought cemetery plots at Oak Ridge. One for him, one for mom.

LAWYER

It clearly states in the will --

MICHAEL

I don't care what it says! Maybe Mama was delirious, you know. She didn't know what she was saying. If she wanted to be cremated, why the hell did she let dad buy two plots, huh?

LAWYER

Well, she was very specific. She wanted her ashes to be thrown over Roseman Bridge.

MICHAEL

WHAT!

BETTY

How bizarre!

CAROLYN

Mr. Peterson, are you sure mama wrote all this?

LAWYER

Well, it was notarized, and witnessed by a Mrs. Lucy Delaney. Maybe you can ask her.

MICHAEL

Who the hell is Lucy Delaney?

CAROLYN

I remember a Mrs. Delaney but Mama told me years ago she died.

MICHAEL

Well, I don't care if it's legal or not, we're not cremating her and throwing her all over some bridge where we can't even go visit her because she's going to be blown all over the place like an ashtray.

BETTY

Not to mention people driving over her and doggies doing their business --

MICHAEL

(interrupting)

We're not doing it! I'm not even sure it's Christian.

BETTY

Maybe it's an Italian thing. Their mother was Italian.

MICHAEL

Doesn't matter. Move on.

The women dare not object. The lawyer raises his eyebrows and continues:

LAWYER

Well, we'll come back to that. Shall we open the box?

JUMP CUT TO:

MOMENTS LATER

C.U. SAFETY DEPOSIT BOX

A key is inserted and the lid is opened. There are many papers, deeds, et. Michael begins sorting through these.

Carolyn notices a manila envelope addressed to her mother, postmarked 1965. She opens it up to find TWO LETTERS and A PHOTOGRAPH -- FRANCESCA standing NEAR A COVERED BRIDGE, her hair wind blown, her expression serene, beautiful and sad. She wears a RED DRESS with buttons down the front.

CAROLYN

Michael, look -- I've never seen this picture of mama. Have you?

Betty and Michael look over her shoulder. He shakes "no."

CAROLYN (cont'd)

It was in this envelope from 1965.

BETTY

She's not wearing a bra.

(takes bridge photo)

This is Roseman Bridge in case anyone's interested.

Interested yes, but no one thinks anything of it. Michael returns to the other papers. Betty takes the photograph for further examination. Carolyn opens one of the letters and begins to read.

The following dialogue is heard OS, as CAMERA ANGLES ON CAROLYN reading one of the letters:

BETTY (O.S.)

It's a beautiful picture of her.

MICHAEL (O.S.)

(to lawyer)

Why are there two deeds here?

LAYER (O.S.)

One of for the original parcel your father bought and this one is for the additional acres he purchased in '59.

MICHAEL (O.S.)
And this?

LAWYER (O.S.)
Those are bills of sale from the
equipment your mother sold in ..
(CONTINUES O.S.)

Throughout their conversation, we focus on Carolyn as she reads and her expression sinks into one of shock and confusion. She flips to the last page of the letter to read who it is from. She can't believe her eyes.

BETTY (O.S.)
What's that?

Carolyn jumps a little, so engrossed in her discovery. She lies.

CAROLYN
Oh, just a old letter from a friend.

BETTY
(laughs)
No treasure maps, huh?

CAROLYN
(laughs nervously)
No.

Betty starts inspecting knit knacks around the house she might be able to take. Carolyn looks to Michael.

CAROLYN (cont'd)
Michael.

MICHAEL
(reading documents)
Yeah.

CAROLYN
Michael.

MICHAEL

(irritated)
What?!

CAROLYN
Come here a minute.

Michael crosses impatiently to Carolyn. Carolyn looks around to the others, then guides him OS into the kitchen for privacy. He protests.

MICHAEL
What? Where are we going?

They exit. Alone with the impatient lawyer, Betty examines a vase as she pumps him for info.

BETTY
Did she say anything in there about me? Leaving me anything in particular?

LAWYER
No.

Betty prattles on as she examines each item, much to the lawyer's dismay, hiding her resentment and hurt.

BETTY
I didn't expect so. She never liked me. It's okay. I always knew. Thought we married too young. Nobody broke his arm -- that's what I said but you know mothers and their sons. Also, she never liked the fact of us moving to Florida although what's where the opportunities were. Couldn't deny that. Suppose we should have visited more but you know she hardly ever made an effort to come to Tampa. Not even to see her grandchildren. She was a cold woman. They say Italians are hot-blooded but not her. She was cool as ice.

(picks up a
candlestick)

She leaves these to anyone?

Michael and Carolyn re-enter the living room. Michael's expression now matches Carolyn in disbelief.

BETTY (cont'd)
What's going on?

MICHAEL
Um... we were just wondering how it might be better if me and Carolyn went over the stuff by ourselves. Not keep you two waiting around. I'll contact your office about the legal work.

Grateful, the lawyer packs up to leave.

BETTY
I don't mind waiting.

MICHAEL
Well, there's a lot of boring stuff to do. Lists of people we have to write to. Find mama's relatives addresses in Italy -- stuff like that.

BETTY
Well, I can help.

MICHAEL
I said NO!

That came out a bit aggressively. Betty is hurt.

MICHAEL (cont'd)
Why don't you go to your mothers. Or back to the hotel. Sit in some air conditioning. Take a bath.

BETTY
(near tears)
I do not need instructions from you to bathe!

(gets her bag)
I knew you'd do this! I knew I'd come
all the way here and be shut out as
usual! I came to be here for you! I
didn't have to come!

(genuinely hurt)
Lord knows I was never much welcome
in this house before. Apparently dead
or alive, nothing's changed.

CAROLYN

Aw, Betty.

Carolyn feels badly for her. An impatient Michael refuses sympathy. Embarrassed, Betty starts to exit then stops at the mantle.

BETTY

Carolyn -- you want these
candlesticks?

CAROLYN

No. You can have them.

Betty grabs them both and exits. Carolyn looks at him disapprovingly. Michael takes the letter from her hand.

MICHAEL

Now what's this about?

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Sitting at the kitchen table, Carolyn is in the middle of reading the letter to Michael.

CAROLYN

-- going over and over in my mind
every detail, every moment of our
time together and I ask myself, "What
happened to me in Madison County?" I
struggle to put it together in a way
that allows me to continue knowing

we're on separate roads. But then I look through the lens of my camera, and you're there. I start to write an article and I find myself writing it to you. It's clear to me now we have been moving towards each other, towards those four days, all our lives --

MICHAEL

(rises)

Goddamn sonofabitch! I don't want to hear anymore! Sonofabitch! Burn the damn thing! I don't want to hear it! Throw it away!

Carolyn continues reading silently. Michael's curiosity gets the best of him:

MICHAEL

What's he saying now?

CAROLYN

Well, he just gets on about how if mama ever needed him, she could find him through the National Geographic magazine. He as a photographer. He promises not to write again. Then all it says is...

(beat)

I love you... Robert.

MICHAEL

Robert! Jesus! I'll kill him.

CAROLYN

That would be some trick. He's already dead. That's what this other letter is.

(takes letter and skims)

From his attorney. He left most of his things to mama and requested...

(she stops)

MICHAEL

What?

CAROLYN

That he be cremated and his ashes
thrown on Roseman Bridge.

MICHAEL

DAMN HIM! I knew mama wouldn't have
thought of that herself. It was some
damn perverted... photographic mind
influencing her! When did the bastard
die?

CAROLYN

'82.

MICHAEL

Wait a minute! That was thirty years
after daddy. Do you think...?

CAROLYN

I don't know. I'm completely in the
dark here. That's what I get for
moving away.

MICHAEL

This happened way before we both got
married. I... I can't believe it.

(then, innocently)

You think she had sex with him?

Carolyn cannot believe he is this dense.

CAROLYN

(sarcastic)

My Lord. It must feel real nice
living inside your head with Peter
Pan and the Easter Bunny.

MICHAEL

Don't talk to me like that. She was
my mother for Christsakes. And now I

find out she was... She was a --!

CAROLYN

Don't say that!

MICHAEL

Well, what am I supposed to think?

CAROLYN

I can't believe she never told me? We spoke at least once a week. How could she do that?

MICHAEL

How did she meet him? Did Dad know? Anything else in that envelope?

CAROLYN

No, I don't think so. I --

She dumps it over and a SMALL KEY FALLS OUT. Pause, as Carolyn and Michael look to each other -- they grab the key and run out of the kitchen, almost comically falling over each other in their obsession to put this puzzle together.

A SERIES OF JUMP CUT --

From one lock to another as they try to find the keyhole that fits the key -- they try closets, attic doors, jewelry boxes, night tables, vanity drawers... Finally --

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

At the foot of their parents bed sits an WALNUT HOPE CHEST, covered with a tapestry. Michael and Carolyn look to each other first, before one removes the tapestry and the other tries the key. It fits. They open the chest to find:

Camera equipment, a chain with a medallion that reads "FRANCESCA," three leather bound notebooks -- and a sealed envelope with "Carolyn or Michael" written on it.

CAROLYN/MICHAEL

You read it!

Carolyn relents. She takes out the letter and reads:

CAROLYN

"January, 1987. Dear Carolyn. I hope you're reading this with Michael. I'm sure he wouldn't be able to read it by himself and he'll need some help understanding all this, especially the parts about me having sex..."

Insulted, Michael pulls the letter out of her hand and defiantly attempts to read it aloud himself to disprove his mother's claim. But after looking at a few lines, he surrenders and hands the letter back to his sister.

CAROLYN (cont'd)

"First, and most of all, I love you both very much and although I feel fine, I thought it was time to put my affairs, excuse that word, in order."

MICHAEL

I can't believe she's making jokes.

CAROLYN

Sshhh. "After going through the safety deposit box, I'm sure you'll find your way to this letter. It's hard to write this to my own children. I could let this die with the rest of me, I suppose.

(cont'd)

But as one gets older, one fears subside. What becomes more and more important is to be known -- known for all that you were during this brief stay. Row said it seems to me to leave this earth without those you love the most ever really knowing who you were. It's easy for a mother to love her children no matter what -- it's something that just happens. I don't know if it's as simple for children.

You're all so busy being angry at us for raising you wrong. But I thought it was important to give you that chance. To give you the opportunity to love me for all that I was..."

Carolyn and Michael look to each other like two school children about to take a difficult exam. They continue.

CAROLYN (cont'd)

"His name was Robert Kincaid. He was a photographer and he was here in 1965 shooting an article for National Geographic on the covered bridges of Madison County. Remember when we got that issue and looked at those bridges we'd seen for years but never noticed? How we felt like celebrities? Remember when we started getting the subscription?"

They don't remember.

CAROLYN (cont'd)

I don't want you to be angry with him. I hope after you know the whole story, you might even think well of him. Even grateful.

MICHAEL

Grateful!?

CAROLYN

(reads)

"... It's all there in the three notebooks. Read them in order. If you don't want to, I suppose that's okay too. But in that case I want you to know something -- I never stopped loving your father. He was a very good man. It's just that my love for Robert was different. He brought out something in me no one had ever brought out before, or since. He made

me feel like a woman in a way few women, maybe more, ever experience..."

MICHAEL

That's it!

Grabbing the letter, he starts putting everything back in the trunk.

CAROLYN

What are you doing?

MICHAEL

This is crazy. She waits till she's dead to tell us all this. Well, I got news for you. She was my mother. That's enough for me. I don't have to know who she was.

CAROLYN

Well, I'd like to read them.

MICHAEL

No. We're going to lock this up and --

CAROLYN

STOP IT!

(Michael freezes)

I want to read them! If you don't want to, then just leave. But don't you push me around like I'm some mule you paid for -- I already GOT A HUSBAND!

Michael is stymied.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Carolyn opens the first notebook which is dated AUGUST 1965. Michael sits beside her with a cup of coffee.

CAROLYN

(reads)

"I suppose his coming into my life

was, in many ways, prepared for weeks, maybe even months before. There was a restlessness I feeling. Out of the blue and for no apparent reason. There's nothing more frightening to a woman whose been settled down for almost twenty years than to suddenly feel unsettled. I don't know when it started ... I do remember one night in particular, a little over a week before Robert arrived..."

CAROLYN'S VOICE BECOMES FRANCESCA'S VOICE AS WE:

DISSOLVE TO:

1965

INT. JOHNSON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Richard is fast asleep while Francesca sits up in bed reading.

FRANCESCA (V.O.)

"It was late at night after a long day. Your father was tired -- fighting all afternoon with that new equipment Robert Harrison convinced him to buy. But I wasn't tired. Lately, I could hardly sleep more than two hours a night. I was reading some John O'Hara novel, skimming the words, turning the pages without absorbing what I was reading. My mind was far away. And no matter how I tried, I couldn't call it back."

Francesca closes the book and turns off the light. She nestles into the bed and tries to sleep. After a beat, she opens her eyes and turns on the light. As she gets out of bed she awakens Richard.

RICHARD

What time is it?

FRANCESCA
Later. Go back to sleep.

RICHARD
Where you going?

FRANCESCA
I'm not tired. I thought I might
finish Carolyn's skirt.

RICHARD
Now?!
(checks clock)
It's after eleven.

FRANCESCA
I can't sleep.

RICHARD
Again? Maybe you should see a doctor.

FRANCESCA
I'm not sick, Richard. I'm just not
tired, now go back to sleep before
you're up for the whole night too!

Francesca exits. Richard nestles under the covers, mumbling:

RICHARD
If you're not sick, how can it be
contagious?

INT. ATTIC - NIGHT

Francesca sits at her sewing machine, working on Carolyn's skirt. When the thread runs out, she checks her sewing box for another spool of that color. Not finding it, she raises and walks to an opened closet. She pulls on a light cord and checks her supplies.

There are shelves of boxes, crates, old clothes and shoes all crammed together. She pulls out one shoe box and an entire stack of items tumble off the shelf onto her head.

FRANCESCA

Damn it! Shit!

She looks at the mess and decides it's time to re-organize.

LATER:

The clock reads 2:30 AM. The closet has been emptied.
Francesca rummages through box after box.

Two huge piles have been created -- one for items to be thrown away, another for items to be kept. Francesca is wiping the bare shelves down with a rag and some cleanser. Looking up to the bottom of the next shelf, she notices A SHOULDER STRAP hanging, wedged between the wall and the shelf. Pulling over a stool, she steps up to be eye level with the shelf.

It is an OLD HANDBAG -- of a style not seen since the forties when she was a young girl. She pulls it down to examine. It is very dusty and worn, but the snaps still work. She places it against her side to see if it would still be fashionable. She opens it and finds an old lipstick -- reading the bottom where the name of the shade is located.

FRANCESCA (cont'd)

Ha, they don't even made this color anymore.

She exits the closet and moves to an old mirror, trying the lipstick on. As she decides whether or not she likes it, a thought occurs to her... she remembers something.

She crosses back to the handbag and feels the inside for a compartment hidden by a flap of material and a snap. She unsnaps it and an old BACK & WHITE PHOTO slips out. She looks at its image -- two young people against an Italian background. Francesca is twenty years younger with her arms around a handsome, black-haired charmer named --

FRANCESCA (V.O.)

"Niccolo. I couldn't remember the last time I had seen that face. And then the memories wouldn't stop.

Like an avalanche..."

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK -

EXT. NAPLES COUNTRYSIDE, 20 YEARS EARLIER - DAY

A hot, breezy summer day. A young vibrant Francesca is storming through an open field, angry, while Niccolo calls after her in pursuit.

The following scene is played in Italian with subtitles.

NICCOLO

Francesca! Francesca! Where the hell are you going?

FRANCESCA

Leave me alone!

NICCOLO

You play these games and I'm supposed to follow -- run after you like a schoolboy. Well, I'm not! I'm fed up!

Niccolo stops. Several yards ahead of him, Francesca stops and turns. Suddenly, she storms back towards him until they are face to face.

FRANCESCA

So that's it! You just give up!

NICCOLO

What "give up"? You agreed with them! Mommy and Daddy said stay away from me and you said all right. What am I supposed to do?

FRANCESCA

Fight for me!

Niccolo grabs her violently.

NICCOLO
ENOUGH! You don't know what you want!
Stop looking for me to tell you! STOP
IT!

Francesca knows he's right. He releases her.

NICCOLO (cont'd)
We can go back now and end it or we
can go back and you tell them off.
This is your choice! Not mine. But I
won't do this anymore. This is for
children!

Frustrated and sad, Francesca sits upon the ground. Niccolo knows she cannot face her parents yet he looks sympathetic.

EXT. JOHNSON HOUSE - DAWN 1965

Francesca sits on the back porch in her bathrobe, looking out over the pasture as if she were watching the previous scene happen right before her eyes.

In the pasture stands NICCOLO as he was twenty years ago. Memories have overlapped. A field in Naples is now a pasture in Iowa and Niccolo is as real to her as the grass. He is staring at her seated on the porch of her Iowa home, a woman twenty yards older than when he knew her. He smiles.

FRANCESCA (V.O.)
"I had forgotten this. I had somehow remembered it being more his fault, his decision. Then I remembered we made love in that field before we left for home. And I remembered it was my idea. I remembered tearing his shirt and biting his body, hoping he would kidnap me. I had forgotten that too. And I wondered, as I sat there... how many other things I'd forgotten."

RICHARD (O.S.)
Frannie.

Startled, Francesca turns as if she were caught in the act.
Richard is fully dressed, prepared to start the day.
Francesca turns back to the pasture -- Niccolo is gone.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - EVENING

It is a week later. Francesca is making dinner. A COUNTRY STATION is tuned in on the radio.

FRANCESCA (V.O.)

"The following week was the Illinois State Fair. The two of you were going with dad to exhibit Carolyn's prize steer. It was the Sunday night you left. I know it sounds awful but I couldn't wait for you all to leave. You were going to be gone until Friday. Four days...
(beat)
Just four days..."

Francesca's expression looks as if she needs a break from her family for more like four years.

FRANCESCA (cont'd)

Michael! Carolyn! Richard! Dinner!

She sets down a bowl of potatoes, a plate of sausages, coffee and corn as one by one her family enters and sits down.

Michael enters through a screen door from the back, letting the DOOR SLAM SHUT.

FRANCESCA

Michael, what did I tell you about that door?

Richard enters after Michael, letting the door SLAM THE same way. Francesca is about to say something, but gives up.

Everyone begins eating -- in complete silence.

When Michel can't open the ketchup bottle, Francesca grabs it, palms the top skillfully and twists it off. She hands it back to Michael who makes no comment.

When Richard scans the table for something that obviously isn't there, Francesca is up out of her seat before he can ask, at the fridge, grabbing the sour cream, closing the fridge and back at the table with incredible swiftness.

When Michel moves his big arm to reach for the salt, he knows over his cup and saucer, which Francesca catches with both hands before they hit the floor. Her reflexes are like a trained athlete.

Finally, Francesca is able to sit and sip her coffee. She watches her teenage daughter fill her plate with a blank expression that lets nothing slip through -- no indication of all the tempests of emotions that go through a teenage girl.

FRANCESCA

You excited about going, Carolyn?

Without looking up, Carolyn fakes a smile. Looking at her, Francesca remembers Carolyn as a three-year-old girl:

FLASHBACK.

In the same kitchen, THREE-YEAR-OLD CAROLYN runs around her mother's feet completely naked, squealing with delight as Francesca flicks her water from the tap.

FLASHBACK ENDS.

Francesca watches as Carolyn eats in silence, distant, locked in her own secret teenage thoughts and dreams.

Francesca then looks to her son, shoveling food into his mouth at an alarming rate. She attempts a conversation.

FRANCESCA (cont'd)

How was your date last night?

MICHAEL

(w/o looking at her)
Okay.

FRANCESCA
What's her name?

MICHAEL
Betty.

FRANCESCA
What's she like?

MICHAEL
Okay.

Silence. Frustrated, Francesca has a fantasy -

FANTASY:

Francesca picks up a blunt butter knife, rises out of her seat, grabs her son and shoves the knife at his throat:

FRANCESCA
Do you like her?

Michael finally reacts with more than one word -- frightened for his life.

MICHAEL
Uh... Yeah. Yeah. She's real nice.

FRANCESCA
Well, what's nice about her? Tell us!

MICHAEL
Well, she's... she's real pretty and
... and she's got a cute shape...
she's a good sport, ya know, for
laughs and
(desperate)
... she loves fried chicken wings and
beer.

FRANCESCA

Isn't that nice? You should bring her
home to meet us!

FANTASY ENDS.

Francesca looks at Michael in disgust.

RICHARD
We better get moving.
(to Francesca)
You sure you don't want to come?

Francesca looks at Richard with complete conviction.

FRANCESCA
I'm positive.

RICHARD
I'm going to miss you.

FRANCESCA
It's only four days.

He gives her a sweet peck on the lips. Francesca smiles,
anxious for them all to leave.

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Alone, dressed in her bathrobe, Francesca checks the front door. She crosses to the living. Noticing two throw pillows on the floor, she arranged them neatly on the couch. She sits herself in an easy chair then flicks on a reading lamp and opens her book. After five seconds, she closes the book. She crosses to the TV and turns it on, then turns it off before the picture tuned in.

She turns and leans on the TV, flicking the ON/OFF switch on and off as her mind wanders. She gets an idea. She crosses to the hi-fi and looks through several albums she got from her Columbia Record Club. But nothing inspires her and she quickly loses the desire for music. She's antsy. She has this time alone and she doesn't know how to spend it.

She walks through the dining room, passing a china closet

filled with fancy dishes and glasses. She stops. Shoved in the corner behind is an old, un-opened bottle of BRANDY. She removes up, setting atop the dining table to open it.

But when she catches a reflection of herself in the window opposite her, she stops. She sees a lonely, frustrated woman in a tattered bathrobe anxious to open a bottle of liquor. Deflated, she returns the brandy to the cupboard and exits.

EXT. BACK PORCH - NIGHT

Francesca sits on the porch with a book in her lap, gazing out over the pasture. It's a hot night. She opens the top of her robe a bit. Feeling the air against her skin, she decides to open it a bit more. She gets an idea.

Standing, she looks to see if anyone is around -- though rationally she knows there isn't a soul for miles. She turns off the porch light. With a brave and daring impulse, she sheds her bathrobe and stand naked under the night sky. The air feels good against her body. She opens her arms up against the night sky and moon like an Indian priestess.

Suddenly, she starts hitting her body as mosquitoes begin attacking her bare torso. Thwarted, she quickly covers herself with a robe and runs into the house.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Francesca trudges into the kitchen. As if on automatic, she takes the coffee pot and fills it with water. She gets the coffee and begins spooning it out. She stops. She gets the idea of taking herself out for breakfast and dumps the coffee pot out.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET; WINTERSET - MORNING

A one street town. On either side are rows of storefronts, an old coffee shop/diner, a bank, a medical center, a newspaper building, a courthouse and a movie theater showing CAT BALLOU.

The steeple of the local church is the highest structure, towering over the town from the end of Main Street.

INT. COFFEE SHOP/DINER - MORNING

Dressed in jeans and a light summer blouse, Francesca sits alone -- treating herself to breakfast and the paper. Some of the gossip news includes rumors of Frank Sinatra, 49, marrying Mia Farrow, 19; Cary Grant 61, marrying DYAN CANNON, 27. Francesca shakes her head in disbelief at such news.

She tries to continue reading, but is distracted by the loud conversation in the booth beside her:

TWO MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN and ONE MIDDLE-AGED HUSBAND sit after breakfast discussing the local gossip.

ELEANOR

Oh, this heat! Times like this I wish we took that offer from your brother and moved on up to Michigan.

HENRY

They got heat in Michigan.

ELEANOR

Not this kind of heat.

HENRY

Heat is heat.

ELEANOR

Heat is not heat! There's different kinds! And this heat is much hotter than what they got in Michigan. You go and call your brother and see if he don't say the same thing.

HENRY

I'll get right on it.

Mrs. Delaney, an attractive well-off woman in her forties, enters the shop and heads for the counter.

GLADYS
(whispers)
Mrs. Delaney.
(Eleanor looks)
Did you hear the latest?

ELEANOR
No, what?

GRADYS
Apparently, she caught them.
(Eleanor gasps)
Ran right into them in Des Moines in
the middle of her shopping.

ELEANOR
Oh, what a horror. Poor woman. That
Redfield girl's got no business
showing her face in daylight.

GRADYS
I don't know how that tramp stands
living here. No one can bear even
speaking to her. She has no friends.

HENRY
Well, nobody put a gun to his head.

ELEANOR
Oh, shut up! It's the woman who's in
control of these situations. Men
don't know which end is up till a
woman points.

Mrs. Delaney acts as if nothing is wrong. Yet, she knows
everyone knows and everyone knows she knows they know, yet no
one says a word. She sits at the counter.

MRS. DELANEY
Just coffee, please.

Francesca hears the gossip continue in hushed tones:

GLADYS

See. Money don't buy happiness. I must say, she's taking it well.

ELEANOR

I'd kill him. Him and that Redfield woman. Together. First one then the other. And then I'd laugh.

GLADYS

I'd laugh first then I'd kill them. Make sure they heard me laughing.

Eleanor nods. Not being able to stand it, Francesca rises. She must pass them on the way to the counter, in order to pay. Eleanor immediately stops her.

ELEANOR

Francesca! So, everybody got off okay last night?

FRANCESCA

Yes, thanks.

GLADYS

What you going to do all alone for four days -- a woman of leisure?

FRANCESCA

Oh, you know there's always something to be done. Have a good day. Henry.

Henry nods back. As she exits, they whisper.

ELEANOR

She's changed.

GLADYS

Oh, yes.

ELEANOR

She used to be so friendly.

HENRY

Maybe she's going through "the

changes."

Eleanor hits him in the chest.

ELEANOR

What do you know about "the changes"?

HENRY

Well, I didn't know they was a secret club.

ELEANOR

Don't talk about what you don't know. Besides, she's too young for "the changes."

GLADYS

My niece had "the changes" when she was thirty-one.

ELEANOR

No. What a tragedy. What happened?

GLADYS

(wisely)

She changed.

At the counter, Francesca pays up. She looks to Mrs. Delaney and tries to smile, but Mrs. Delaney works hard at not making eye contact with anyone. Suddenly, she rises telling the waitress:

MRS. DELANEY

Excuse me for a moment, I left something in the car.

She exits quickly. Francesca pays up as the waitress adds:

WAITRESS

Poor woman.

EXT. COFFEE SHOP/DINER - MORNING

Francesca exits and heads for her truck. As she crosses from

one corner to another, she notices down the side street --

Mrs. Delaney sitting alone in her own car, sobbing. Unable to bear the humiliation, she stole herself away to cry.

Francesca wants to help but feels useless. She quickly heads for her truck.

CUT TO:

EXT. JOHNSON HOUSE - DAY

Francesca sits on the front porch with some iced tea, trying to cool herself off. It is a scorcher. She is barefoot, her blouse hanging out of her jeans, her hair fastened up by a tortoise shell comb.

Camera begins a slow move into close-up, as she sips her tea and lets her mind wander. WE INTERCUT HER FANTASIES WITH HER ON THE PORCH:

FANTASY: Back in town, Francesca slides into Mrs. Delaney's car. She embraces the woman who cries into her arms.

-- Francesca on the porch.

FANTASY: Mrs. Delaney's car is surrounded by townpeople staring into it. Francesca hugs Mrs. Delaney closer to her in defiance.

-- Francesca on the porch.

FANTASY: Mrs. Delaney's car drives up to a train station. She and Francesca exit with suitcases. They are surrounded by news reporters as they make their way to the train.

REPORTER

Mrs. Johnson! Mrs. Johnson! Is it true Cary Grant has proposed to you?

FRANCESCA

Yes. And I've accepted.

REPORTER

What about his engagement to Dyan Cannon?

FRANCESCA

I said to him Cary you're being ridiculous. You're more than half her age. He said no one had ever been that honest with him and he falls in love with me.

REPORTER

What about your husband?

FRANCESCA

I'm very sad but Richard said that since it's Cary Grant, he completely understands. I'm also taking Mrs. Delaney away from this town. She'll be living with Cary and I in Beverly Hills.

She boards the train with Mrs. Delaney.

END OF FANTASIES.

Tired of her fantasies, Francesca looks up to the sun to clear her mind. It is blinding. When she looks back out onto the road, her vision is momentarily blurred. Until, slowly, out of the blue, she sees:

A TRUCK driving toward her house, kicking up dust, like some phantom appearing through the etheric plane. Francesca isn't even sure it's real. She sips cool drink & blinks to regain her vision. The truck slows down and turns into her driveway. Francesca watches with suspicious curiosity as:

The truck stops and ROBERT KINCAID steps out. Flashing his blue eyes in her direction, he smiles and says:

ROBERT

Sorry to bother you, but I've got a feeling I'm lost.

Francesca remains guarded.

FRANCESCA
Are you supposed to be in Iowa?

ROBERT
(laughs)
Yeah.

FRANCESCA:
Well, you're not that lost.

He laughs. She puts down her tea and crosses to him.

ROBERT
I'm looking for a covered bridge out
this way... uh... wait a minute --

He looks through a small notepad for the name. Francesca
finds herself scanning his body.

FRANCESCA
Roseman Bridge?

ROBERT
That's it.

FRANCESCA
Well, you're pretty close. It's only
about two miles from here.

ROBERT
Oh, terrific. Which way?

Pause as Robert awaits directions and Francesca scans a sudden
impulse.

FRANCESCA
Well, I can take you if you want.

Robert is pleased, but a bit surprised as is Francesca who
anxiously recants:

FRANCESCA (cont'd)
Or I can tell you. I can take you or

tell you. It's up to you. I don't care. Either way.

Robert smiles finding her sudden nervousness charming.

ROBERT

Well --

Suddenly, from the opposite direction of the road, A CHEVY barrels by. The driver, FLOYD, toots his horn.

FLOYD

Howdy, Francesca.

FRANCESCA

Hey, Floyd.

He drives off. Francesca knows they've been seen. Slightly annoyed by lowain neighborliness, she turns to Robert and with some defiance says:

FRANCESCA (cont'd)

It'd be better if I show you, I think.

ROBERT

If I'm not taking you away from anything.

FRANCESCA

No. I was just going to have some iced tea then split the atom, but that can wait.

(he smiles)

I just have to get my shoes.

Robert watches her as she turns and heads back to the house. He watches her lift her blouse and tuck it into her jeans, revealing her shapely hips and buttocks. He turns back to the truck and notices the mailbox -- MR & MRS. RICHARD JOHNSON. He nods as if he knew all along and begins to make room on the front seat for Francesca.

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE

Francesca is slipping on her boots when she suddenly stops.
"What am I doing?", she asks herself silently.

EXT. JOHNSON DRIVEWAY

Francesca approaches the truck. On the door, she reads:
KINCAID PHOTOGRAPHY, BELLINGHAM, WASHINGTON.

Robert is clearing away paper cups, banana peels, paper bags,
photography equipment. In the back, Francesca notices a
cooler and a guitar case.

ROBERT

I wasn't expect company. Let me
get this out of the way.

He hauls a case of film from the front to the back. Francesca
notices his tanned, muscular arm move in one graceful sweep.

ROBERT (cont'd)

Okay. All set.

Francesca smiles. They both get into the truck.

ROBERT (cont'd)

Now, where are we going?

FRANCESCA

Out, then right.

CUT TO:

EXT. MADISON COUNTY ROAD - DAY

As the truck drives, we see no one else in sight.

INT. KINCAID'S TRUCK

They drive in silence. Francesca is enjoying the breeze against
her face.

ROBERT

Pretty country.

FRANCESCA

Hmm-mmm.

She looks out at the vast expanse. It depresses her.

ROBERT

There's a wonderful smell about Iowa -- very particular to this part of the country. Do you know what I mean?

FRANCESCA

No.

ROBERT

I can't describe it. I think it's from the loam in the soil. This very rich, earthy kind of... alive...
No. No, that's not right. Can you smell it?

FRANCESCA

(shakes her head)

Maybe it's because I live here.

ROBERT

That must be it. It's a great smell.

Francesca wants to know more about him.

FRANCESCA

Are you from Washington originally?

ROBERT

Uh-huh. Lived there till I was twenty or so and then moved to Chicago when I got married.

FRANCESCA

Oh. When did you move back?

ROBERT

After the divorce.

FRANCESCA

Oh.

ROBERT

How long you been married?

FRANCESCA

Uh... uh...

(can't remember)

Umm... long time.

ROBERT

You don't look like a native, if you don't mind my saying so.

FRANCESCA

No, I don't mind. I'm not from here. I was born in Italy.

ROBERT

Well, from Italy to Iowa -- that's a story!

(Francesca smiles)

Whereabouts in Italy?

FRANCESCA

Small town on the Eastern side no one's ever heard of called Bari.

ROBERT

Oh yeah, Bari. I've been there.

FRANCESCA

(surprised)

No, really?

ROBERT

Oh, yeah. Actually, I had an assignment in Greece and I had to go through Bari to get the boat at Brindisi. But it looked so pretty I got off and stayed for a few days. Breathtaking country.

Francesca is overcome by the idea of such freedom.

FRANCESCA

You just... got off the train because
it looked pretty?

ROBERT

Yeah. Excuse me a sec.

He reaches over with one arm, brushing slightly against her
thigh. He opens the glove compartment and pulls out a pack of
Camels and a Zippo lighter.

ROBERT

Like one?

Francesca, who doesn't usually smoke, accepts.

FRANCESCA

Sure.

She takes a cigarette out of the pack. Robert drops the pack
and, with the same hand, flicks open the Zippo and ignites it.
Francesca leans over. The road is bumpy and a breeze blows
through both windows.

She cups her hands around his to shelter the flame. She feels
his skin for a brief moment.

She sits back and enjoys the ride and her cigarette as Robert
lights up. Silence. They drive.

ROBERT

So, how long you've been living here?

FRANCESCA

Long.

(changes subject)

You just got off the train and stayed
without knowing anyone there?

ROBERT

(laughs)

Yeah.

EXT. ROSEMAN BRIDGE - DAY

The truck stops. They exit. Robert takes out some equipment.

ROBERT

This won't take long. I'm shooting tomorrow morning. I just need to do some prep work.

FRANCESCA

I don't mind waiting.

He smiles and takes his equipment to the bridge. Francesca slowly follows. She watches his body move. Catching herself, she stops.

Robert sets up a tripod in the small ravine beneath the bridge, pointing a view finder up as he plans his shots. Francesca walks through the bridge, noticing lovers names scrawled on the inside: CATHY & BUDDY 4 EVER... ROSIE AND HANK TILL THE END OF TIME. Through a crack in one of the wooden planks, Francesca watches like a voyeur as Robert works. She sees him take out a handkerchief and wipe the sweat off his neck, then inside his shirt and around his chest. Without knowing where Francesca is, Robert speaks aloud:

ROBERT

Is it always this hot?

Francesca moves quickly away from the plank, like a Peeping Tom who's been caught.

FRANCESCA

This time of year.

ROBERT

Would you do me a favor and go to the truck? Inside that leather bag with the pockets is a package of lens cleaners. Would you grab me one?

Francesca obliges, grateful for something to occupy her.

Inside the truck, she scans for the leather bag. She sees it next to a duffel bag. The bag's zipper is opened. She glimpses inside as Robert's personal things -- clothes, socks, underwear, shaving kit. Life magazines from July and August, one depicting the death of Aldai Stevenson; the other a cover photo of the Watts riots. She grabs the leather bag and opens it.

At the bridge, Francesca looks for Robert in the raving but he is gone. She looks through the bridge to the other end and sees only the tripod. No Robert. She walks through the bridge and out the other end. She finds Robert bent over, picking flowers.

FRANCESCA

Oh there you are.

ROBERT

Oh! You caught me.

He rises with a bouquet of wildflowers for her.

ROBERT

Thanks for your help.

Francesca smiles, not knowing how to take this.

ROBERT

Men sill give women flowers, don't they? I mean, as a sign of appreciation? I'm not that out of date, am I?

FRANCESCA

No, not at all --
(suddenly)
except those are poisonous.

ROBERT

WHAT!

He flings the flowers down. He wipes his hands furiously.

FRANCESCA

I'm sorry. I was kidding.

Robert looks at her with a shocked smirk, secretly liking her strange behavior.

FRANCESCA

I'm sorry. I don't know what -- I'm sorry. Really. They're lovely.

She begins picking up the flowers.

ROBERT

(smiling)

Are you by nature a sadistic person?

FRANCESCA

No, I'm not.

(trying not to laugh)

I don't know why I said that. I've been in a very... strange mood all day. I've never done anything like that before. It's... I'm just...

(looking for excuse)

Well, you know, the whole world is just going nuts.

Robert looks at her like she's nuts. Francesca tries to dig herself out of her hole. Robert enjoys offering no help.

FRANCESCA

What with those riots in Los Angeles and people burning draft cards and ... Adlai Stevenson dying last month.

She rises with the flowers. Robert gives her a friendly pat on the arm.

ROBERT

Shouldn't let things get to you so much.

He continues with his work. Francesca expresses relief and embarrassment behind his back.

INT. TRUCK - LATER

Driving back, Francesca sits with her feet up on the dashboard. Robert drives while he fiddles with the radio. All he can find are country stations.

FRANCESCA

Looking for something in particular?
There's not much of a selection.

ROBERT

I found this Chicago station before.
Wait a minute...
(he tunes it in)
Here it is.

We hear a BLUES SINGER with a sax arrangement.

FRANCESCA

Oh, that's nice.

ROBERT

Want another cigarette?

FRANCESCA

Sure.

Francesca's having a great time.

EXT. JOHNSON HOUSE - DAY

Robert's truck drives down the road and into the driveway.

ROBERT

Well, thank you for all your help,
Mrs. Johnson.

FRANCESCA

Francesca.

ROBERT

Francesca. Robert.

Francesca nods, as if to say hello and goodbye in the same

moment. She gets out of the car, closes the door, then asks:

FRANCESCA
Would you like some iced tea?

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Robert fiddles with the kitchen radio, tuning in to the Chicago station. Francesca is making iced tea. Robert sits back down at the kitchen table.

FRANCESCA
Lemon?

ROBERT
Sure.

With her back to him, Robert never takes his eyes off her. She turns and crosses to him, with the tea.

ROBERT (cont'd)
Thanks.

Francesca smiles and sips her own. She watches him gulp down the tea so fast, some of it dribbles down the side of his face and neck. Francesca finds it sexy. He empties it.

FRANCESCA
Would you like another one?

Robert nods and he pulls out his cigarettes.

ROBERT
Mind if I smoke?

FRANCESCA
(at the sink)
Not at all.

Robert lights up as he watches her fix another iced tea. He watches her slip off one boot, then the other -- never missing a beat of her preparation. He can't help eyeing her body. When she returns, she also has the flowers he picked for her arranged in a Casper the Friendly Ghost jelly glass. She

places them on the table and sits.

ROBERT

Sure you want to keep those in the house?

FRANCESCA

I'm so sorry about that. It was rude. I think I just got nervous for some reason.

ROBERT

I thought it was funny.

She likes that.

FRANCESCA

Where are you staying while you're here?

ROBERT

A little place with cabins. The something-Motor Inn. I haven't checked in yet.

FRANCESCA

And how long are you here for?

ROBERT

As long as it takes, I might stay a week. No more I don't think. Where's your family?

FRANCESCA

My husband took the kids to the Illinois State Fair. My daughter's entering a prize steer.

ROBERT

Oh. How old?

FRANCESCA

About a year and a half.

ROBERT

No, your kids.

FRANCESCA

Oh. Michael's 17 and Carolyn's 16.

ROBERT

Must be nice having kids.

Francesca looks at him and FANTASIZES SAYING:

FANTASY:

FRANCESCA

Not any more. It's awful. They're awful. I can't stand them.

END OF FANTASY:

But in reality, Francesca chooses instead to say:

FRANCESCA (cont'd)

They're not kids anymore. Things change.

ROBERT

Everything does. One of the laws of nature. People are always so afraid of change. But if you look at it like it's something you can count on happening, it's actually a comfort. Not many things you can count on for sure.

FRANCESCA

I guess. Except I'm one of the people it frightens.

ROBERT

I doubt that.

FRANCESCA

Why?

ROBERT

Italy to Iowa? I'd call that a change.

FRANCESCA

(explaining)

Richard was in the army. I met him while I was living in Naples. I didn't know where Iowa was. I only cared that it was America. And of course, being with Richard.

ROBERT

What's he like?

As Francesca thinks of an answer, she looks over to the entranceway between the kitchen and the front hall and sees:

FANTASY:

Richard standing there in his underwear, reaching over his shoulder.

RICHARD

Franny, could you clean out my boiler again?

END OF FANTASY:

Francesca answers Robert, half of her still in fantasy --

FRANCESCA

He's very... clean.

ROBERT

Clean?

FRANCESCA

(catching herself)

No. I mean yes, he's clean but he's also other things. He's a very hard worker. Very honest. Very caring. Gentle. Good father.

ROBERT

And clean.

FRANCESCA

Yes. Very clean.

They drink. Francesca thinks she sounds like an idiot.

ROBERT

So you must like Oiwa, I guess.

Francesca looks at him. She wants to tell the truth, but holds back.

FRANCESCA

It's... uh... uh...

She stops. Robert smiles.

ROBERT

Go ahead. I won't tell anyone.

Surprised, Francesca looks at him oddly -- as if he already knows and is giving her permission.

FRANCESCA

It's...

(tries again)

I...

(finally)

I hate it!

She covers her mouth, like a reflex -- worried someone heard. Robert just smiles and nods.

Francesca is so taken by his understanding and acceptance, she lets the flood gates open, speaking faster than her mind can keep up --

FRANCESCA (cont'd)

(without a pause)

I hate it! I hate it! I HATE IT! I
hate the corn and the dust and the
town and the cows and that SMELL that
you love! I hate the people.
Everybody knows everybody's business,

I mean it's nice now and then,
they're always there to help out, but
that's just it, it's like they're
waiting for something awful to happen
to help out and when nothing awful is
happening, then they just sit around
and talk about what is happening
which is none of their business. I
want to kill them sometimes for how
cruel they can be --

Camera begins slowly moving out to a wider angle...

FRANCESCA (cont'd)

-- everybody's talking about poor Mrs.
Delaney whose husband is having an
affair with that Redfield woman and
"isn't it a shame," and "isn't it
awful," and the truth is THEY'RE
LOVING IT! Poor woman can't even be
cheated on without the grocery man
knowing about it -- no one respects
anyone's privacy. You're not even
safe in your own home! They think
they can just walk right into your
house because they BAKED you
something. It's like they have a
secret password and YOU CAN'T KEEP
THEM OUT! I live in fear of that door
opening and having a peach cobbler
shoved at me...

(CONTINUES MOS IF
NEEDED)

Throughout this rapid fire monologue, camera has moved to a
wide angle as Robert just sits and listens, letting her get
it all off her chest. She continues as we:

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM

Francesca is lying on the couch as Robert places a cold cloth
on her head. Her "confession" took a lot out of her.

ROBERT
Feeling better?

FRANCESCA
Much.

ROBERT
Is the dizziness gone?

FRANCESCA
I think so.

She sits up. She feels exposed. But also, relieved.

ROBERT
I better go. You sure you're all
right?
(she nods)
It's been a pleasure. Sincerely.

FRANCESCA
I feel so embarrassed.

ROBERT
Why? You uncorked a bottle. From what
I can tell, I got here just in time.
Any later and you'd have made the
front page, running down Main Street
naked, smoking Camels out of your
butt.

FRANCESCA
(laughs)
But I... We don't even know each
other.

ROBERT
(sincerely)
You have no reason to feel ashamed.
You haven't said anything you don't
have a right to. And if anybody tells
you different -- you just send them to
me.

She smiles. He turns to exit.

ROBERT (cont'd)
Better get my stuff.

Francesca surprises herself. She doesn't want him to go.

FRANCESCA
Would you like to stay for dinner?
(he turns)
There aren't many choices in town and
... anyway, you'd have to eat alone.
So would I.

ROBERT
That's very nice of you. I don't get
many dinner invitations on the job.
It would be a welcome change. Thanks.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - LATER

Francesca rushes in and starts to disrobe, getting ready to shower and change for dinner. She glances out the window and sees:

EXT. JOHNSON HOUSE

Robert is at the water pump. His shirt is off and he is washing himself. (WE INTERCUT THE TWO.)

Francesca finds herself staring, a bit open mouthed. He has a muscular, firm body. She watches how the water cascades over his body. How he seems so unashamed, so "in his skin," moving with such strength and grace.

Robert pauses and looks out over the open pasture. The cold water feels good. Since the pump is the back of the house, hidden from the road, no one can see him. He decides to take off his pants and cool himself further.

Francesca begins watching this in shock until she has to

literally pull herself away from the window with such a force that she rams herself into a chest of drawers, knocking over an array of perfume bottles and a mirror. She deftly catches a falling bottle and freezes. Taking a breath, she pulls herself together.

FRANCESCA

This is ridiculous. Stupid!

She replaces the bottle and heads for the bathroom quite composed, then, without warning, makes an immediate 180 degree turn and heads back to the window to sneak a peek.

Seeing him, she gasps.

FRANCESCA (cont'd)

Oh my God.

Watching him, she is possessed by some very frightening feelings and runs from the window, into the bathroom, closing the door behind her.

EXT. JOHNSON HOUSE - EARLY EVENING

Francesca is gathering some vegetables for dinner, from her garden. Robert is at his truck, in his pants, changing into a fresh shirt.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Francesca is cutting up vegetables. Robert enters with some of his gear.

ROBERT

I'm just going to put some of this film in your fridge. Heat isn't too forgiving out there.

He does. On the radio, TONY BENNETT sings "WRAP YOUR TROUBLES IN DREAMS." Robert approaches Francesca.

ROBERT (cont'd)

Can I help?

FRANCESCA
(surprised)
Help cook?

ROBERT
Sure. Men cook. We don't all eat
bananas with our feet, ya know.

FRANCESCA
(laughs)
Okay.

They stand side by side. Francesca hands him a stack of
carrots and a knife.

MONTAGE:

Tony Bennett's up-tempo tone plays over a series of images of
Francesca and Robert talk and prepare dinner.

-- Four hands side by side, cutting and chopping.
Occasionally, a hand brushes against another as it reaches
for something.

-- Robert's hand gently touching Francesca's waist as he
reaches around her for an onion.

-- Robert lighting Francesca a cigarette.

-- Robert brings in his cooker through the screen door. HE
MAKES SURE IT DOESN'T SLAM. FRANCESCA MAKES A NOTE OF THIS.

-- Robert opens the cooler and removes two cold beers, tossing
one to Francesca.

-- Francesca opening a new tablecloth and spreading it out on
the table.

-- Francesca handing Robert plates from the shelf, their
fingers only barely touching.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

Robert and Francesca are in the middle of dinner. But instead of the usual silence that surrounds Johnson family eating, Francesca is mesmerized by Robert as he manages to eat and tell a story. The scene begins with a LAUGH FROM FRANCESCA.

ROBERT
(laughs)
... No, wait, it gets better.

He stands up and acts it out for her.

ROBERT (cont'd)
You have to get the full picture here. I have three cameras around my neck, a tripod in one hand and my pants down around my ankles. I thought this was a private bush. I look up and this gorilla, this female gorilla, is staring at me with what can best be described as the most lascivious expression I've ever seen on a female with so much body hair.
(Francesca laughs)
I freeze. 'Cause that's what they tell you to do. In this position. She comes towards me and... and she...
(he stops awkwardly)

FRANCESCA
What?

ROBERT
She starts sniffing me.

FRANCESCA
Oh my God...
(laughs)
You're blushing.

ROBERT
It's still a very sensitive memory for me.

FRANCESCA

Then what happened?

ROBERT

We got engaged.

FRANCESCA

Oh you!

She throws a napkin at him.

FRANCESCA (cont'd)

None of this is true!

ROBERT

No, it is. Except for the engagement part. She wouldn't have me, although I still get a Valentine every year.

Francesca is laughing so hard she can't breath. Robert loves making her laugh.

FRANCESCA

You ought to write these stories down.

ROBERT

Nah. I've tried. My writing's too technical, I think. Problem of being a journalist too long is you stop giving yourself permission to invent. I better just stick to making pictures.

FRANCESCA

"Making pictures." I like that. You really love what you do, don't you?

ROBERT

(nods, smiles shyly)

I'm kind of obsessed by it, actually.

FRANCESCA

Why, do you think?

ROBERT

I don't know if obsessions have reasons. I think that's why they're obsessions.

FRANCESCA

You sound like an artist.

ROBERT

No. I wouldn't say that. National Geographic isn't exactly the hub of artistic inspiration. They like their wild life in focus and without any personal comment. I don't mind really. I'm not artist. I'd faced that a long time ago. It's the course of being well-adjusted. I'm too normal.

FRANCESCA

(supportively)

I don't think you're normal.

He looks at her in surprise. She catches herself again.

FRANCESCA

I didn't mean that the way it sounded.

ROBERT

Well, let's just call it a compliment and move on.

(changes subject)

Did you love teaching?

FRANCESCA (cont'd)

Sometimes. When there was a particular student who made a difference. I know they're all supposed to, but it's not true. You tend to single out one or two you think you can contribute something to.

ROBERT

And did you?

FRANCESCA

I'd like to think so. I know one of them went on to Medical school.

ROBERT

Why did you stop?

FRANCESCA

My children. And Richard didn't like my working.

ROBERT

Do you miss it?

FRANCESCA

I don't know. I've never thought about it... what was the most exciting place you've ever been to? Unless you're tired of talking about it.

ROBERT

You're asking a man if he's too tired to talk about himself? You don't get out much, do you?

Francesca smiles, a little embarrassed.

ROBERT

I'm sorry. That was...

FRANCESCA

(overlapping)

No. It's all right. I just meant, it might be a little dull for you, telling all this to some housewife in the middle of nowhere.

ROBERT

This is your home. It's not nowhere. And it's not dull.

Francesca smiles again, this time relieved.

ROBERT

Let's see -- my favorite place...

Francesca settles in to listen, never taking her eyes off of him.

ROBERT (cont'd)

Well, it's the obvious choice, but I think I'd have to say Africa. It's another world. Not just the people and the cultures but the land, the colors you see at dawns and dusks -- and the life there. It charges every molecule of air.

Francesca is fascinated, being drawn into his imagery.

ROBERT (cont'd)

It's tangible -- the moment to moment of life and death, the co-habitation of man and beast, of beast and beast, who'll survive, who won't -- and there's no judgement about it. No right or wrong or imposed morality. It's just life. It's a voyeurs paradise really because those animals don't want anybody in their business. You can watch but at a distance.

(excited)

I remember one time I was on a truck headed for the Niger.

Lights begin to dim as Francesca is so taken in by his story, she begins to actually see what he is describing.

ROBERT (cont'd)

We were driving north. The truck was old so I guess the sound of the motor muffled this kind of rumbling in the distance -- until finally, it was upon us like, like a hundred thunder claps all at once...

CU on FRANCESCA as WE BLEND THE SOUNDS OF AFRICA and --

CUT TO:

EXT. AFRICA - DAY

Robert and a driver are in a truck driving north. Robert turns to look out the window and sees:

A HERD OF GIRAFFES AND GAZELLES AND WATERBUCKS AND ZEBRA are running in the grasslands to the right of the truck. Robert excitedly instructs the driver:

ROBERT

Get us closer!!

The driver veers off towards the stampede as Robert opens his door and makes his way to the flatbed part of the truck with his camera. The truck takes its position within this breathtaking force of wildlife, as giraffes, zebras and gazelles surround it -- all going in the same direction.

Robert stands in the truck, shooting as fast as he can. The truck races to keep up with the animals. Robert is so pumped he can hardly catch his breath. Suddenly, the force and beauty of these creatures causes him to lower his camera. He is unable to film it because it overwhelms him. He just stands there in awe and lets out a primal scream. The animals gradually veer off to where the truck can no longer follow. Robert watches them disappear into the distance.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. JOHNSON KITCHEN - NIGHT

Francesca has seen all of this in her mind. Robert smiles at her, sensing how in tune with the story she was.

FRANCESCA

My God. How I'd love to see that.

ROBERT

They have safaris for tourists now.
Maybe you can convince your husband.

Francesca smiles. There is an awkward pause between them.

ROBERT (cont'd)
It's a beautiful night. Would you
like to go for a walk?

FRANCESCA
Well, it's kind of buggy out there.

ROBERT
(rises)
Have no fear. This Shoshone Medicine
Woman taught me how to make bug
repellent tea out of tree root.

FRANCESCA
You drink bug repellent?

ROBERT
No, you rub it on you. I have some in
the truck. Don't go away.

She shakes her head. He runs out the screen door, not letting
it slam. Francesca looks like a teenager with first date
excitement.

EXT. PASTURE - NIGHT

Francesca and Robert walk through the pasture. She sniffs her
arm.

FRANCESCA
Smells like dirt.

ROBERT
You get used to it.

FRANCESCA
When?

ROBERT
(laughs)
You want to go back in?

FRANCESCA

No. I'm all right. It's working.

Silence. They walk. It is a beautiful night.

ROBERT

You've got it all right here, you know. It's just as beautiful as any other place I've seen. God, it knocks me out.

FRANCESCA

What?

ROBERT

(indicating the night)

This "... Of what I call God and fools can Nature." Who wrote that?

FRANCESCA

Umm, I don't know. I can look it up.

ROBERT

I'd appreciate it. I like knowing who I'm stealing from. If you can't create art I think the least you can do is recognize it around you, don't you think? There is...

(genuinely affected)

... so much beauty.

She watches him with great appreciation. He smiles at her. Instead of looking away, their eyes remained locked for a moment. There is clearly an attraction. They simultaneously look away and continue walking.

Francesca's heart is beating a mile a minute yet she can't deny she is enjoying herself. Walking side by side in silence, Francesca turns back occasionally to look at her house as they get further away from it. Suddenly, the more distant the house becomes, the more frightened she starts to feel. Something inside her knows she's going too far with this man -- too far from home. Although a part of her wants it, she is surprised to find a larger part of her finds too unknown. She stops.

ROBERT (cont'd)

What's wrong?

Francesca looks confused for a moment, not knowing what she wants. She can't move. She searches for a way out.

FRANCESCA

Would you like some coffee? Or maybe,
some brandy?

Somehow Robert can sense her uneasiness. He obliges.

ROBERT

How about both?

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Francesca moves about the kitchen preparing coffee -- dropping the coffee pot basket, spilling the grounds. She acts tense. Robert sits at the table opening the brandy bottle Francesca almost opened the night before, aware of her mood.

Francesca gets the coffee going then sets the table with cups and saucers.

ROBERT

You sure you won't let me help you
with those dishes?

FRANCESCA

(coldly)

No. I'll do them later.

ROBERT

Francesca?

FRANCESCA

What?

ROBERT

Are you all right?

FRANCESCA

Yes.

ROBERT
Francesca?

FRANCESCA
What?

ROBERT
We're not doing anything wrong, do
you.

Francesca freezes. He has read her mind again.

ROBERT (cont'd)
(smiles)
Nothing you can't tell your children
about.

Once again, he relieves her of fear and anxiety. He hands her
a glass of brandy...

CUT TO:

1995

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Carolyn and Michael have come to the end of a notebook.

MICHAEL
He's getting her drunk. That's what
happened. Jesus, maybe he forced
himself. That's why she couldn't tell
us.

CAROLYN
Oh, he did not. He's such a nice guy.

MICHAEL
Nice? He's trying to sleep with
somebody's wife.

CAROLYN

I don't think so. Not yet anyway. And besides, something like that doesn't make you a bad person. He reminds me of Steve in a way. Steve's weak, immoral and a liar but he's still a real nice guy. He just shouldn't be married.

(laughs)

At least not to me. You getting hungry? I'm hungry.

Michael nods, then speaks with sincere compassion.

MICHAEL

I had no idea it's gotten that bad, sis.

CAROLYN

Oh, don't feel sorry for me. Please. No one's forcing me to stay.

MICHAEL

Then why do you?

CAROLYN

And do what? Live alone? Go back to school? Find someone else? Start a magazine for confused woman? ... What if I can't do any of those things?

Michael can't answer her. Carolyn looks through the cabinets.

CAROLYN (cont'd)

There's not much here to make.

MICHAEL

Let's go into town and get a bite. We'll take the books with us.

Carolyn nods. Michael looks for the next notebook, checking the dates.

INT. CAR - EARLY EVENING

Michael drives as Carolyn opens the next notebook and reads:

FRANCESCA (V.O.)

"We sat sipping brandy. I thought if anybody walked through the door now there'd be no explaining it. But I didn't care. And I loved that I didn't care. I almost wanted it to happen. Then there'd be no turning back. I wanted to be like him. I lived this life of his. We talked about his wife and I was jealous -- not of her -- but of his leaving. His fearlessness. He knew what he wanted. How did he do that.

CUT BACK TO:

1965

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Francesca sips her brandy. Robert sits in the easy chair.

FRANCESCA

Do you mind if I... ask you why you got divorced?

ROBERT

Not at all. I wasn't around much... So why did I get married? Well, I thought it was a good idea at the time. Have a home base. Roots. You can get lost moving around so much.

FRANCESCA

So what happened?

ROBERT

I never got lost. For some reason, I'm more at home everywhere than at one place. So I decided I'll think of myself as some kind of world citizen. I belong everywhere and nowhere. I'm

kin to everyone, and no one in particular. See, once you get into the habit of not needing anyone, it's kind of hard to break.

FRANCESCA

You must get lonely at times.

ROBERT

Never touch the stuff. I've got friends all over the world. Good friends I can see when I want, if I want.

FRANCESCA

Woman friends, too?

ROBERT

I'm a loner, I'm not a monk.

Francesca averts her eyes, before continuing her investigation.

FRANCESCA

You really don't need anyone?

ROBERT

No, I think I need everyone! I love people. I want to meet them all! I just think there are too many out there saying "This is mine." or "She's mine." Too many lines have been drawn. World's breaking apart because of man's weakness for some testosterone conquests over territory and power and people. He wants control over what deep down he knows he has no control over whatsoever and it scares him silly.

FRANCESCA

Why doesn't it scare you?

ROBERT

I embrace Mystery. I don't know

what's coming. And I don't mind.

FRANCESCA

Do you ever regret it? The divorce,
I mean.

ROBERT

No.

FRANCESCA

Do you ever regret not having a
family?

ROBERT

Not everybody's supposed to have a
family.

FRANCESCA

But -- how can you just live for what
you want? What about other people?

ROBERT

I told you, I love other people.

FRANCESCA

But no one in particular.

ROBERT

No. But I love them just the same.

FRANCESCA

But it's not the same.

ROBERT

That's not what you're saying. I know
it's not the same. What you're saying
is, it's not as good. Or it's not as
normal or proper.

FRANCESCA

No, I'm just saying --

ROBERT

(interrupting)

I'm a little sick of this American Family Ethic everyone seems to be hypnotized by in this country. I guess you think I'm just some poor displaced soul doomed to roam the earth without a self-cleaning oven and home movie.

FRANCESCA

(irritated)

Just because someone chooses to settle down and have a family doesn't necessarily mean they're hypnotized. Just because I've never seen a gazelle stampede doesn't mean I'm asleep in the world.

ROBERT

Do you want to leave your husband?

Francesca is completely stunned and thrown off guard.

FRANCESCA

No. Of course not.

(rising, upset)

Beat. Awkward silence. Suddenly there is tension between them.

ROBERT

My mistake. I apologize.

FRANCESCA

What made you ask such a question?

ROBERT

I thought that's what we were doing -- asking questions.

FRANCESCA

(defensive)

I thought we were just having a conversation. You seem to be reading all this meaning into it. Meanings I must be too simple to, uh...

interpret or something.

ROBERT
I already apologized.

Silence. Robert remains seated. Francesca remains at the sink.

ROBERT (cont'd)
It's getting late.
(rises)
Thank you for dinner.

Pause. Francesca feels badly.

FRANCESCA
Listen, I'm sorry I --

ROBERT
No, no. Forgive me. I made a mistake.
It was an inappropriate thing to ask.

FRANCESCA
(shrugs it off, then:)
... I feel like something's been
spoiled now.

Robert smiles and crosses to her. He takes her hand into both his hands.

ROBERT
It's been a perfect evening. Just the
way it is. Thank you.

Francesca smiles. The possibility of a kiss hangs in the air between them until Robert turns to get his film out of the fridge. As he exits through the screen door, he stops.

ROBERT (cont'd)
One thing though -- don't kid yourself,
Francesca. You're anything but a
simple woman.

He smiles and exits, catching the screen door before it slams.

Francesca doesn't move for a moment, then crosses to the door as if to run after him when she is stopped by the PHONE RINGING. She picks up.

FRANCESCA

Hello?

RICHARD (on phone)

Franny?

FRANCESCA

Richard, hi.

RICHARD (on phone)

How are you?

FRANCESCA

Fine. Everyone settled in okay?

RICHARD (on phone)

Just fine. We're all in one room.

Michael's on the couch and

Carolyn's...

(continues...)

She hears Robert's truck door open and close. She hears the motor being turned on. She half-listens to Richard.

FRANCESCA

Uh-uh... good... Hmm...

She hears the truck driving away as Richard continues:

RICHARD (on phone)

We got our position in the Fair. Not bad although I would have liked to be third which is not too early and not too late. But I told Carolyn not to worry...

(continues, if needed)

CUT TO:

INT. FRANCESCA BEDROOM - NIGHT

Francesca exits her bathroom, in her bathrobe, shutting the light. She is brushing her hair and thinking of Robert. She sits on the edge of the bed. She sees her reflection in a mirror on the closet door.

She stands and takes her robe off. She steps forward to look at her body -- running her hands gently around her curves, her neck, down the side of her thighs, her face, her breasts.

She shuts off the lights and gets into bed under the covers. She closes her eyes and tentatively begins to explore her body. It is awkward for her but we can see her trying to let herself go. Until she opens her eyes in frustration. It's no good. She can't do it. She feels ashamed. The shame turns into anger.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Francesca sits at a writing table with two large books opened before her containing literary quotations. She searches for the line Robert mentioned in the pasture.

A note sits before her as well. On it reads: "Robert. Again, I'm sorry for last night. Would you like supper again tonight after you're finished. I'd like it very much if I were one of those good friends you have in the world. Anytime is fine -- Francesca... P.S. By the way, "Of what I call God and Fools call Nature" was..." She writes the name BROWNING.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROSEMAN BRIDGE - NIGHT

Francesca is tacking a note for Robert to the bridge. She considers taking it down a moment later, but decides not to. She gets back into her truck and drives away.

WIDE ANGLE OF BRIDGES - DAWN

DISSOLVE TO:

The view of the bridge goes in and out of focus until we

realize we are seeing it through Robert's camera lens.

Once the focus is set, Robert notices something is tacked onto the bridge. He crosses to it hurriedly -- time for the perfect shot is running out -- pulls it down, thumbtack and all, and shoves it into his pocket, unread. He returns to his camera to take his shots.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNSON BEDROOM - MORNING

Francesca is making her bed when she hears a truck driving down the road. She looks out the window to see:

Robert's truck. However, it passes right by her house.

Francesca's spirit sinks. She feels silly, ashamed and rejected. She sits on the bed.

FANTASY:

Inside the truck, Robert drives by the house and chuckles to himself at the foolishness of some boring, frustrated housewife. Francesca's note has been crumpled and stuffed into a dirty ashtray.

END OF FANTASY:

Francesca enters her bathroom, slamming the door behind her.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER THAT MORNING

Francesca sits at the kitchen table in her bathrobe with a cup of coffee -- a comic portrait of shame and self-pity. Her hair is a mess, she hasn't showered or dressed and she stares into space while listening to the bluesy Chicago radio station.

The sink is full of dirty dishes she refuses to clean. Beside it is an ashtray of butts from the night before. She carries it over to the table and begins fingering for a butt to smoke in desperation. She lights up and stares into space.

FANTASY:

Robert is in Africa talking to TWO ZULU TRIBE MEMBERS. THE DIALOGUE IS SUBTITLED IN SWAHILI:

ROBERT
(laughs)
... and then she tacks this note on
the bridge asking me to have dinner
with her again!

One Zulu turns to the tower and remarks.

ZULU
How pathetic.

END OF FANTASY:

Francesca put out her cigarette and suddenly gets an idea. She goes to the phone, reads a number off of a slip of paper and dials.

FRANCESCA (on phone)
Hello? Is Richard Johnson staying
there?... No, I don't want to leave
a message. Maybe you can help me --
I'm his wife and I live in Winterset
Iowa -- I wanted to surprise them by
driving up tonight. What would be the
fastest route, the Interstate?... Huh-
huh... Hold it, let me get a pen.

CUT TO:

EXT. PAY PHONE, GAS STATION - LATE MORNING

Francesca's note is opened in Robert's hand. Her phone number is written after the "P.S." He stands in the pay phone getting a busy signal from Francesca's line. He hangs up.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - DAY

Francesca, dressed and packed, prepares to leave. She checks her purse to make sure she's got everything. She grabs her bag and exits.

A few beats later, the phone rings. But she doesn't return. It rings again. We hear Francesca's truck door open and close. It rings again. We think Francesca is on her way, until:

We suddenly hear her burst into the house and see her leap for the phone.

FRANCESCA
Hello?

INTERCUT --

INT. SLOW BEND SALOON/RESTAURANT - DAY

Robert is at another pay phone.

ROBERT
Francesca?

FRANCESCA
(out of breath)
Yes! Hi.

ROBERT
Am I interrupting anything?

FRANCESCA
No. I was just... No.

ROBERT
I'm sorry I didn't call sooner, but I just read your note. I stuffed it into my pocket. The light was fading and I had to get my shot.

FRANCESCA
(relieved)
The light was fading. Huh-huh.

ROBERT

I would love to come for dinner.

FRANCESCA

(smiles)

Wonderful. Uh...

ROBERT

Listen, I have to shoot Cedar Bridge until a little after sunset. I want a few night shots. Would you like to come with me? If you're interested...

FRANCESCA

Oh, sure. Great.

ROBERT

I'll pick you up.

FRANCESCA

No. I'll drive myself. I have a few errands. I'll meet you there.

ROBERT

Okay. See you later.

FRANCESCA

Yeah. See you later.

Francesca is thrilled. Her mind races with a list of things she must do before tonight. She opens a cabinet, removes a coffee can and empties it of her house money. She quickly counts it, then shoves it into her purse.

EXT. ON THE ROAD - DAY

Francesca drives past a sign marking Des Moines as the next town.

INT. SLOW BEND SALOON/ RESTAURANT - DAY

The second of two eating establishments in Winterset. A lunch time crowd fills the place. Robert is seated at the counter. He can sense their eyes on him, wondering who this

stranger is and what's he doing here. He knows the whispered conversation is about him.

A MIDDLE-AGED COUPLE talk at table.

WIFE

Thelma told me he checked into the Motor Inn and the bill goes to National Geographic Magazine.

HUSBAND

National Geographic? What the hell's he doing here? We ain't got no naked pygmies to take pictures of.

WIFE

He's taking pictures of the bridges.

HUSBAND

Ain't no pygmies there either.

Robert wants to finish his lunch as quickly as possible. At that moment, someone enters the restaurant and all the conversation stops. He overhears one waitress turn to the other and whisper --

WAITRESS

God. It's Lucy Redfield.

Both the Waitress and Robert (though more subtly) turn to see:

THE REDFIELD WOMAN. But instead of being the harlot we might think, she's actually a rather plain, demure looking woman -- not nearly as fancy or pretty as Mrs. Delaney herself.

As she crosses the counter, Robert immediately picks up on the vibes in the room. He notices all the patrons stare then turns away to whisper. The waitress behind the counter ignores her. A customer eating at the counter places a bag on an empty stool beside her, so the Redfield woman can't sit down near her.

Robert and the Redfield woman's eyes meet. She is clearly uncomfortable. She turns, about to leave, when Robert clears

his cameras off of a stool next to him and offers:

ROBERT

Got room right here if you like.

She is surprised at his courtesy. Others are astounded. Some disgusted. She accepts his offer and sits beside him.

REDFIELD WOMAN

Thank you.

ROBERT

Hot out there today.

She nods and smiles. The waitress tosses a menu at her and slams down a glass of water, then moves on down the counter. The Redfield woman tries to act casual, glancing through the menu. Robert subtly scans the room as all eyes are on them, then turn away.

Robert returns his glance back to the Redfield woman who is now only pretending to read the menu. She is so embarrassed. She wants to leave but can't move.

WAITRESS

Well, are you ordering anything!?

Her harsh tone startles the Redfield woman as well as Robert. Gathering her dignity, she responds.

REDFIELD WOMAN

No. Thank you. I've changed my mind.

She politely nods to Robert, gathers her things and exits. Robert looks to the waitress, as a SECOND WAITRESS enters.

SECOND WAITRESS

I'd've thrown that water right in her face.

WAITRESS

Poor Mrs. Delaney.

The waitress walks O.S. leaving the second waitress facing

Robert, who looks at her curiously. The second waitress looks back as if to say, "What business is it of yours?" and exits.

CUT TO:

EXT. DES MOINES - DAY

A metropolis compared to Winterset.

Francesca exits a liquor store with a bottle of wine in a paper bag. She also carries a bag of groceries as she heads down the street to her parked truck. She passes a DRESS SHOP and stops.

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. WINTERSET - DAY

Robert enters a general store. He buys a six pack of beer for his cooler and approaches the counter for the Cashier.

CASHIER

That all?

Robert nods. He decides to have some fun and test the waters a little bit.

ROBERT

Isn't it awful about poor Mrs.
Delaney?

With this, the damn bursts -

CASHIER

Tragic is more like it. The pain that woman has been subjected to by that no-good husband. I never liked him. Known him for years. People say he's quiet. Well, it's the quiet ones that can sneak up behind you and stab you in the back. I heard yesterday, that she confronted him. Gave him the ultimatum and you know what he did?--

(CONTINUES AS NEEDED)

Robert stands astounded, listening to this diatribe of gossip.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. DES MOINES DRESS SHOP - DAY

Francesca sits in her slip, alone in a dressing room, with several dresses strewn about. The panic of indecision has set in. She looks at herself in the mirror and begins to doubt that seeing Robert is a good idea. Or perhaps she's imagining something that isn't there. And what about Richard?

MEMORY:

A few years back. Francesca is dressed up for some formal affairs. She heads down the stairs. Richard is waiting in the hall, in a suit and tie. He looks at her admiringly.

FRANCESCA

Ready. You have the keys?

But Richard doesn't answer. He's just staring at her. Francesca stops. Richard looks at her like a little boy.

FRANCESCA (cont'd)

What's the matter?

Richard is obviously impressed by how she looks, but he can't say anything. He just smiles shyly and shakes his head to say nothing is wrong and opens the door for her.

END OF MEMORY:

Francesca feels guilty when a SALESWOMAN enters with a pretty summer dress.

SALESWOMAN

How about this one?

Francesca examines it. She likes it. But the guilt...

FRANCESCA

I don't know. I haven't bought a

dress for myself in so long.
(saleswoman nods)
I mean, I'm just buying a dress. It's
not a special occasion or anything.
I'm just shopping. Just shopping for
a new dress, that's all.

SALESWOMAN
(completely
understands)

That might work. And if he's still
mad, just tell him you could have
done better but you married him out
of pity. That's always works for me.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

Francesca enters with her new dress, groceries and wine as
the PHONE RINGS. She puts everything down to answer.

FRANCESCA
Hello?

Intercut ROBERT at a pay phone.

ROBERT
It's Robert.

FRANCESCA
Oh, hi. Look, I'm running a little
late, but I'll still...

ROBERT
(w/difficulty)
Listen, don't take this the wrong way
but, I'm wondering if this is such a
good idea.

Francesca's heart sinks.

FRANCESCA
Oh.

ROBERT

I uh... I had lunch in town today.
Happened to cross paths with "that
Redfield woman." I apologize. I
thought you were half-joking about
that.

FRANCESCA

Oh. I guess you got the whole story.

ROBERT

The cashier at the general store was
very dangerous.

FRANCESCA

I think he's running for town crier
next year.

ROBERT

I now know more about their affair
than I remember about my marriage.

(seriously)

Francesca, the last thing I want to
do is put you in any kind of
situation that would... even though
we know it's just -- I mean, it's
nothing like that, but if anybody saw
us or...

(can't finish)

FRANCESCA

(disappointed)

I understand.

(touched)

That's very kind of you.

Silence. Both want to meet. Both experience the idea of not
seeing each other even again in this brief moment. Someone
has to say something to save it -- but who will it be?

FRANCESCA (cont'd)

Robert?

ROBERT

Yeah?

FRANCESCA

I want you to come.

Robert is relieved.

FRANCESCA (cont'd)

I'll meet you at the bridge just like
we planned all right. Don't worry about
the rest of it... I'm not.

ROBERT

All right. See you there.

Francesca smiles and hangs up. In that moment, Francesca realizes consciously what she is doing and what she wants.

CUT TO:

EXT. CEDAR BRIDGE - DUSK

Robert is already there, working. He checks his watch, anxious for Francesca to arrive, when he hears a truck driving up. He looks to see Francesca stop and get out. By their expressions we can tell how glad they are to see each other.

FRANCESCA

Sorry I'm late. Richard called.

ROBERT

Oh, how is he?

FRANCESCA

Fine. They're all having a good time.
How many more shots do you have?

ROBERT

Couple. Want to help?

She nods. He extends his hand. She pauses, then takes it. He leads her to the bridge. Walking away from camera, they say:

ROBERT (cont'd)
I should stop off at the motel to
clean up before dinner.

FRANCESCA
Well, I have plumbing at my house.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNSON BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

Francesca enters. Robert is in the bathroom, in the shower, with the bathroom door slightly ajar. His clothes are laid on the bed with his bag beside them. A fresh shirt is folded. Francesca takes his dirty shirt and decides to clean it. As she exits, her eye can't help roaming toward the bathroom door. For a moment, she pauses to listen to the sound of the water as it hits his body.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Francesca is busy preparing dinner. Robert enters, cleaned and dressed.

ROBERT
Can I help?

FRANCESCA
Actually, no. I've got everything
under control. I'd like to clean up
myself a bit. I'm going to take a
bath. Dinner'll be ready in about a
half hour.

ROBERT
How about if I set the table?

FRANCESCA
Sure.

ROBERT
Would you like a beer for your bath?

FRANCESCA
(surprised)
Yes, that'd be nice.

Robert gets her one.

INT. BATHROOM - LATER

Francesca lounges in a tub with a beer poured into a wine glass. She finds it very elegant. She takes a deep breath, thinking "What's going to happen tonight?"

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Robert is at the radio when Francesca enters in her new dress. She looks beautiful. And it's all over Robert's face.

FRANCESCA
What's wrong?

Unlike her husband, Robert has an answer.

ROBERT
Absolutely nothing. You're just sort
of a knockout in that dress.

She smiles and crosses to the stove.

FRANCESCA
Table looks beautiful.

He can't take his eyes off of her. On the radio we hear DIHAH WASHINGTON begin to sing "IF IT'S THE LAST THING I DO" -- a beautiful, blusey lovesong. Francesca pulls out a pan of hot rolls as THE PHONE RINGS. Francesca moves toward it with a roll, which she tosses to Robert. He burns his fingers and he smiles at her joke. The song plays throughout.

FRANCESCA (cont'd)
Hello? Hi, Madge?

Francesca and Robert do not take their eyes off of each other throughout the call. Robert takes a bit of the roll.

FRANCESCA (cont'd)

Huh-huh. Nothing, just making myself some dinner... No what?... Oh... I heard about him. Yeah, I hear he's some kind of photographer.

(Robert smiles)

No, I didn't... Huh-huh... Hippie? I don't know, is that what hippies look like?...

Robert steps closer to her, purposely reaching across her body for a napkin.

FRANCESCA (cont'd)

Oh he is, huh? Well, don't tell Floyd, he'll be out with a shotgun...

She notices a crumb on Robert's mouth and wipes it off. Robert takes her hand and holds it, lowering it to his side.

FRANCESCA (cont'd)

Well, listen, I have a pot boiling. I've got to go... No, they don't get home until Friday morning... Well, maybe I'll give you a call. Okay. Bye.

She hangs up. The two are now almost face to face. Robert raises her hand up and slips his free one around her waist. They begin to dance to the song. The kitchen lights have not been turned on since the sun went down. The sky, a dark orange and magenta, illuminates the room through the window. They never take their eyes off of each other. Suddenly, Robert stops.

ROBERT

You're shaking. Are you cold?

Francesca shakes her head. They dance a bit more, but Francesca is shaking which makes it difficult. They both stop. Robert places his huge hands on either side of her face, gently stroking her hair away from her cheek. He whispers.

ROBERT (cont'd)

If you want me to stop, tell me how.

He brushes his cheek and face softly against hers. Francesca rubs hers against him. She can barely breathe.

ROBERT (cont'd)

Francesca, I won't be sorry. I won't apologize for this.

FRANCESCA

Nobody's asking you to.

They kiss. Hands gently explore. Their bodies touch. Their lips never spend more than seconds away from each other. Robert gently slide his hands down her breasts and torso, exploring every inch of her. Francesca grips his massive back, sliding up to his neck and hair. Robert lifts her leg and presses it against his hip, kissing her neck and shoulders. Francesca starts to lose herself, clutching his head at her breast then pulling him up to her mouth once again.

CUT TO:

1995

INT. SLOW BEND CAFE - PRESENT DAY - EVENING

The same saloon/restaurant of twenty-five years ago has been turned into a modern cafe yet the original charm is still there.

Carolyn and Michael sit in a booth, with half-eaten dinners before them. Carolyn has been reading the book to Michael when she looks across from her to find -- Michael looking like a little boy who is fighting not to cry.

CAROLYN

What's the matter?

Michael shakes his head. He can't or won't explain. He's too upset. His eyes tear up. Carolyn feels badly for him.

MICHAEL

I'm going to get some air.

He exits. Carolyn smiles sympathetically. Somehow this last passage of their mothers doesn't affect her in the same way. She returns to the book but first asks a passing waitress, with great urgency.

CAROLYN

Can I smoke here?

The waitress nods. Carolyn needs a cigarette for the rest of this. She opens her bag to get her pack. Inside her bag she notices a BUSINESS CARD. She picks it up to read IRA NEWMAN, attorney. Divorce. Pre-Nuptials. Marital Litigation. She pauses for a moment. Then, tossing the card back inside, she lights her cigarette and takes a drag. We follow the curls of smoke up as we:

DISSOLVE TO:

1965

INT. JOHNSON LIVING ROOM

Camera moves down curls of smoke, to reveal:

Robert and Francesca in each others arms, under a blanket on the living room floor on a bed of couch pillows, smoking a cigarette after lovemaking. Francesca seems miles away -- feelings of regret and guilt creeping in.

ROBERT

Are you comfortable?

(she nods)

Do you... want to move to the bedroom?

FRANCESCA

No. I can't. Not yet.

She can't bring herself to go into her husband bed.

ROBERT

You want to eat something?

FRANCESCA
Are you hungry?

ROBERT
No.

Silence. Robert shifts his body to face her.

ROBERT (cont'd)
Honey. Are you all right?

She looks at him and starts to cry, shaking her head. The room is filled with memories of her family. She nestles in his arms. He folds her. She closes her eyes.

FRANCESCA
Take me somewhere.

ROBERT
What?

FRANCESCA
Right now. Tell me someplace you've been -- someplace on the other side of the world. Anywhere but here.

ROBERT
(thinks, then:)
How about Italy?

FRANCESCA
Yes.

ROBERT
How about Bari?

FRANCESCA
Yes. Tell me about the day you got off the train.

ROBERT
Have you ever been to that station?

FRANCESCA

Yes.

ROBERT

You know that little place nearby
with the striped awning that sells
sandwiches and little pizzas...

The two transport themselves together to another place, where
there is no familiar memories surrounding them to interfere.

CUT TO:

EXT. JOHNSON PORCH - NIGHT

The two sit in bathrobes on the porch looking out over the
pasture. They have plates of dinner on their laps. They eat
voraciously.

ROBERT

Do you have anymore of the stew?

Chewing, Francesca nods and leans over, picks a pot off the
porch and ladles some more onto his plate. Too much falls out
and it spills onto the robe.

FRANCESCA

Oh, I'm sorry.

ROBERT

It's okay. It's not that hot anymore.
Thanks God.

Francesca hands him a dish rag. Robert wipes off the food
revealing his bare leg. She reaches over and touches it. He
looks at her and smiles. She leans over and kisses him
passionately until, suddenly, she pulls away. She looks
upset. She rises and moves away to look out to the pasture.
Robert can sense what is wrong.

ROBERT (cont'd)

You think too much, you know that?

FRANCESCA

I just feel like I'm getting a little
... out of control that's all. It's
kind of frightening.

ROBERT

Why?

FRANCESCA

Why!? Because, I'm having thoughts I
hardly know what to do with. I...
can't seem to... stop them.

ROBERT

Nobody's asking you to.

FRANCESCA

(excited)

And arraccinos and zeppolis. Yes! I
know it!

ROBERT

I sat outside and had coffee.

FRANCESCA

Where? Near the doorway or the near the
front of the church?

ROBERT

Near the church.

FRANCESCA

(closes her eyes)

I sat there once. It was hot. Like
today. I'd been shopping. I had all
these bags around my feet I kept
having to move every time the waiter
came by...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SANDWICH CAFE - BARI - DAY

Francesca sits at the outdoor cafe in Bari with shopping bags
around her feet. She re-arranges them as the waiter passes

by, mumbling something vulgar under his breath. When she looks up -- Robert is standing there. She smiles. He offers her hand. She takes it and rises. They leave the cafe.

MONTAGE:

Francesca and Robert together against the breathtaking backdrop of the Italian countryside.

EXT. BARI COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

On a lakefront, Robert and Francesca make love.

WE INTERCUT WITH:

INT. JOHNSON LIVING ROOM - EVENING

FRANCESCA AND ROBERT MAKING LOVE ONCE AGAIN.

Francesca looks at him and understands he is giving her full permission to explore whatever she wants. Hesitantly, she crosses to him and takes his plate away. She stands before him, leaning him back into his chair. She slowly, tentatively, opens her robe. She strokes his hair, then caresses his head and gently guides it between her legs.

1994

INT. SLOW BEND RESTAURANT - NIGHT

C.U. on an ashtray filled with cigarette butts as Carolyn anxiously lights another. These last entries have over stimulated her. She calls to the waitress abruptly.

CAROLYN

Can I get another cup of coffee,
please?

When she looks up, she sees Michael has returned. He sits.

CAROLYN (cont'd)

Where did you go?

MICHAEL

Bar across the street.

CAROLYN

Have you called Betty?
(she shakes his head)
Maybe you should.

MICHAEL

I found out who Lucy Delaney is.
(she looks interested)
Remember the Delaneys from Hillcrest
Road?

CAROLYN

Yeah. But I thought she died.

MICHAEL

He remarried. Apparently they were
having an affair for years.
Apparently the first Mrs. Delaney was
a bit of a stiff.

CAROLYN

You mean -- she didn't like sex?

MICHAEL

(nods, then simply:)
I bet mom could've helped her.

CAROLYN

Boy. All these years I've resented
not living the wild life in some
place like Paris and all the time I
could've moved back to Iowa... Are
you drunk?

MICHAEL

Not yet. You want to go?

CAROLYN

I think I better. Between the book
and the coffee, I'm this close to
raping the busboy.

EXT. IOWA LAKEFRONT - NIGHT

Michael and Carolyn have parked in a secluded area near a lake. Some place where the moonlight and the scenery create a beautiful backdrop. They sit on the ground, leaving the headlights and the radio on. They are getting drunk sharing a bottle of whiskey.

MICHAEL

I used to love this place. I used to take Kathy Reynolds down here.

CAROLYN

You never dated Kathy Reynolds!

MICHAEL

Not officially. Her and Steve Kendall were pinned at birth. But I was crazy about her. And for about three months, I managed to catch her during her "exploring" stage.

CAROLYN

I never knew that.

MICHAEL

(sadly)
Nobody did.

CAROLYN

Was this during Betty?

MICHAEL

Everything was during Betty. God we were so young. Why did we think we had to do it all so fast? I've never cheated on Betty. Not once we were married, I mean.

CAROLYN

Did we want to?

MICHAEL

Only about a thousand times. What do

I do now? "What's good enough for mom
is good enough for me?"

CAROLYN
(pissed off)
What gets me is I'm 46 years old.
I've been in this crummy fucking
marriage -

MICHAEL
Carolyn!

CAROLYN
(ignores him)
-- for over twenty years because
that's what I was taught -- you stick
with it! Normal people don't get
divorced. I can't remember the last
time my husband made love to me so
intensely that he transported me to
Europe, for Christ's sake -- quite
frankly, I don't think he ever did!
And now I find out in between bake
sales, my mother was Anais Nin!

MICHAEL
What about me! I feel really weird.
Like she cheated on me, not dad.
Isn't that sick? I don't mean I
wanted to sleep with her or anything
but -- ya know -- being the only son.
You're sort of made to feel like
you're the prince of the kingdom, ya
know? And in the back of your mind,
you kind of think your mother doesn't
need sex anymore because she has you.

CAROLYN
You're right -- that is sick.

They drink.

MICHAEL
If she was so unhappy, why didn't she

leave?

They look to each other without an answer. Then simultaneously they reach for the notebooks.

MICHAEL (cont'd)

Can I read it now? I think I'm ready.

Carolyn offers him the book then lays back in a relaxed position in order to listen. Michael flips to an ear marked page.

MICHAEL (cont'd)

What paragraph were you up to?

CAROLYN

(casually)

She just made him perform oral sex on the porch.

Michael freezes. He loses his nerve. Carolyn helps.

CAROLYN (cont'd)

Go ahead, Michael. You've got to do this. Just think, "Today I am a man."

Michael nods and takes another swig. He reads:

MICHAEL

"I'd never had a man make love to me that way before."

(stops)

Oh Jesus.

(continues)

"I couldn't believe the feelings bursting inside of me. As if I had opened some forbidden Pandora's box."

Camera begins to move to wide angle as Francesca takes over.

FRANCESCA

"It seems, thinking about it now, that in those few days I lived a completely different life as a

completely different woman. What was recognizable as me before Robert was gone. We decided to spend Wednesday away from Winterset. Away from Madison County. Away from pastures and bridges and people too familiar and reminders too painful. We let the day take us where it wanted..."

1965

INT. DES MOINES MOVIE THEATER - DAY

VIVIEN LEIGH is walking down a ships stairs in the 1965 film "SHIP OF FOOLS." She is alone on screen. She walks, slightly intoxicated. Suddenly, Charleston music plays out of nowhere and she begins to dance, by herself, without any self-consciousness.

In the movie theatre, Robert sits with his arm around Francesca like teenage lovers. Her head is nestled in his chest as she eats from a bag of popcorn. Robert barely keeps his eyes on the screen, staring at Francesca and stroking her hair.

EXT. DOWNTOWN DES MOINES STREET - DAY

Francesca and Robert walk hand-in-hand, window shopping and taking in the sights. For Francesca, it is as if she is seeing everything for the first time.

INT. BOOK STORE - DAY

Robert introduces Francesca to the photography section, showing her a book of one of his favorite photographers, Walker Evans. Francesca admires one photograph in particular -- a mother and child during the depression.

FRANCESCA

On that one is beautiful. Look at their expressions. As if the camera weren't on them at all. As if they had no strength left to hide what they were feeling.

ROBERT

He's a genius. They're not
photographs -- they're stories, entire
histories captured in moments.

FRANCESCA

I bet you could do a book.

ROBERT

No. I couldn't.

FRANCESCA

Why do you say that?

ROBERT

Because I already tried once.

Francesca is surprised. She senses his disappointment.

ROBERT (cont'd)

It's no big deal. I know how to work
a camera, how to make it "make
pictures" -- but I don't know how to
make it make art.

(laughs)

At least that's what six publishers
said. To take what we see of this
world and give it back with a bit of
ourselves in it. It's a mystery to me.

FRANCESCA

(smiles, supportive)

But you don't mind.

ROBERT

(smiles)

No, I don't mind.

She brushes his hair away from his face affectionately. As he
looks at another book, she notices their reflection in a
mirror. She puts her arm through his. They look like a couple
to her -- two people who belong together.

INT. FANCY RESTAURANT - DAY

Francesca and Robert have an elegant lunch.

FRANCESCA

What were you like when you were younger?

ROBERT

(smiles)

Trouble. Why?

FRANCESCA

(laughs)

I just wondered. Why were you trouble?

ROBERT

I had a temper.

FRANCESCA

What were your parents like?

Pause. Robert doesn't reply. She looks at him curiously.

ROBERT

I can't do this, honey.

FRANCESCA

What?

ROBERT

Try and live a lifetime before

Friday. Cram it all in.

(shakes his head)

This is the first time either has mentioned their time clock. Francesca nods, understandingly.

Across the room, Francesca notices A MOTHER having dessert with her FIVE-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER, a pretty little girl in a fancy yellow dress. The mother rises and exits to the ladies room while the little girl continues eating a large sundae.

Francesca smiles. As the girl licks a spoon of fudge, she

sees Francesca looking at her and smiles back. Robert watches the silent exchange as he eats. Francesca makes a funny face at her. The little girl giggles as she spoons more ice-cream. Unfortunately, she spoons too much and the ice-cream falls on her pretty dress. She tries to take it off her, but she slips through her fingers and stains her even more. She looks at Francesca as if she's about to cry. Francesca smiles.

FRANCESCA

Excuse me a minute.

Robert watches her cross to the little girl and kneel beside her. He sees her consoling the little girl while taking a napkin and dabbing it in the water glass.

She helps the girl carefully wipe away the mess, all the while calming her. The mother re-enters the scene and shakes her head at her daughter. The daughter is afraid of being reproached but the mother is smiling. She and Francesca begin talking. She thanks Francesca. Robert sees the two mothers exchanging a moment of common experience and brief friendship. The mother and daughter take their leave as Francesca says goodbye and returns to the table. Robert looks at her lovingly. Francesca returns to her meal, but suddenly she is no longer hungry. Robert senses something is upsetting her.

ROBERT

You're somewhere else, where?

FRANCESCA

Just that it's been a perfect day and that I'd like to skip my fancy dessert and go home after this.

ROBERT

Uh-huh. And?

FRANCESCA

(beat)

You're right, you know. We don't have much time.

Uncomfortable silence hangs between them. A waiter passes by.

ROBERT
Check, please.

OS, as the MOTHER YELLS:

MOTHER
REBECCA! REBECCA!

Both Robert and Francesca look to the voice.

EXT. RESTAURANT - DAY

The mother stands on the street frantically calling for her daughter.

MOTHER
REBECCA!

The Maitre'd, Francesca and Robert exit the restaurant.

MOTHER
Oh my God...!

FRANCESCA
What happened?

MOTHER
I was paying the check. She ran outside. I told her to wait for me right here! Oh God, where is she?
Rebecca!

The sidewalk is filled with people. Francesca looks to Robert. He recognizes the concern in her expression. Going home will have to wait.

ROBERT
I'll check down here. Someone call the police.

The Maitre'd goes back inside. Francesca comforts the mother.

FRANCESCA

Think for a second. Is there
someplace she said she wanted to go?

MOTHER

I don't remember!

EXT. STREET

Robert searches through the street, poking in and out of
storefronts, looking across the street.

EXT. RESTAURANT

Francesca and the mother search in the opposite direction.

EXT. STREET

Through the crowd of people, Robert looks across the four
lane Main Street to a LARGE CITY PARK. He crosses to it.

INT. RESTAURANT - AN HOUR LATER

Francesca sits with the mother as TWO POLICEMEN take down a
description. The mother is crying. A waiter brings over some
water for her. The Maitre'd stands by.

MOTHER

She was right outside. I turned my
head for a second.

POLICEMAN

When was this?

FRANCESCA

About an hour ago.

MOTHER

They're not going to find her!

FRANCESCA

Yes, they are.

At that moment, the mother looks up and cries.

MOTHER
REBECCA!

She jumps out of her seat as all turn to see:

Robert holding the little girl in his arms, entering the restaurant. He carefully hands her over to the mother. The two wrap their arms around each other. Francesca looks to Robert, loving him even more now.

FRANCESCA
Where was she?

ROBERT
Across the street. She went into the park and got turned around and didn't know her way out.

MOTHER
You crossed the street by yourself?!

REBECCA
(crying)
It was a green light.

The mother is too relieved to be mad. Robert sits down.

MOTHER
Thank you so much!

ROBERT
(frazzled)
I need a drink.

Everyone laughs out of relief. Francesca wraps her arm around his shoulder and kisses his forehead. He kisses her back.

INT. TRUCK - DUSK

Robert drives as Francesca sits inside his arm. Neither speaks.

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - DUSK

Francesca calmly leads Robert up to her bedroom.

INT. JOHNSON BEDROOM

Naked, Francesca guides Robert into bed beneath the covers. They begin to make love -- softly, lovingly -- like a couple that are beyond the erotic, discovery stage; a couple that have been together and in love for years.

LATER -

Francesca puts her arm around him as he nestles his head to her breast. Francesca strokes his hair as Robert closes his eyes.

ROBERT

I don't know why I'm so tired all of a sudden.

FRANCESCA

Long day. Go to sleep.

ROBERT

Am I too heavy for you?

FRANCESCA

No.

Robert settles into her. But Francesca is wide awake. Something is on her mind -- "Tomorrow? What happens after tomorrow?"

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Francesca is serving Robert breakfast, then sits down beside him. Silence. We can sense some tension between them -- this being their last day together.

Francesca seems ingeniously friendly. Robert is suspicious.

FRANCESCA

Sleep all right?

ROBERT

Yes, thanks.

FRANCESCA

Good. More coffee?

(he nods, she pours)

Robert, I hope you don't mind my asking, but I feel like I should.

ROBERT

What?

FRANCESCA

Well, these... women friends of yours... all over the world. How does it work? Do you see some of them again? Do you forget others? Do you write them now and then? How do you manage it?

Her facetiousness startles Robert.

ROBERT

I... What do you want?

FRANCESCA

Well, I just want to know the procedure. I don't want to upset your routine. Do you want any jam?

ROBERT

(insulted)

Routine! I don't have a routine. And if you think that's what this is -

FRANCESCA

Well, what is this?

ROBERT

(upset)

Well, why is that up to me? You're the one who's married. You told me you have no intention of leaving your husband.

FRANCESCA

To do what? Be with someone who needs everyone and no one in particular? I mean, what would be the point. Would you pass the butter?

ROBERT

I was honest with you. I told you who I was.

FRANCESCA

Yes. Absolutely. You have this habit of not needing and that it's hard to break. I understand.

(beat)

Of course, in that case, why sleep -- you don't need rest or for that matter eat, you don't need food.

She takes his plate away from him, rises and throws it into the sink.

ROBERT

What are you doing?

FRANCESCA

(sarcastic)

Gee, I don't know. I guess I'm not cut out to be a World Citizen who experiences everything and nothing at the same time.

ROBERT

How do you know what I experience?

FRANCESCA

(angry)

I know you! What can this possibly mean to anyone who doesn't "need" meaning -

(mocking)

"Who goes with the Mystery" -- who pretends he isn't scared to death.

ROBERT

Stop it!

FRANCESCA

You have no idea what you've done to me, do you? And after you leave, I'm going to have to wonder for the rest of my life what happened here. If anything happened at all! And I'll have to wonder if you find yourself in some... housewife's kitchen in Romania if you'll sit there and tell her about your world of good friends and secretly include me in that group.

ROBERT

What do you want me to say?

FRANCESCA

(nonchantly)

I don't want you to say anything. I don't need you to say anything.

Robert rises, knocking his chair aside.

ROBERT

STOP IT!

FRANCESCA

Fine. More eggs or should we just fuck on the linoleum one last time?

ROBERT

(grabs her)

I told you! I won't apologize for who I am.

FRANCESCA

No one's asking you to!

ROBERT

I won't be made to feel like I've done something wrong.

FRANCESCA

(angry)

You won't be made to feel! Period.
You've carved out this little part
for yourself in the world where you
get to be a voyeur, a hermit and a
lover whenever you feel like it and
the rest of us are just supposed to
feel so incredibly grateful for the
brief time you've touched our lives!
Well, go to hell! It isn't human not
to feel lonely -- it isn't human not
to afraid! You're a hypocrite and
you're a phony!

ROBERT

(cries out)

I DON'T WANT TO NEED YOU!

FRANCESCA

WHY?

ROBERT

BECAUSE I CAN'T HAVE YOU!

FRANCESCA

WHAT DOES THAT HAVE TO DO WITH IT?

He throws a cup at the wall. It breaks apart. Covering his
face, Robert turns away from her as he holds onto the sink.
Francesca reaches for him but he pulls away, embarrassed.

FRANCESCA (cont'd)

(softly)

Don't you see, I've got to know the
truth, Robert. I've got to know the
truth or I'll go crazy. Either way.
Just tell me. But I can't act like
this is enough because it has to be.
I can't pretend I don't feel what I
feel because it's over tomorrow.

Robert, keeping his face from her, tries to tell her:

ROBERT

If I've done anything to make you think that what's happened between us is nothing new for me -- is some routine -- then I do apologize.

FRANCESCA

What makes it different, Robert?

Robert turns to face her. He is so hopelessly in love he can hardly find the words. His eyes fill up with tears.

ROBERT

Because... if I even think about tomorrow -- if I...

(voice cracks)

even think about leaving here without you -- I'm not sure I can... that I -

(he shakes his head)

He can't even finish. He kneels down before her wrapping his arms around her and burying his face into her body. Francesca starts to cry -- out of happiness, out of pain -- holding onto him as if for dear life.

FRANCESCA

Oh God... what are we going to do?

She kisses him -- over and over, not wanting to be even an inch apart. As if any space between them might separate them forever.

Suddenly, OS, they hear a CAR DRIVE UP to the house. They panic. Francesca runs to the window to see:

MADGE, a girlfriend, has come for a visit. Madge is holding a homemade dessert.

FRANCESCA (cont'd)

No. No. Where's your truck?

ROBERT

Behind the barn. I better go.

Francesca turns to him -- speechless -- not wanting him to go.

ROBERT (cont'd)

Don't worry. I meant upstairs.

He exits. Francesca gathers herself and heads for the front entrance, quickly cleaning up the plates.

INT. FRONT HALL - DAY

Francesca opens the door to Madge.

FRANCESCA

Madge?

MADGE

Hi. I made some brown betty. I sent
Floyd off to town with the boy. I said -
(entering)

"Floyd, I'm going to visit my
girlfriend and spend the afternoon
and that's all there is to it. He
said who's going to make lunch? I
said I'm taking a sick day. Eat at
the dinner." Isn't that hilarious?

(MOVES INTO KITCHEN)

He didn't dare raise an eyebrow -- I
don't even want to tell you how late
he was out last night with those good
for nothings from the Sandford ranch.
I am so sorry, honey, I let two days
pass before I came by, but with the
boy home the time just escapes me.
Have you heard from Richard? How's
the fair? God, it's hot.

Following her into the kitchen, Francesca doesn't know which question to answer first.

EXT. PORCH - LATER THAT DAY

Madge and Francesca sit facing the pasture beside a table with coffee and brown betty. We parachute into the middle of the scene.

MADGE

... I said to her, "what's the point of summer school if all he's going to do are these art projects. The boy needs so much work in math and his spelling is a nightmare..."

(continues)

Francesca isn't listening. Her mind wanders.

FANTASY:

FRANCESCA

Madge. Please. Something's happened. I've met someone. I've fallen in love in a way I've never thought could happen my entire life. It's our last day together. I feel like I'm going to die when he leaves. Please. Help me.

MADGE

Oh, honey. I'm so sorry. But you've got to be grateful for even feeling the little you've been given. Believe me. Go to him. Don't let him leave without these new precious hours you've got left. And if you need anyone to cry on, you know where I am.

END OF FANTASY:

Madge shoves a plate at her.

MADGE (cont'd)

More brown betty?

Francesca takes the plate. She can't think straight.

MADGE (cont'd)

... Anyway, I'm glad that's over with. Sara doing so well though. Everyone thought I was crazy having them so far apart, but...

(CONTINUES...)

FANTASY:

Francesca stands behind Madge, as the latter chatters on MOS. She calmly picks up the brown betty and, from behind, shoves it into Madge's face and holds it there, trying to suffocate her with it. Madge struggles.

END OF FANTASY:

Francesca's mind races as Madge continues.

MADGE

... without one lesson. The instructor couldn't believe it. So, who knows -- she may have talent. How's Carolyn doing? What are her plans for next year?

Francesca realizes this is her moment. She holds her head and leans over, unsteadily.

MADGE (cont'd)

Honey, what's wrong?

FRANCESCA

I don't know. I woke up a little dizzy. I didn't sleep well. I think I need to lay down.

MADGE

You want me to call the doctor?

FRANCESCA

No, no. I just didn't sleep well. I'm not used to sleeping alone. And this heat. Would you mind?

MADGE

No, of course not. I'll just clean up.

FRANCESCA

No, leave it. I'll do it later. Listen, maybe you and Floyd can come

for dinner on Saturday. I'm sure
Richard'll have so many stories to
tell you both about the fair and all.

MADGE

Oh, that'll be nice.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - LATER THAT DAY

Francesca enters to find Richard, laying on the bed fully
clothed. She sits beside him. He strokes her arm, then guides
her to lay down. Once she's in his arms, he speaks.

ROBERT

Come with me.

Francesca knew he was going to say this. Either answer she
gives frightens her.

FRANCESCA

Hold me.

She turns to him and they embrace. Robert, however, fears
only one response. On the soundtrack, we hear the song "DARN
THAT DREAM."

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

The song continues over the next few images. Camera slowly
pans from the radio, upon which the song is playing, to a
beautifully set table and candles. It arrives on Robert
preparing dinner.

INT. BEDROOM

Camera pans the room from two OPENED SUITCASES, as Francesca
packs to leave. She moves about the room as if with blinders
on -- focused on her task, refusing to take in any sign or
memories that might hinder her. She is wearing a RED DRESS,
with BUTTONS down the front.

INT. KITCHEN

Robert stands at the sink rinsing out some utensils. Waiting for the water to turn hot, he looks out through the window above the sink. He sees a beautiful view of beautiful night. He pauses as it strikes him that this is a view Francesca has seen a million times -- that soon she would not see ever again.

INT. SECOND FLOOR LANDING

Camera follows her as she exits the bedroom with her suitcases, then walks down the hall to the stairs, then down the staircase to the front hall.

She quietly sets the suitcases down, hearing the radio and Robert in the kitchen. She pauses, then enters the living room. One of the throw pillows has fallen off the couch. She replaces it then takes a moment to look about the room. She slowly sits down on the couch.

We hear voices of the past, auditory memories conjured up by each stick of furniture Francesca sees.

FRANCESCA (V.O.)

Michael, get off the back of that chair! What did I tell you!

WE HEAR HIM FALL AND BEGIN TO CRY.

FRANCESCA (V.O.)

All you all right, honey. Let me see...

A sound of Christmas music... of toddlers running and laughing... A birthday party for Carolyn...

CAROLYN (V.O.)

Mama, look -- look at the dress Aunt Patty sent!

RICHARD (V.O.)

Franny, BONNAZA's on!

ROBERT

Francesca?

Francesca snaps out for it and turns to find Robert.

ROBERT (cont'd)
I've got dinner.

She smiles.

INT. KITCHEN

They eat by candlelight. Neither speaks. Neither is very hungry.

ROBERT
Would you like a beer?

She smiles and shakes her head. Robert opens a bottle and takes a sip.

ROBERT (cont'd)
You know what I'd like to do before we leave? I'd like to take a picture of you -- at Roseman bridge. Maybe just as the sun's coming up.

FRANCESCA
Yes. I'd like that.

Pause. Robert smiles back and takes another sip. Then, knowing full well what hangs heavy between them, he asks:

ROBERT
Tell me why you're not coming with me?

Francesca stops pretending to eat. She looks at him, having forgotten how well he can read her.

FRANCESCA
No matter how I keep turning it around in my mind -- it doesn't seem like the right thing.

ROBERT

For who?

FRANCESCA

For anyone. They'll never be able to live through the talk. Richard will never be able to. He doesn't deserve that. He hasn't hurt anyone in his life.

ROBERT

(getting aggressive)

Then he can move! People move!

FRANCESCA

His family's lived for almost a hundred years. Richard doesn't know how to live anywhere else. And the kids...

ROBERT

The kids are grown! They don't need you anymore. You told me that. They hardly talk to you.

FRANCESCA

No, they don't say much. But Carolyn's 16. She's just about to find out about all this for herself -- she's going to fall in love, she's going to try and figure out how to build a life with someone. If I leave what does that say to her?

ROBERT

What about us? What about me?

FRANCESCA

You've got to know deep down that the minute we leave here. It'll all change.

ROBERT

Yeah. It could get better.

FRANCESCA

No matter how much distance we put between us and this house, I bring with it with me. And I'll feel it every minute we're together. And I'll blame loving you for how much it hurts. And then even these four days won't be anything more than something sordid and... a mistake.

ROBERT

(desperately)

Francesca, listen to me. You think what's happened to us happens to just anybody? What we feel for each other? How much we feel? We're not even two separate people anymore. Some people search their whole lives for it and wind up alone -- most people don't even think it exists and you're going to tell me that giving it up is the right thing to do? That staying here alone in a marriage, alone in a town you hate, in a house you don't feel apart of anymore -- you're telling me that's the right thing to do!?

FRANCESCA

We are the choices we've made, Robert.

ROBERT

(rises)

TO HELL WITH YOU!

He turns his back on her.

FRANCESCA

Robert. Please.

(desperate to explain)

You don't understand -- no one does. When a woman makes the choice to marry, to have children -- in one way her life begins but in another way it stops. You build a life of details.

You become a mother, a wife and you stop and stay steady so that your children can move. And when they leave they take your life of details with them. And then you're expected move again only you don't remember what moves you because no one has asked in so long. Not even yourself. You never in your life think that love like this can happen to you.

ROBERT

But now that you have it -

FRANCESCA

I want to keep it forever. I want to love you the way I do now the rest of my life. Don't you understand -- we'll lose it if we leave. I can't make an entire life disappear to start a new one. All I can do is try to hold onto to both. Help me. Help me not lose loving you.

She embraces him. He wraps his arms around her. He whispers.

ROBERT

Don't leave me. Don't leave me alone.
Please.

This breaks her heart, knowing how hard it is for him to say this. She holds him tighter, until -

ROBERT (cont'd)

Listen. Maybe you feel this way, maybe you don't. Maybe it's just because you're in this house. Maybe ... maybe when they come back tomorrow you'll feel differently. Don't you think that's possible?

FRANCESCA

I don't know. Please...

ROBERT

I'm going to be here a few more days.
I'll be at the Inn. We have some
time. Let's not say any more now.

FRANCESCA

No. Don't do this.

ROBERT

I CAN'T SAY GOODBYE YET! We'll leave
it for now. We're not saying goodbye.
We're not making any decision. Maybe
you'll change your mind. Maybe we'll
accidentally run into each other and
... and you'll change your mind.

FRANCESCA

Robert, if that happens, you'll have
to decide. I won't be able to.

She cries in his arms. He kisses her as if for the last time.
Then, quickly, separates himself and leaves the house.

EXT. JOHNSON HOUSE

Robert walks briskly towards his truck not wanting to look
back. He gets in, starts it up and drives away.

Francesca exits the house and watches the truck recede into
the distance. She stops when she reaches the front gate,
leaning against it. She murmurs to herself -

FRANCESCA

Keep going. Please.

The truck drives away. Then, suddenly, stops. Francesca's
heart quickens. She watches as the truck stands on the road
in the distance. As if Robert was deciding to turn around or
keep going. Francesca waits. Suddenly, the door to the truck
flies open and Robert exits. Francesca loses all restraint.

She opens the gate but her dress is caught on it. Robert
stands by the truck. Francesca tears at the dress, ripping
off a button which falls to the ground. She runs down the

road. Seeing her, Robert runs towards her as well.

They grab each other furiously. For these few moments, all considerations are gone. As he kisses her, he murmurs:

ROBERT

I forgot to take your picture.

She laughs through her tears as they continue to kiss. Camera pans up to the road beyond Robert's truck.

WE SEE RICHARD'S TRUCK DRIVING TOWARDS THEM. For a moment it seems as if they will be caught until we realize RICHARD'S TRUCK IS BEING SUPERIMPOSED as the LIGHT GRADUALLY BRIGHTENS TO REVEAL:

MORNING.

EXT. JOHNSON HOUSE

Richard, Michael and Carolyn drive down the road toward the house. Robert's truck, and all traces of him, are gone.

Francesca steps into the doorway in a house dress to welcome her family home -- wondering how this will feel.

JOHNSON KITCHEN - EVENING

The Johnson family has dinner as Francesca narrates:

FRANCESCA (V.O.)

You all came home. And with you, my life of details.

EXT. JOHNSON HOUSE

Everyone is doing various daily chores.

FRANCESCA (V.O.)

A day or two past and with each thought of him, a task would present itself like a life saver, pulling me further and further away from those four days.

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Francesca is reading. Richard watches TV.

FRANCESCA (V.O.)
I was grateful. I felt safe.

CUT TO:

EXT. WINTERSET - MAIN STREET - DAY

Richard and Francesca drive up to the general store to buy groceries. Francesca heads for the store as Richard crosses the street.

FRANCESCA
Want anything special for dinner?

RICHARD
Hmm. How about that brown sugar meat loaf you make?

FRANCESCA
(smiles)
Okay.

She enters the store.

INT. GENERAL STORE - DAY

Francesca makes small talk with the grocery lady as she buys what she needs.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Francesca places a bag of groceries on the front seat of the truck, then gets in herself to wait for Richard. She takes a deep breath and removes a handkerchief from her bag to wipe the sweat from her face. She freezes -

Through the windshield, she sees ROBERT standing beside his truck across the street, staring at her. Her heart stops. For a moment, she isn't even sure he's real.

The town moves about its business around them. But neither notice or care. Whatever safety or forgetfulness she felt is gone. Her feelings burst through. She sits there helpless before him -- willing to go or stay depending on what he did.

He begins walking towards her. She prepares herself. Her life will change -- it has to. There's not turning back.

But the closer Robert gets, the clearer he can see that she is crying. And he stops.

Without any words, he realizes what taking her with him would mean. With just a glance, he sacrifices her. With their eyes locked in the middle of Main Street -- in front of the whole town -- they smile and say goodbye.

Robert returns to his truck. He drives off down Main Street, taking the first left.

Moments later, Richard throws the feed bag into the back of his truck and gets in. Francesca is wiping her eyes.

He doesn't notice. He drives off in the same direction as Robert.

FRANCESCA (V.O.)

For a moment, I didn't know where I was. And for a split second, the thought crossed my mind that he really didn't want me -- that it was easy to walk away.

As they pass the corner where Robert made his left turn, Francesca turns to look and sees:

ROBERT'S TRUCK IS PARKED just off the corner. As if he had to drive away to get out of sight, but couldn't bring himself to drive any further.

The sight of him hiding there breaks Francesca's heart, she turns away from her husband to hide the tears.

EXT. JOHNSON HOUSE - DAY

WE REPLAY THE OPENING SCENE FROM THE MOVIE:

Carolyn is in the yard picking vegetables. Her parents drive up in their truck. She steps out with her bag of groceries and walks briskly into the house. Richard follows more slowly with his bag of feed, stopping at the gate to pick up the button from Francesca's red dress.

INT. KITCHEN

Francesca enters and places her groceries on the counter. She tries to compose herself. She sees the radio before her. She turns it on. The Dinah Washington song "I'LL CLOSE MY EYES" evokes every feeling of love and loss within her. She begins to cry.

She hears Richard enter the house. She stands out of sight, holding her hand to her mouth to muffle her crying. She hears:

MICHAEL (O.S.)

Dad! You bought the wrong feed!

RICHARD

What!?

She hears Richard exit the house.

EXT. LUCY REDFIELD'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A hand knocks on a door. Lucy Redfield opens it to find Francesca standing there with a cake.

FRANCESCA

Hi. I'm Francesca Johnson. I just feel awful I haven't come to visit sooner. I hope I'm not interrupting anything. Is it too late?

Lucy is shocked and moved at the same time.

LUCY

No. Not at all.

FRANCESCA

I was wondering if... maybe you'd
like some company.
(almost manic)
I baked a cake!

Lucy looks at the cake. She's a little dazed by all this.

LUCY

Uh... sure. Please. Come in. I'll
make coffee.

Francesca enters. Lucy closes the door.

CUT TO:

EXT. IOWA LAKEFRONT - DAWN

Michael continues reading beside Carolyn as the sun rises.

MICHAEL

"We became inseparable, Lucy and I.
The funny thing is, I didn't tell her
about Robert until years later. But,
for some reason, being with her
somehow made me feel it was safe to
think about him. To continue loving
him. The town loved talking about the
two of us but we didn't care. And
neither did your father. Which I
thought was a lovely thing. I
received Robert's letter and my
photograph soon after. I always
wondered if your father found them.
I was never quite sure..."

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

At dinner, Richard remembers the button he found.

RICHARD

Oh, Franny, is this yours?

Francesca sees the button. She speaks her original lines MOS

as HER NARRATION is heard:

FRANCESCA (V.O.)

I almost told him. In that moment I
felt as if I couldn't hold it back.
If he really loved me maybe he'd
understand.

She returns to her meal. The family eats in silence.

FRANCESCA (cont'd; V.O.)

But love won't obey our expectations.
Its mystery is pure and absolute.
What Robert and I had, could not
continue if we were together. What
Richard and I shared would vanish if
we were apart. But how I wanted to
share this. How would our lives have
changed if I had? Could anyone else
have seen the beauty of it?

INT. JOHNSON KITCHEN - NIGHT

Francesca moves about the kitchen with a frantic pace as she puts the finishing touches on a cake. Placing the frosting bowl in the sink, she hears someone upstairs exiting their bedroom. She quickly gathers the cake and her bag and exits through the screen door.

EXT. JOHNSON HOUSE - NIGHT

Fighting tears, she walks to the truck from around the house. She gets in and starts it. She vaguely hears her daughter from the front door.

CAROLYN

Mom?

But she doesn't acknowledge it and drives away.

EXT. MOTOR INN - NIGHT

Her truck approaches and then speeds past the Inn where Robert is staying. We can see his truck in the parking lot.

1979

INT. JOHNSON BEDROOM - NIGHT

And older Francesca cares for a sickly Richard. He lies in bed beside an array of medicines and tonics. She wipes his forehead with a cool cloth as he takes his pills.

FRANCESCA

Better?

He nods. She smiles. She shuts off the light and lays beside him.

RICHARD

Franny?

FRANCESCA

Hmm?

RICHARD

I just want to say... I know you had your own dreams. I'm sorry I couldn't give them to you. I love you so much.

Francesca turns to him. She is so touched, tears fill her eyes. She nestles close to him, wrapping her arms around him.

1982

EXT. DES MOINES

Francesca eats at the same restaurant she shared with Robert.

FRANCESCA (V.O.)

After your father died, I tried to get in touch with Robert but found out he had left the National Geographic soon after the Madison County. No one seemed to know where he was. My only connections to him were the places we'd been to that one day. And so each week, I'd re-visit

them.

EXT. JOHNSON HOUSE - DAY

Francesca greets a UPS man with an envelope and a package.

FRANCESCA (V.O.)

And then one day, I received the
letter from his attorney, with a
package.

INT. JOHNSON LIVING ROOM

Francesca reads the letter informing her of Robert's death. She then unwraps the package to reveal a MEDALLION with her name inscribed and A PHOTOGRAPHY BOOK; a published collection of black and white photos by Robert Kincaid entitled "Four Days." Beautiful, dramatic black and white representations of love and passion, loneliness and pain, and union. On the front page there reads an inscription "FOR F."

ROBERT (V.O.)

"There is a pleasure in the pathless
woods... There is a rapture on the
lonely shore... There is society
where none intrudes... By the deep
sea and music in its roar... I love
not man the less, but Nature more...
From these our interviews, in which
I steal... From all I may be, or
have been before... To mingle with the
Universe and feel... What I can
ne'er express, yet cannot all conceal."

The quote is Byron's. She smiles with pride as she cries.

CUT TO:

EXT. IOWA LAKEFRONT - EARLY MORNING

Michael sits with his arm around Carolyn as they look out over the lake. The notebooks are closed, but Francesca's narrations continue over the next few scenes.

FRANCESCA (V.O.)

There has not been a day since that I have not thought of him. When he said we were no longer two people, he was right.

INT. JOHNSON BEDROOM

Carolyn, looking through her mom's closet, finds the summer dress she bought in Des Moines to wear for Robert.

FRANCESCA (V.O.)

We were bound together as tightly as two people can be. If it hadn't been for him, I don't think I would have lasted on the farm all these years. Remember that dress of mine you wanted, Carolyn -- the one you said I never wore. Well, I know I was silly. But to me, it was as if you were asking to wear my wedding dress to go to the movies.

Carolyn smiles as she holds the dress before her.

INT. MOTEL - DAY

A tired Michael finds his way through the motel to his room.

FRANCESCA (V.O.)

After reading all this, I hope you can now understand my burial request. It was not the ravings of some mad old lady. I gave my life to my family. I wish to give Robert what is left of me.

INT. MOTEL ROOM

Michael enters to find his two children watching TV and an angry Betty folding clothes.

CHILDREN

Hey, Dad!

He looks at them lovingly, then at Betty who angrily motions for him to follow her into the bedroom.

She slams the door behind him and talks in a irate whisper.

BETTY

You have been out all night long! Do I have a right to ask where you've been or is this a family secret?

Michael just looks at her. He gently takes her hand.

MICHAEL

No. No more secrets.

He kisses her hand. Betty is floored.

MICHAEL (cont'd)

Do I make you happy, Betty?
(she is stunned)

Because I want to. I want to more than anything.

He gently kisses her cheek then embraces her. Betty -- for the first time in her life -- is utterly speechless.

INT. JOHNSON BEDROOM

Wearing her mother's dress, Carolyn sits on the bed holding the phone, waiting for Steve to pick up. In her other hand, she holds the divorce lawyers card.

CAROLYN

(on the phone)

Hi, Steve? It's me. Good. You?...

Listen, we have to talk... Well, how about you?... Uh, no -- I've decided I'm going to stay for a while... I don't know how long...

No, I won't be coming back...

I'm not angry, Steve. I'm not angry at all.

(smiles)

CUT TO:

EXT. ROSEMAN BRIDGE - DAY

Michael and his family stand beside Carolyn and a Priest.

FRANCESCA (V.O.)

"I gave Lucy his photography book. If you're interested, take a look. If my words still leave something unclear, perhaps his pictures can illuminate. After all, that's what an artist does best... "

Michael receives the urn from the priest. He and Carolyn walk away from the group towards the bridge. They stop. Carolyn removes the lip. Michael sets his mother's ashes free.

FRANCESCA (V.O.)

"I love you both with all my heart. Do what you have to, to be happy in this life. There is so much beauty."

THE END