

# **VOWS**

What do marriage vows really mean?

A Screenplay  
By  
Coleman Luck  
&  
Carel Gage Luck

Based on the novel  
A Vow to Cherish

Darkness.

As soft music whispers...a woman's voice begins speaking.

ELLEN (V.O.)  
(with a faint echo)  
Remembering. Remembering.  
(beat; anguished)  
So hard to remember.  
(beat)  
Oh, God, please help me.

FADE IN:

INT. JOHN AND ELLEN'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

A single shaft of light shines down on a woman's hand. She is writing in a journal. The voice belongs to Ellen Brighton, but her face is not seen. Close by the journal a candle flickers in a simple base.

ELLEN (V.O.)  
Things to remember.  
(pause)  
Candles.  
(beat)  
Yes, candles.

The hand stops writing and picks up the candle.

ELLEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Little, flickering lights in a world  
of darkness. Ever since I was a  
child I've loved them. So tiny.  
And the shadows are so large.

The hand sets the candle down and begins writing once more.

ELLEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Christmas candles. Birthday candles.  
Candles in churches. Long, slim  
candles at romantic dinners with  
John.  
(beat;whispering)  
Wedding candles. Oh, yes. Candles  
at our wedding. They were so  
beautiful.  
(beat)  
Oh, Lord, help me to see it all again.  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
To have the words to write it  
down...before it slips away.

DISSOLVE  
TO:

INT. JOHN'S HOME OFFICE -- NIGHT

Darkness and shadows.

A single light shines down on a man's hands. He's typing on a computer keyboard. The screen is not visible and the keys make no sound. The voice of John Brighton is heard, but his face is not seen.

JOHN (V.O.)  
(with a faint echo)  
I've been told that I should write a  
journal...that somehow the act of  
writing will help the pain.  
(beat)  
Can anything help the pain? It's  
like a black ocean that's filling  
every corner of my life.  
(beat)  
And yet, the sweetness of the past  
never leaves me.  
(beat)  
I remember her beauty. She was the  
most beautiful woman I'd ever seen.  
We'd both been searching. I had  
given up. Then, we met.  
(beat)  
When we married, I was 31 and she  
was 27.  
(beat)  
I'll never forget our wedding day...

MONTAGE BEGINS:

INT. CHURCH SANCTUARY -- AFTERNOON

A misty vision. Fragments of memory from the past. Soft  
and dream-like.

Afternoon light streaming through stained glass windows.

A church filled with candles and white flowers.

At the front, a lovely bride stands beside a handsome groom.  
It is JOHN and ELLEN BRIGHTON of years ago. With them is a  
MINISTER.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

His voice echoes...fading in and out as though from far away.

MINISTER

(echoing)

...Love never fails.

(beat)

Where there are tongues...they will  
be stilled. Where there is knowledge,  
it will pass away...

(beat)

But love...never fails...

Images of lace and flowers.

The Bible in the minister's hands.

The Cross high above.

MINISTER (CONT'D)

Now, we see but a poor  
reflection...then, we shall see face  
to face...Now I know in part, then,  
I shall know fully, even as I am  
fully known.

(beat)

And now, these three remain: faith,  
hope and love. But the greatest of  
these is love...

(beat)

And love...never fails.

Then come the vows. There are tears in Ellen's eyes as John  
speaks to her. In the background, a lovely woman's voice  
begins to sing.

JOHN

(echoing softly)

In the name of Jesus, our Savior and  
Lord, I, John, take you Ellen to be  
my beloved wife. To have you and to  
hold you. To honor and to treasure  
you. To be at your side in sorrow  
and joy. To suffer with you and be  
transformed. And to love and cherish  
you always. I promise you this from  
my heart...with my soul...as long as  
life shall last...

Over and over the words of John's vows continue echoing.

As the ring is slipped on.

As the bride and groom take communion.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

As two candles burn into one.

DISSOLVE  
TO:

INT. HONEYMOON SUITE -- NIGHT

Mist and moonlight. John and his young bride are together on the wedding bed. She looks up at him and whispers...

ELLEN  
Did you mean them, John?

JOHN  
Mean what, Sweetheart?

ELLEN  
The vows you spoke today.

JOHN  
Forever. As long as life shall last.

Gently, he kisses her. Their kiss deepens.

JOHN (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
When you love someone, promises are so easy to make. And you have no idea what they mean.  
(beat)  
But you learn.

SMASH CUT  
TO:

INT. HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOM CORRIDOR -- DAY

Chaos. A blur of lights and people.

Ellen is on a gurney. Below her waist the white sheet is covered with blood. An E.R. team is rushing her down the hall toward surgery.

She's in the last stages of pregnancy and is screaming with pain.

ELLEN  
(screaming)  
OH, GOD, OH, GOD, OH, GOD--HELP ME--  
HELP ME...

Terrified, John is running along beside her, trying to hold her hand. A nurse pushes him away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

E.R.NURSE

Mr. Brighton--go to the waiting room.

JOHN

But I've got to do something. I've got to help her.

E.R.NURSE

If you want to help her...go and pray.

John is left standing alone. He is in shock.

JOHN (V.O.)

It was our first child, and it was late in her pregnancy. During the night, she started bleeding. It got worse and worse.

(beat)

I learned then what it means to enter a nightmare.

POV JOHN

Jarring fragments of memory.

As the gurney and the medical team rush away, through John's eyes everything enters slow motion. The cacophony of the hospital merges into a mindless echo.

CU JOHN'S FACE

It's covered with sweat and his eyes are wild with fear. His wife is gone.

DISSOLVE  
TO:

INT. ANOTHER HOSPITAL HALLWAY -- LATER

CU JOHN'S SHOES WALKING

John is pacing the halls of the hospital. There is activity around him, but he barely sees it.

POV JOHN

Through his eyes everything is blurring motion and echoing sound.

JOHN (V.O.)

I waited and waited.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

No one would tell me anything. I paced the halls until I thought I would go insane. The nurse said to pray. But, inside, all I could do was scream. I knew I was going to lose her.

(beat)

Then, I found the chapel.

John stops and stares at the chapel doors. He pulls them open...and enters.

INT. HOSPITAL CHAPEL -- CONTINUOUS

With tears in his eyes, John stumbles to the front and kneels down. He is gasping for air. He buries his face.

Suddenly, a gentle, but powerful hand grasps his shoulder.

John turns and looks up. Above him is the strongest, kindest face that he has ever seen. A face scarred with life, yet unbittered. It's an African/American man in his mid forties. This is ALEXANDER BILLMAN.

ALEXANDER

There are times to kneel alone.  
Then, there are times when somebody  
should kneel with you.

The man kneels down next to John.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

Used to be I never liked kneeling.  
Took me a long time to learn how.

Alexander looks at him. John doesn't know what to say.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

I'm pretty good at praying for people.  
My name's Alexander.

With a smile, he extends his hand. John takes it.

JOHN

I'm John.

ALEXANDER

So, what can I pray for, John?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN

(just above a whisper;  
fighting back tears.)

It's my wife. She's pregnant. Close  
to delivery. This morning she started  
bleeding...really bad.

(beat)

I...just feel like...I'm going to  
lose her.

ALEXANDER

Let's pray for her right now.

With his right hand, Alexander grasps John's shoulder. With  
his left hand he reaches toward Heaven. And then, he begins  
to pray. John has never heard a prayer like this one.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

(with strange intensity)

Oh, God...

(pause)

Oh, God...

(pause)

Oh, God...

Each time he says God's name, there is deeper emotion. And  
then, there is silence...a silence so long that John opens  
his eyes and looks over at the man.

To his amazement, he sees Alexander staring upward. Tears  
are running down his cheeks. The hand that is raised is  
trembling. Finally, he continues.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

Well...I'm here again. But this  
time I've got somebody with me.

(beat)

His name's John...

(beat)

It's just the two of us kneeling  
down before You.

(beat)

And not far away...there's a young  
woman who's carrying a little baby.  
She's in awful pain, Lord. She's  
just...bleeding so much. And they  
can't stop it. John feels death all  
around her. And I feel it too.  
Like shadows creeping in. She's  
helpless, Lord.

(pause)

Now, I'm going to ask you for a favor.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

Maybe you could think of it as a special gift to me on this day. Not that I deserve it. But I'm asking anyhow.

(beat)

This young man is only starting out. Just at the beginning life with the woman he loves. Don't let her die, Lord. Jesus, you know what it's like to see your blood running down. To see life slipping away.

(beat)

Save that mother and baby, Lord. Stand over them. Stop the bleeding. You can do it through the power of your own blood that was shed for us.

(beat)

I'm asking, Lord...

(beat)

Asking right now.

Once more, there is a long silence. When Alexander turns toward John, his eyes are filled with peace. He smiles.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

There, we laid it out. Let's see what he's going to do.

JOHN

(whispering)

Thank you. Thank you so much.

They both get up.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Are you...a chaplain here?

ALEXANDER

No. I've just spent a lot of time in this room. But this is the last time. I came here...just to pray once more. And you see, God gave me something to pray for.

JOHN

Why have you been coming here?

ALEXANDER

My wife...has had cancer. A brain tumor. She fought it hard. But a few minutes ago...she passed away.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)  
 (beat; with a wistful  
 smile)

I loved her, John. I loved her.

Slowly, he turns away. John stares at him.

JOHN (V.O.)  
 I couldn't believe it. At the end  
 of his marriage...when he had just  
 said goodbye to the woman he  
 loved...when his heart was  
 breaking...he was praying for us.

DISSOLVE  
 TO:

INT. JOHN'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

John's hands are moving on the keyboard.

JOHN (V.O.)  
 It was like Jesus Himself had knelt  
 down beside me. That day, Alexander  
 Billman became my best friend.  
 (beat)  
 And his prayer for Ellen and Kyle  
 was answered.

DISSOLVE  
 TO:

INT. JOHN AND ELLEN'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

CU ELLEN'S HAND

Writing in her journal. The candle beside her has burned  
 lower.

ELLEN  
 Remembering...  
 (beat)  
 Remembering the candles...  
 (beat)  
 The light that God has brought to  
 me. I almost died when Kyle was  
 born. Everything was growing so  
 dark. And there was nothing the  
 doctors could do.

LIMBO

CU ELLEN'S FACE IN SURGERY.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Darkness is all around her. No one else is visible. An oxygen tube is in her mouth.

Suddenly, she opens her eyes and stares upward. Her eyes grow wide. Slowly, her face is filled with a soft, golden light.

ELLEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

When I was dying. That's when He came. I saw Jesus. He was there in the operating room...and He spoke to me. Over and over He said, "I love you. Don't be afraid."

(beat)

They say it was just an hallucination. But I know it wasn't. He was real.

MONTAGE BEGINS

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- DAY

Ellen's room is filled with flowers, balloons and joy. Ellen is in her hospital bed, holding the new baby.

ELLEN (V.O.)

Our baby was so beautiful. Every finger and toe was perfect. Kyle was a gift of God's love.

DISSOLVE  
TO:

EXT. WOODS -- DAY

Years have passed. A little, four-year-old boy is walking through the woods with Ellen...who is pregnant again.

ELLEN (V.O.)

I loved Kyle so much. I didn't think I could ever love another child that way.

(beat)

And then, Teri came...

DISSOLVE  
TO:

INT. A BABY GIRL'S ROOM -- DAY

The room is pink and full of frills. John is holding his baby daughter, who is asleep in his arms. Ellen is beside him. Four-year-old Kyle looks on in wonder. Carefully, John lays the tiny girl onto the bed. She's very beautiful.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He is enraptured.

MONTAGE ENDS

DISSOLVE  
TO:

INT. JOHN'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

John's hands are moving on the keyboard. His voice is heard, but his face is not seen.

JOHN (V.O.)

Where have the years gone? The years  
of my children's childhood. Our  
home was filled with happiness...and  
the future was bright with joy.

(beat)

I want them back. I want them back.

The hands stop moving. John rests his head on the keyboard, and his shoulders tremble.

FADE TO  
BLACK:

FADE IN:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM -- DAY

It is fifteen years since the birth of Teri.

A high school band completes a round of "Pomp and Circumstance"...not in perfect harmony or key. A large crowd is gathered for a high school graduation. Four hundred seniors are lined up, receiving their diplomas. It's the usual drill of parents rushing forward to snap pictures of grinning graduates.

Waiting in line for his moment of glory is KYLE BRIGHTON, a good-looking, eighteen-year-old kid with mischief in his eyes.

Seated several rows back from the platform is his family. Ellen is 47 and beautiful. John is 51, still young looking, but with a touch of gray in his hair. Teri is 14, a pretty, teenage girl with an attitude. One by one, the principal drones out the names of the students.

PRINCIPAL

Constance Corinne Billingsly.

The girl walks across the stage to get her diploma.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TERI

Constance Corinne. What kind of a freakoid name is that?

Ellen shushes her.

PRINCIPAL

Stanton Elmer Bitman.

As the kid strides stiffly across the stage, some of the seniors start chanting...ELMER...ELMER...ELMER. He bows and grins.

JOHN

(a loud whisper)

You know, it's just not like it was when I graduated. I mean there used to be some dignity about this.

PRINCIPAL

Barton Brundage Booshly.

TERI

I can't handle it. They're getting worse and worse.

As the kid makes his way over the platform, he doesn't realize that his friends have hung a large, paper nose on his back. It sticks straight out. He doesn't understand why the audience is laughing at him.

ELLEN

I just hope *your son* doesn't try to pull some weird little number to be funny.

JOHN

I told him to play this completely straight. No horsing around.

(beat)

He's not gonna horse around, is he Teri?

TERI

The Kyle we know and love? Don't worry, Dad, everything's gonna be cool.

(beat)

Just make sure you have your camera ready.

A sickened look comes over John's face.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN

Why do I suddenly want to throw up?

He stares over at Kyle who's getting very close to the front of the line. Kyle sees him. John mouths the words...NO HORSEING AROUND. Kyle grins and waves.

PRINCIPAL

William Harrison Morehouse Breechman.

TERI

If you're gonna take a picture you'd better get up there, mom.

Suddenly, Ellen begins looking around.

ELLEN

John, where's the camera?

JOHN

I don't know.

ELLEN

But you had it. You walked in with it.

JOHN

No, I didn't. I haven't touched the camera.

TERI

Mom, you'd better get up there.

Ellen is very flustered.

ELLEN

I can't find it. It's not here.

TERI

MOTHER, it's around your neck.

It is around her neck, hanging to the side under her arm. When she sees it, Ellen is totally confused.

ELLEN

How did that get there?

TERI

Give it to me.

Teri jerks the camera away and rushes up to the front, just as Kyle's name is called.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PRINCIPAL  
 Kyle Anthony Brighton.

With a dangerous grin, Kyle walks across the stage...extends his hand and takes the diploma. Unfortunately, when he walks away, he leaves the hand he extended in the grip of the principal. The man stares at it with an absolutely dead-pan expression. Teri gets the shot.

JOHN  
 Oh, Lord, help us.

When the other seniors see the prank they cheer. And they cheer louder when they realize the principal can't remove it. He tries to pull it off, but it's stuck.

ELLEN  
 It's that awful glue.

JOHN  
 I'm gonna kill him. Your son is never gonna see another birthday.

Through it all, as the crowd screams with laughter, Teri keeps on snapping pictures.

THROUGH THE CAMERA LENSE

FREEZE FRAME: The principal pulling.

FREEZE FRAME: The principal pulling harder.

FREEZE FRAME: The principal with his foot on the fake wrist, trying to drag himself free.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BRIGHTON HOME -- ESTABLISHING -- EVENING

The Brighton's live in an upscale home in the suburbs. Kyle's graduation barbecue bash is going on in the back yard. Rock music is playing.

EXT. BACK YARD -- EVENING

Kids are in the swimming pool. Nearby, Kyle is getting some hero worship from a group of his friends. They're tossing around a fake hand. Not far away, John is working at the grill. Alexander Billman, now in his mid-sixties, is helping him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN

You got any ideas about how I should deal with this, Alexander?

ALEXANDER

Well, you could ground him for six months, but then he wouldn't be able to go to college.

JOHN

That would punish me.

ALEXANDER

(laughing)

I just wish I could have been there to see Arthur's face.

JOHN

Yeah, well, he's my golfing partner. What am I going to say to him on Saturday?

ALEXANDER

(laughing harder)

You could offer to give him a hand with his bag.

JOHN

That is all the wisdom you're going to share?

ALEXANDER

Afraid so.

As John stares at him, Alexander can't stop laughing.

INT. KITCHEN -- MOMENTS LATER

The kitchen is a mess, stacked with dirty dishes. Ellen and a close friend, KAY HARTLY, are preparing another large tray of veggies, chips and dip. Ellen looks exhausted. Kay glances out the window and sees Teri surrounded by a group of Kyle's male friends.

KAY

You'd better look out, Ellen. Your daughter is getting dangerously beautiful.

ELLEN

And dangerously hard to manage.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KAY

You know what they say about teenagers. Boys wreck cars and girls wreck people.

ELLEN

I'm beginning to understand.

KAY

My brilliant son crashed into a wall at the DMV the day he went for his license.

Suddenly, Ellen is slightly dizzy. She looks terrible as she leans against a counter top.

KAY (CONT'D)

Hey, are you all right?

ELLEN

I'm fine. I've just been very tired lately. And, once in awhile I get a dizzy spell.

KAY

You're not pregnant are you?

ELLEN

Don't even think such a thing.

KAY

Well, it happens. Your son's going off to college in a few months. Your daughter's starting high school. Big changes.

ELLEN

Kay, I am not pregnant.

KAY

If you say so. But they've got these little home test kits...

Ellen glares at her.

KAY (CONT'D)

All right. All right.

The tray is finished. Kay picks it up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KAY (CONT'D)

After I deliver this to the sharks,  
I'm going to help you clean up this  
mess.

ELLEN

No, listen, let's not worry about  
it. I'll do it in the morning.

KAY

Are you sure?

ELLEN

Absolutely. I'm finished for the  
day. All I want to do is go to bed.

KAY

I know the feeling.

CU ELLEN'S FACE

As her friend walks away, Ellen closes her eyes and takes a  
deep breath.

EXT. THE BRIGHTON HOME -- MORNING

The front door opens. John and Ellen walk out. They're  
dressed in jogging clothes. Ellen looks much better than  
she did the night before.

JOHN

What a great morning. I feel  
wonderful.

They move out into the street and start to jog.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I'm glad this whole graduation thing  
is over. When I graduated, we didn't  
have two solid weeks of parties.  
It's enough to beat parents to death.

ELLEN

You keep talking like that, you sound  
like an old man. I'll bet you jogged  
fifteen miles through the snow every  
day to school

JOHN

You're absolutely right. Summer and  
winter. Up to my waist. And I'm a  
better man for it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They haven't gone far before Ellen is fatigued.

ELLEN

I'm so tired, I just can't run very fast.

John slows down.

JOHN

We're a little out of shape. Two weeks with no exercise.

(beat)

It's hard to believe. Soon Kyle'll be off to college. In four years Teri'll be gone. It'll be just you and me.

(beat)

I love my kids. But I'm kind of looking forward to that. I'll turn the business over to my team. And you and I are gonna do some travelling.

ELLEN

I've been thinking too. I love teaching. But maybe...I'd be more useful...On the school board.

JOHN

(thrilled)

ALL RIGHT.

ELLEN

Take it easy. It's not gonna happen for a year or two.

JOHN

I get to run your campaign.

Ellen is getting very out of breath.

ELLEN

Submit your resume and I'll decide.

Suddenly, she slows to a walk...and then stops.

ELLEN (CONT'D)

John, I just can't do it this morning. Do you mind?

JOHN

Of course, not. You want to go out for breakfast.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLEN

No. You need the exercise. Keep on going and I'll walk back.

JOHN

Are you sure?

ELLEN

Yeah. I think I've picked up some kind of flu bug. I'm going to go and lie down.

JOHN

All right. See you in awhile.

He jogs away.

CU ELLEN'S FACE

For a moment, she stands and watches him with a far away look in her eyes.

ELLEN (V.O.)

I remember...

(beat)

I remember...Summer mornings so filled with love...

(beat)

Running through the trees with you...

MONTAGE BEGINS

EXT. ROAD IN THE WOODS -- MORNING

The softness of memory. John and Ellen are jogging together down a beautiful, forest road.

ELLEN (V.O.)

The wind touching us with the spirit of God's creation. You could run so much faster...so much farther.

(beat)

But you chose to run with me.

JOHN (V.O.)

I remember...

(beat)

The wind in your hair and the dancing sunlight in your eyes. I remember your laughter. Sometimes we laughed so hard that we couldn't keep on running.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

As they run, John and Ellen start laughing. They laugh harder and harder until they have to stop. They hug and kiss deeply.

JOHN (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 Oh, Ellen, I love you. We lived as  
 though life would never end.  
 (beat)  
 I remember...  
 (beat)  
 And I remember the first day...that  
 I ran on...alone.

MONTAGE ENDS

EXT. STREET -- MOMENTS LATER

Back on the street where Ellen is standing. The sky seems to darken and there is the sound of an eerie wind.

Ellen grows smaller and smaller...as John runs on.

EXT. JOHN AND ELLEN'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

John is asleep in bed. Ellen is not beside him. Slowly, he awakens. He hears the sound of the shower running and looks at the clock. It's 1:15 AM. The shower stops. Bleary-eyed, John gets up and stumbles to the bathroom.

INT. BATHROOM -- CONTINUOUS

He finds Ellen wrapped in a huge towel, drying her hair.

ELLEN  
 Well, sleepyhead, you're finally up.

JOHN  
 El, what are you doing? It's one-  
 fifteen in the morning.

ELLEN  
 What are you talking about? It's  
 seven AM. Time to rise and shine.

JOHN  
 Take a look.

INT. JOHN AND ELLEN'S BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

John leads her back into the bedroom. She stares at the clock.

ELLEN  
 That can't be right.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He holds up his watch.

JOHN  
You think this is wrong, too?

She looks at it.

ELLEN  
This is crazy. How did I do this?

JOHN  
I don't know, but let's go back to bed.

He lies down. Smiling, she lies down beside him. She snuggles close.

ELLEN  
You know, as long as we're up, we could take advantage of it.

He smiles sleepily at her.

JOHN  
You're right. Why waste a good night sleeping.

He pulls her close.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BRIGHTON HOME -- MORNING

It's late August. On the driveway Kyle's car is stuffed full with his junk. He's about to leave for college. The front windows are open. Rock music pounds from inside. Kyle is standing beside the car saying goodbye to two of his friends.

KYLE  
See you at Christmas, dudes.

They nod and exchange "high fives." The front door of the house opens. Ellen, Teri and John come out. John is carrying a small overnight bag. He stares at the car.

JOHN  
Where am I supposed to put this?

KYLE  
Hey, there's plenty of room.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Kyle takes the bag and jams it through an open window on top the rest of the stuff.

ELLEN

Kyle, your car looks like a garbage truck.

JOHN

It doesn't matter, Ellen. The important thing is...it's all going with him.

Ellen puts her arms around her son. There are tears in her eyes. Teri rolls her eyes.

ELLEN

My baby is going off to college.

TERI

MOTHER, he's only going to be two hours away.

Kyle hugs her.

KYLE

Don't worry, mom. I'll be home lots of weekends...with big piles of dirty laundry.

JOHN

We'd better get on the road.

Ellen gives Kyle a kiss, then she kisses her husband. Kyle says "goodbye" to his sister.

KYLE

Try not to flunk out this year.

TERI

(with a deadly look)  
I make straight "A's."  
(then, with a sweet smile)  
I'm gonna turn your room into an aquarium.

KYLE

Goodbye, twerp.

There is emotion there, just well hidden.

TERI

Goodbye, dweeb.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Kyle gets in behind the wheel. His father climbs in on the passenger side. As they drive away, everyone waves. Ellen is crying. Fighting back a few tears herself, Teri goes back into the house.

INT. TERI'S ROOM -- LATER

Teri's room is the epitome of "cool." There are posters everywhere and a bubbling neon sign that reads, "COOL CHICK." Rock music is pounding. Teri is in front of a mirror modelling some pieces of her new Fall wardrobe. The clothes are small, black and tight. Suddenly, she hears her mother yell from another room.

ELLEN (O.S.)  
TERI, WILL YOU TURN THAT DOWN?

Teri ignores her and keeps on modelling.

ELLEN (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
TERI, DID YOU HEAR ME?

The door opens. Ellen looks in. When she sees her daughter's clothes, her eyes grow wide.

TERI  
Would you mind knocking?

With a bored look, Teri turns down the music.

ELLEN  
What are you wearing?

TERI  
Some stuff I got for school.

ELLEN  
Well, you can just take it back right now, because you're not walking out of the house in that.

Their voices begin to rise.

TERI  
WHY NOT?

ELLEN  
NO DAUGHTER OF MINE IS GOING TO BE SEEN LOOKING THAT WAY.

TERI  
WHAT'S WRONG WITH IT? ALL THE GIRLS DRESS LIKE THIS?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLEN  
I DON'T CARE. YOU'RE NOT GOING TO.

TERI  
WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO, WEAR SKIRTS  
DOWN TO MY ANKLES.

ELLEN  
I SAID, TAKE IT OFF AND TAKE IT BACK.

CU: ELLEN'S FACE

Suddenly, in her anger, she grows dizzy. Weird sounds jangle in her ears. Teri lashes out.

TERI  
LOOK, JUST BECAUSE YOUR BABY LEFT  
FOR COLLEGE THAT DOESN'T MEAN YOU  
CAN TAKE YOUR FRUSTRATIONS OUT ON  
ME.

The jangling in Ellen's ears grows louder.

POV ELLEN

As she stares at Teri, suddenly, the words from her daughter's mouth turn to gibberish.

TERI (CONT'D)  
MIGDA RUGAN. MELETA MESHEN.  
STRESSION RUTAN GOG.

The sounds grow louder and louder. Ellen grabs her head and starts to scream.

ELLEN  
STOP-IT-STOP-IT-STOP-IT-STOP-IT...

She rushes out of the room, slamming the door. Teri stares in surprise after her.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE TERI'S ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Ellen leans against the wall, holding her head.

ELLEN (V.O.)  
That morning. That awful morning.  
In the room...with Teri. I knew  
something was horribly wrong. But,  
I refused to believe what my body  
was saying. I told myself it was  
just stress. And I kept it a secret.  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

(beat)

But, after that, the awful days...came  
faster and faster.

EXT. HARRISON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL -- MORNING

It's the first day of the new school year. Students are entering the building under a sign that reads: "WELCOME TO HARRISON ELEMENTARY. HAVE A GREAT YEAR."

Ellen pulls into the parking lot and gets out. She looks beautiful, but a little tired as she moves toward the main entrance.

INT. SCHOOL -- MAIN HALLWAY -- MOMENTS LATER

As she walks down the main hall, students from previous years greet her. (AMY and JENNIFER.)

AMY

Hello, Mrs. Brighton.

JENNIFER

Hi, Mrs. Brighton.

Ellen smiles.

ELLEN

Hello, Amy. Hello, Jennifer.

But suddenly, as she walks, she begins hearing the jangling sounds. At first, they're far away, but they get louder and louder

CU ELLEN'S FACE

She is perspiring.

ELLEN (CONT'D)

Oh, no.

POV ELLEN

Ahead, the hallway seems to stretch away forever. The end is lost in darkness and mist. The walls are looming shadows. The light from the open doors blasts out at her. Filled with fear, Ellen wanders, searching for her room. Finally, she bumps into another teacher. (This is ED SHEPHERD.)

ED

Hi, Ellen.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ellen stares at him.

ELLEN  
I'm looking...for my classroom. Do  
you know where it is?

ED  
What do you mean? Have they changed  
it?

ELLEN  
I...can't find it.

ED  
It's right over there.

She looks across the hall. Instantly, the jangling sounds  
vanish. She stares, shakes her head and smiles.

ELLEN  
Ed, thank you. I don't know what's  
the matter with me today.

ED  
Are you all right?

ELLEN  
I'm fine. Just a little tired. See  
you later.

She heads for the room. The man stares after her.

INT. ELLEN'S CLASSROOM -- DAY

The class is seated, waiting for her. She smiles at them,  
nervously.

ELLEN  
Good morning, class.

CLASS  
Good morning, teacher.

ELLEN  
My name is Mrs. Brighton. I'm going  
to spell my name for you on the board  
and you can write it down.

She turns to the board, picks up a piece of chalk and begins  
printing: M-R-S. B-R-I... But then, she stops. The jangling  
sounds are coming back.

CU ELLEN'S FACE

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She turns and looks at the class.

POV ELLEN

Seated in the front row, she sees her daughter Teri...wearing the clothes she told her to take back. She walks up to her.

ELLEN (CONT'D)

Teri, what are you doing here? And why are you wearing those clothes?

But then, the jangling sounds fade away.

CU ELLEN'S FACE

She is confused. She finds herself standing over a little girl she has never met before. This is SUSAN

SUSAN

(scared)

I'm...I'm not Teri. My name is Susan.

ELLEN

Oh...I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. What was I thinking. It's all right. Everything is okay.

Breathing hard and perspiring, Ellen walks back to the board.

INT. KITCHEN -- EVENING

Ellen is trying to fix dinner, but she isn't accomplishing much. She's very troubled and frightened. John walks in from work. He's glowing.

JOHN

Hi, honey.

He kisses her. Instantly, he sees that something is wrong.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Hey, what's going on?

ELLEN

Nothing.

JOHN

You look upset.

ELLEN

Nothing is going on. I'm fine...

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLEN (CONT'D)

(beat)  
Just...awfully tired. The first day  
of school...you know.

JOHN

Well, forget fixing dinner. We're  
going out. We're gonna celebrate.  
I won the Atlantic Petroleum account.  
We'll be consulting on all their  
exploration in the far east.

ELLEN

That's wonderful.

JOHN

So, get Teri and let's go "do the  
town."

He takes the food she was preparing and opens the refrigerator  
door to put it away.

ANGLE IN REFRIGERATOR

On the top shelf is a large tureen of soup. To John's  
amazement, in the soup is a stack of mail.

JOHN (CONT'D)

What is this?

He pulls out the dripping mess.

JOHN (CONT'D)

It's the mail.

ELLEN

(totally confused)  
What?  
(beat;staring)  
How did that get in there?

Teri enters and sees the mail.

TERI

So, that's where the mail went.  
I've been looking all over for it.

JOHN

How did it get in the refrigerator?

TERI

Well, I sure didn't put it there.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLEN

What are you saying, that I did?

TERI

You've been doing some pretty weird things lately, mom.

Ellen starts screaming.

ELLEN

I HAVE NOT. DON'T YOU BLAME THAT ON ME. EVERYTHING THAT GOES WRONG IN THIS HOUSE IS NOT MY FAULT. I DID NOT DO THAT, DO YOU HEAR?

Then, she bursts into tears. Very shaken, John puts down the mail and takes his wife in his arms.

DISSOLVE  
TO:

MONTAGE BEGINS

INT. HOSPITAL -- VARIOUS LABS -- DAY

Ellen taking batteries of tests:

1. A Computer Assisted Tomography (CAT)scan.
2. Giving blood samples.
3. With a NEUROLOGIST, who is staring through a scope deep into her eyes.
4. Inside the clanging MRI machine.
5. Talking to a PSYCHIATRIST.

Through it all, John is by her side.

MONTAGE ENDS

INT. NEUROLOGIST'S OFFICE -- DAY

John and Ellen are seated in the neurologist's office. They're both very nervous. The Doctor enters. There is a look of deep concern in his eyes. John takes Ellen's hand.

JOHN

So, what's the situation, doctor?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NEUROLOGIST

Well, it isn't cancer. That much we know for certain.

They both breathe a sigh of relief.

JOHN

Thank God.

NEUROLOGIST

But the news isn't good.

Both John and Ellen grow tense again.

JOHN

What's wrong?

NEUROLOGIST

All of the tests are pointing in one direction.

(beat; the words come hard)

Ellen, we believe that you have Alzheimers Disease.

JOHN

What?

It's as though someone has hit them in the face.

NEUROLOGIST

Of course, it's impossible to be absolutely certain. But we're as sure as we can be. We've ruled out every other cause...

JOHN

But that's an old person's disease. She isn't old.

NEUROLOGIST

You're right. In the vast majority of cases it strikes people over 65. But a small minority contract it much younger. In such cases, the disease is an inherited genetic mutation. Unfortunately, since Ellen was adopted, we know nothing about her birth parents or genetic heritage.

JOHN

This can't be right.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN (CONT'D)

You've made some kind of mistake.  
We want a second opinion.

NEUROLOGIST

And we want you to get one. There's  
nothing that would make us happier  
than to be proven wrong.

(beat)

Several of my colleagues are waiting  
outside to talk with you about  
alternatives. It isn't as hopeless  
as it sounds.

(beat)

But right now...I'm going to leave  
you alone for a few minutes.

(beat)

Ellen, I'm so sorry.

The doctor leaves the room. Slowly, John turns to look at  
his wife. Tears are brimming in his eyes.

Ellen looks back at him. Then...as though in a dream...she  
looks away.

INT. JOHN AND ELLEN'S CAR -- DRIVING -- DAY

John and Ellen are driving home after getting the verdict.  
It's raining. Ellen stares straight ahead as though she is  
made of stone. John reaches over and tries to take her hand,  
but she does not respond.

ELLEN (V.O.)

Oh, how alone I was on that day.

(beat)

Gone. Everything. With one word.  
Burned to ashes. My children's  
weddings. Seeing my grandchildren  
yet to be born. Growing old with my  
husband.

(beat)

And the past. That gone too. One  
by one, all the memories would be  
stolen.

(beat)

Even the faces of the ones I love so  
much.

(beat)

On that day. Over and over. The  
words screamed out, "Where is God.  
Where is God?"

INT. JOHN AND ELLEN'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

John and Ellen are in their bedroom, trying to come to grips with what has happened.

JOHN  
 (frightened and  
 brokenhearted)  
 Look, we're going to fight this.  
 We'll get a second opinion. Maybe  
 they're wrong.

ELLEN  
 They're not wrong.

JOHN  
 We'll get you the best medical care  
 in the world. They said there are  
 new drugs that help control the  
 symptoms.

ELLEN  
 But there's nothing they can do to  
 stop it.

He tries to take her in his arms.

JOHN  
 Sweetheart, we'll get everyone in  
 the church to pray. We'll face this  
 together.

When he says this, the dam of rage in Ellen breaks.

ELLEN  
 (bitterly)  
 FACE IT TOGETHER? WHAT ARE YOU  
 SAYING, JOHN? WE WON'T FACE ANYTHING  
 TOGETHER. DAY BY DAY AND WEEK BY  
 WEEK I'M GOING TO BE MORE AND MORE  
 ALONE. AND IT WON'T STOP UNTIL I'M  
DEAD.

(pause; her heart is  
 breaking)  
 And you'll be alone, too.  
 (beat)  
 Oh, God, I want to die right now.

She buries her face in his arms. For a long moment, he holds her.

JOHN  
 We've got to tell the children.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

In terror, she pushes him away.

ELLEN  
NO. NO. Please, don't do that.

JOHN  
Ellen...

ELLEN  
I want my life to be the way it is  
as long as possible. Look at Teri.  
She won't listen to me now. If she  
thinks I'm brain dead, she'll never  
do anything I say.  
(beat)  
Promise me you won't tell them, John.  
Promise me.

JOHN  
All right.

His heart is breaking.

INT. JOHN AND ELLEN'S BEDROOM -- LATER

John and Ellen are in bed. John is exhausted and asleep.  
Ellen lies awake, staring at the ceiling. Tears are streaming  
down her cheeks.

EXT. ALEXANDER'S HOME -- DAY

Alexander lives in a warm, inviting home on the edge of town.  
He's working in his flower garden. He looks up and sees  
John's car pull into the driveway. John gets out and walks  
toward him. It's clear by the look on his face that something  
is terribly wrong.

ALEXANDER  
I tried to call you last night, John.  
What's the verdict? People from the  
church have been asking.

For a moment, John stares at him without speaking. Then...

JOHN  
They believe she has Alzheimer's  
Disease.

ALEXANDER  
Oh, dear Lord...

Tears well in Alexander's eyes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN

Alexander, a long time ago you prayed...and God saved Ellen. You've got to pray again. He's got to do a miracle.

Alexander puts his arm around John's shoulder.

ALEXANDER

Come on inside.

INT. ALEXANDER'S LIVING ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Alexander's living room is as warm and open as the man himself. Over the fireplace hangs a large photo of Alexander and his wife Margaret. Alexander leads John into the room.

JOHN

My wife doesn't deserve this. You know her. She's a good woman.

Quietly, Alexander walks over and looks up at the face of his wife. Suddenly, John remembers Alexander's pain.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. What am I saying? Your wife didn't deserve it either.

(beat)

How can God allow these things to happen?

ALEXANDER

I don't know, John. All I know is that suffering is horrible.

(beat)

And I know how much I miss her, even after all these years.

JOHN

It makes me question everything I've ever believed.

Alexander turns toward him.

ALEXANDER

Let's walk together.

He leads him from the room.

EXT. REAR OF ALEXANDER'S HOME -- MOMENTS LATER

Alexander and John walk out his back gate into a quiet woods. They make their way down a beautiful path.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEXANDER

After the third operation, when I knew my wife was going to die...I entered darkness like I've never known. It felt like God wasn't there. Friends weren't there.

(beat)

I'd come out into these woods at night and scream. Night after night I screamed.

(beat)

And all day long, I watched as Margaret was slipping away.

(beat)

Do you know what was so horrible? I couldn't even stand to be with her. Seeing her pain, made mine even worse.

(beat)

God forgive me, I started to withdraw...and she felt it.

Remembering brings tears to Alexander's eyes.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

But, as I...pulled away...Jesus came closer and closer to her. Her body was a poor scarred wreck. But every day the light grew brighter in her eyes. It was the Light of Heaven.

(beat)

But for me, there was nothing but darkness.

(beat)

I did a lot of screaming in these woods, John. But, finally, there just wasn't anything left.

As Alexander continues, he feels the terrible weight of the past.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

One night I came out and all I could do was fall on my face on the ground. I didn't have the strength to move.

(beat)

The agony was stripping everything away. All the walls I'd built up. The places to hide. Broken and gone.

(beat)

And, suddenly, in the stillness...I was face to face with God.

The forest around them is growing thicker and darker.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

I knew that I could either love Him  
in spite of everything...with none  
of my questions answered. Or I could  
run from Him forever.

(beat)

But the one thing I couldn't do was  
hold on to my wife.

(beat)

I had to let go...

Suddenly, they walk out into a little clearing.

EXT. CLEARING -- CONTINUOUS

ALEXANDER

And this is where I did it. This  
little clearing in the woods.

(beat)

In my mind I built an altar. Right  
here. And on it...I laid the one I  
loved the most in all the world.

(beat)

I gave her up to Him.

(beat)

Twenty-four hours later...she died  
in my arms.

For a moment, Alexander can't go on.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

So...this became my "altar place."

(pause)

After she was gone, I had to find a  
way to let out the sorrow. I had to  
do something with my hands.

(beat)

I started carving on a tree.

Alexander leads John over to a large tree. He pulls back a  
branch. Carved onto the trunk and two of the limbs is the  
body of Jesus...nailed...growing out of the wood.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

What do I know about suffering?

This is all I know.

(beat)

He came into this world. Suffered  
like no man ever did. And He did it  
for you and me. So that we could be  
forgiven.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

(beat)

I look at Jesus...and I see the  
love...and suffering...of God.

Alexander turns to John.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

It's all right to scream, John.  
Just remember. When it's over...He'll  
be there.

EXT. THE BRIGHTON HOME -- EVENING

John's car pulls into the driveway after work. Exhausted,  
he gets out and walks into the house.

INT. KITCHEN -- MOMENTS LATER

John enters the kitchen.

No one is there. Suddenly, he hears Teri scream.

JOHN

TERI?

TERI

I CAN'T STAND IT.

He rushes to find her.

INT. TERI'S ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

John bursts into Teri's room. She's standing over an open  
drawer.

TERI

LOOK WHAT SHE DID.

He looks in the drawer. On top of the clothes is a raw,  
five-pound, beef roast. Teri pulls it out and hands it to  
her father.

TERI (CONT'D)

I HAVE BLOOD ALL OVER MY T-SHIRTS.  
SHE'S GONE COMPLETELY INSANE.

She pulls the T-shirts out and throws them on the floor.

JOHN

Where is she?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TERI

At a teacher's conference.

He leads her out of the room

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE TERI'S ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

They walk down the hall toward the kitchen.

TERI

I can't take this anymore. You keep going to doctors and neither one of you will tell me anything. WHAT IS WRONG WITH HER?

John is very shaken.

JOHN

Teri, I'm sorry. Something is wrong with your mother. Not cancer, but very serious. We're trying to understand how it works. She's taking medicine that may help her.

INT. KITCHEN -- CONTINUOUS

John places the roast in the sink and washes his hands.

JOHN

I promise you'll know everything soon. For now, just try to give your mom some space. And pray for her.

TERI

Pray for her?  
(a sarcastic laugh)  
I'm sick of people telling me to pray. I stopped believing in that kind of garbage a long time ago.

She storms out. John stares after her. A new weight is on his heart.

INT. TEACHERS' CONFERENCE ROOM -- NIGHT

The teachers of Harrison Elementary School are gathered for a conference. They're giving reports on their classes and the coming activities of the year. Ellen, looking beautiful once more (but also very nervous), is awaiting her turn. Ed Shepherd, the teacher she met in the hall, is at the lectern, completing his report.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ED

...And I do expect some of the very best projects I've ever had to come from this class. There are some very bright kids here. And that about does it for my half of the second grade.

There is applause. The principal, VALERIE BEACH, gets up.

VALERIE

Thank you, Ed. That all sounds very exciting. We're going to look forward to that science fair.

(beat)

So, now, on to third grade. We'll begin with our Teacher Of The Year for last year...Ellen Brighton.

More applause.

CU ELLEN'S FACE

Suddenly, from far away, Ellen hears the jangling sounds. She begins perspiring. She gets up and walks to the lectern. Her presentation is completely typed out and she has it with her. She struggles to concentrate on it. But, the jangling sounds get louder.

ELLEN

The first thing I would say is...thank you...to...Ed and Cynthia. From their...test scores, it appears that my third graders...have been...well-prepared in...second grade.

The sounds are louder still. Her nervousness is becoming noticeable. She swallows hard and stares at the report.

ELLEN (CONT'D)

Now...on to plans...for this year.

POV ELLEN

The jangling is all around her. As she looks at the words on the page, they shift into an unknown language.

ELLEN (CONT'D)

Uh...

She stares at the pages until everyone in the room is growing uncomfortable.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLEN (CONT'D)

Well...uhh...I'm afraid...my  
glasses...aren't working right.  
(she takes them off)  
I...I think I...need...a new  
prescription.

She puts them on again. The words just won't change back to normal.

ELLEN (CONT'D)

Valerie, do you mind...if I submit  
my report in writing? I'm just  
not...feeling very well tonight.

VALERIE

That would be fine.  
(beat)  
Do you need a glass of water?

Ellen hands her the report.

ELLEN

No. No, thank you. But I think...I  
will go home.

She walks out of the room. The other teachers stare after her very concerned.

EXT. SCHOOL HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS

Out in the darkened hall, Ellen buries her face in her hands and cries.

ELLEN (V.O.)

Oh, God, please, please...don't take  
away reading. What am I going to  
do...if I can't read?

DISSOLVE  
TO:

INT. JOHN AND ELLEN'S BEDROOM -- CU JOURNAL -- NIGHT

Ellen's hand is writing in the journal. She struggles to control her fingers. The penmanship is changing...growing more out of control.

ELLEN (V.O.)

For so long. Have loved words.  
When..I was young. Wrote poetry.  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Now... write words...to help me  
remember. But next morning.  
Sometimes. Don't know what they  
say. I am...going back. Back. To  
being a little child. A child...*who  
can't read.*

Suddenly, all around her there is a deep, clanging sound.

INT. MRI MACHINE -- DAY

Ellen is lying on her back inside an MRI machine. The clanging is the sound of the machine in operation.

JOHN (V.O.)

That first year, how many times we  
went to the hospital. Four times,  
sometimes five a week. Tests without  
number. Second opinions. Third  
opinions. Endless talking--talking  
to doctors...

INT. NEUROLOGIST'S OFFICE -- DAY

Ellen and John are talking with several doctors, including their neurologist. The stress of the ordeal is on all of their faces.

JOHN (V.O.)

And there was so little they could  
tell us. The drugs seemed to be  
helping. At least we wanted to  
believe they were. But every case  
of Alzheimers is different. No way  
to predict what will happen...or  
when. All they would say is "live  
for the present. Cherish the days  
that you have together." But  
cherishing isn't easy, when your  
heart is being torn to pieces.

(beat)

But, I had found a place to scream.  
And I went there often.

EXT. CLEARING IN THE WOODS -- NIGHT

Brilliant moonlight shines down on Alexander's clearing in the woods. Wisps of fog drift in the trees. John is alone. He paces in agony.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN  
 (whispering)  
 Oh, please God, heal her. Oh, please  
 God heal her...

Finally, he stops, looks up at the sky, raises his fists...and  
 cries out in anguish.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
 WHY IS THIS HAPPENING? WHY?

Unseen among the trees, a man is watching. It's Alexander.  
 His head is bowed. As he listens to John, tears are in his  
 eyes. Quietly, he turns away.

DISSOLVE  
 TO:

INT. JOHN'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

John's hands are moving on the keyboard.

JOHN (V.O.)  
 But screaming brought no peace. I  
 felt as though I were sinking into  
 the ground and soon there would be  
 nothing left of me.  
 (beat)  
 Then, one evening Ellen came into my  
 office. It was so strange. Something  
 had happened. Her eyes were filled  
 with peace. She said, "John, I quit  
 my job. I can't teach anymore.  
 Kyle is coming home for the weekend.  
 It's time to tell the children."

INT. FAMILY ROOM -- DAY

Kyle and Teri have just received the word about their mother's  
 condition. Teri is crying. Kyle is fighting back tears.

KYLE  
 I'm going to drop out of college.  
 You're going to need help.

Ellen takes his hand.

ELLEN  
 No, no, no. I don't want you to do  
 that.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KYLE

But, I want to be here. You've always been there for us. Now, it's our turn.

ELLEN

Kyle, don't you understand? You and Teri are my dreams. I have no other dreams left. All I want is for both of you to go on and grow and follow God. Don't stop your lives because of me.

TERI

What's going to happen to you, mom?

ELLEN

I'll begin to fade. Maybe slowly. Maybe quickly. The things that I know will vanish. My memory will slip away.

(struggling for words)

There may come a moment...when I won't even know...any of you. But that's only because a veil has been lowered over my eyes.

(beat)

When that day comes...oh, remember how much I love you. Remember that the real me...my soul...my spirit...is still there...hidden...but loving on and on. Remember...whatever I may look like on the outside...my love for all of you...will never fail.

Both of her children hug her...mingling their tears with hers.

DISSOLVE  
TO:

EXT. LOVELY CABIN IN THE MOUNTAINS -- DAY

John and Ellen's car pulls up at a lovely cabin in the mountains. The Fall leaves are brilliant. The beauty of God's creation is everywhere. John and Ellen get out. Ellen looks lovely and appears to be totally normal.

JOHN (V.O.)

A week later it was our twentieth anniversary. I took Ellen back to the cabin in the mountains where we had spent our honeymoon.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ellen exults in the beauty around her.

ELLEN

Oh, John, it's so beautiful. Look  
at how God has painted the leaves.

(beat)

Everything is just like I remember.

She turns to him. Her eyes are wistful and soft.

ELLEN (CONT'D)

Am I like you remember?

John takes her in his arms.

JOHN

You're even more beautiful than the  
first day we came.

MONTAGE BEGINS

Pure joy. For a few hours, time stands still.

1. John and Ellen ride horses through the autumn blaze of  
color. Laughing. Happy.

2. They share a picnic.

3. John pushes Ellen on a swing.

MONTAGE ENDS

EXT. WOODS NEAR WATERFALL -- AFTERNOON

John and Ellen walk hand in hand through the woods. She  
stops and turns to him.

ELLEN

John, I have something to ask you.

JOHN

What is it, Sweetheart?

ELLEN

Knowing everything the way you do  
now, would you still have married  
me?

Tears well in his eyes.

JOHN

I wouldn't give up a day of the  
life we've spent together.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLEN

No regrets?

JOHN

Oh, many regrets. That I didn't love you more. Regrets for anger. For harsh things that I've said. For selfish blindness over so many years. For the times I made you cry. A thousand regrets.

(beat)

Will you forgive me for all of those?

ELLEN

(whispering)

Yes. But you need to forgive me too.

JOHN

For what? There's nothing.

ELLEN

There is. How often I've thought only of myself. How often I've hurt you and turned away. I haven't been the wife I could have been. Forgive me. If only I could live it over.

He holds her in his arms.

JOHN

Forgiven

(beat)

Ellen, I love you so much.

ELLEN

Let's lay all the regrets behind us...and remember this moment, whatever comes.

She begins whispering a prayer.

ELLEN (CONT'D)

Oh, Jesus, hold my husband in your arms...

(beat)

Hold him, Lord...when I have slipped away.

INT. CABIN LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

The living room of the cabin is a place for romance. There's a huge couch, overstuffed chairs and a stone fireplace.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

John and Ellen have just finished a wonderful meal. They're sitting on the couch in front of a fire. Ellen's eyes are sparkling. John looks at her. She is so beautiful.

JOHN

If only we could stop our lives and  
stay in this room forever.

He puts his arms around her and pulls her close.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Ellen, I love you.

He's about to kiss her, when she looks up at him...her eyes filled with wonder.

ELLEN

Today was so beautiful. The most  
beautiful day of my life. You took  
me riding. And we had a picnic.  
And you pushed me on a swing.

(beat)

You've been gone so long, daddy.  
Years and years. And I've missed  
you so much. But, now you're back.  
And I never want you to go away.

Completely contented, she lays her head on his chest. Tears well in John's eyes, as he strokes her hair.

INT. CABIN BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Ellen sleeps alone on the huge, romantic bed.

INT. CABIN LIVING ROOM

John is lying on the large couch. As he stares upward, the tears are still in his eyes.

JOHN (V.O.)

From that night on, I slept alone.  
As time passed, more and more she  
became a child. And I couldn't take  
advantage of her innocence.

(beat)

That was our last trip together. By  
the time our twenty-first anniversary  
came, there was much more  
deterioration. The woman I loved  
was...slipping away.

EXT. CHURCH -- ESTABLISHING -- MORNING

It's Sunday morning. A choir is singing inside a beautiful, old church.

DISSOLVE  
TO:

INT. CHURCH SANCTUARY -- LATER

The church is full. John and Ellen are in their regular pew. Teri and Kyle are with them. Ellen's face is ravaged. There are dark circles under her eyes and her cheeks are hollow. She seems very nervous. She's twisting a small handkerchief between her fingers. The PASTOR is preaching.

PASTOR

...all around us people are lonely  
and suffering. In a world of shallow  
laughter, sorrow is everywhere.

(beat)

And the call of Jesus is to go into  
that world and feed the hungry, lift  
the down-trodden. Show the depths  
of His love.

Ellen is growing more and more nervous. She's breathing harder. She stares down at nothing.

PASTOR (CONT'D)

But to do that we must allow Him to  
make our lives into broken bread and  
poured out wine for the needs of  
others. To eat a loaf of bread you  
have to break it. And wine can't be  
drunk unless grapes are crushed.  
Jesus says, "Go in my name. Pour  
out your lives. Feed a world that  
is starving for my love..."

Suddenly, Ellen begins sobbing. John puts his arm around her, trying to calm her down. Everyone is staring at them. John tries to lead her from the room. But, she won't budge.

Without warning, Ellen gets up out of the pew and walks straight up to the altar. There, she stands, crying, wringing her hands...looking up at the cross in the stained glass window. John has followed her. He puts his arm around her. The pastor steps down from the pulpit. Tears are in his eyes. He puts his arms around both of them...then speaks to the congregation.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PASTOR (CONT'D)

Broken bread and poured out wine.  
It comes in many forms. But, it  
always begins with a soul crying out  
to God. Ellen is a gift from Jesus  
to all of us.

(beat)

Let's pray for her...and John and  
Teri and Kyle.

(beat)

Oh, Lord, we lift up this wonderful  
family. We lift up your child, Ellen.  
Her heart is breaking. Only you  
know the depth of the hurt that she  
carries inside. We ask that you to  
come right now...heal that hurt...and  
bring her peace.

Then, the pastor and John and Ellen walk down the aisle...Kyle  
and Teri join them. Together, they walk past friends who  
are crying. Alexander. Kay Hartly. And others. As they  
move through the sanctuary someone begins singing the  
beautiful old hymn, "All The Way, My Savior Leads Me." The  
congregation joins in.

EXT. THE BRIGHTON HOME -- AFTERNOON

It's Sunday afternoon. John and Alexander are on the porch  
of the Brighton home. John is anguished by the experience  
of the morning.

JOHN

I just don't know what to do. She's  
never done that before. She's getting  
worse and worse. Everything is  
disintegrating.

ALEXANDER

John, you know what happened this  
morning? It was a wonderful thing.  
Why do most good Christians go to  
church? Oh, we go for lots of  
reasons. But, not like Ellen. She  
came like a little child...with empty  
hands. And in her sorrow, all she  
wanted was to meet Jesus.

At that moment, Kyle and Ellen come out of the house. She  
is smiling and happy. They sit down on the swing. Kyle is  
amazingly gentle with her.

ELLEN

Sing. Let's sing. Let's sing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KYLE

Okay, mom. What would you like to sing?

Ellen begins singing off key, but with real joy in her heart, the little, children's song...

ELLEN

Jesus, loves me, this I know...for the Bible tells me so...

Kyle joins in. Alexander looks at John.

ALEXANDER

Do you think Jesus met Ellen this morning? I think He was right there at the front...and He took her in his arms.

Kyle and Ellen continue singing...as John stares brokenhearted at his wife.

EXT. JOHN AND ELLEN'S BEDROOM -- MORNING

A large, bouquet of roses is beside the bed. The card reads, "Sweetheart, I love you. Happy twenty-second anniversary. John."

Ellen sits in the bed. On the coverlet are a dozen pictures of her family. She stares at them...touching them gently, one by one. More and more she is living in her own world. Teri comes in ready for school. She looks more mature.

TERI

Hi, mom. I'm off to school.

Her mother stares at her as though she were a stranger.

ELLEN

Grace?

TERI

No, I'm not Grace, mom. I'm your daughter Teri. This one.

She points at her picture on the bed. Ellen picks it up, lovingly.

TERI (CONT'D)

I'll see you this afternoon. Mrs. Grady is here. She'll be up in a minute.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She kisses her mother goodbye and leaves. John steps out of the bathroom. He's dressed in jogging clothes. MRS. GRADY enters. She's a care-giver in her late fifties.

JOHN  
Hello, Mrs. Grady.

MRS. GRADY  
Well, how is everyone today?

JOHN  
Doing pretty well.

MRS. GRADY  
Are you feeling good, Ellen? Do you want to get up and get dressed?

No response. John bends down to kiss his wife. But, when Ellen realizes that he's leaving, she starts to scream and clings to him.

ELLEN  
NO. NO-NO-NO-NO-NO...

Mrs. Grady comes over and tries to comfort her.

MRS. GRADY  
It's all right. He's coming back in a little while.

Agonized, John tears himself away. Ellen keeps on screaming.

JOHN  
Maybe I'd better not go.

MRS. GRADY  
No, you go on ahead, Mr. Brighton. It's important that you have some time for yourself. That's why I'm here.

John heads for the door. Ellen shrieks louder. He looks back.

MRS. GRADY (CONT'D)  
Go on, now. We'll be fine.

EXT. THE BRIGHTON HOME -- MOMENTS LATER

John leaves the house to jog. But, outside, he can still hear his wife screaming. He forces himself to walk out the front gate and start to run.

EXT. ROAD IN THE WOODS -- MORNING

John is running down a road in the woods...the same road that he and Ellen ran on so many times. As he runs, tears streak his face. Finally, he can't run any longer. Stumbling over to the side, he leans against a tree. Thinking he is alone, he cries out in anguish...

JOHN

Oh, God...I don't know what to do.  
Please...help me...help me...

He doesn't hear another jogger a distance behind him. It's a very attractive woman in her late thirties. This is JULIA SINCLAIR. She sees John leaning against a tree and hears him crying out..."Help me. Help me." Thinking that he's in trouble, she jogs faster toward him. But, when she gets close, she realizes that he's crying and praying. Pulling back, she stops where he can't see her.

JOHN (CONT'D)

She's suffering so much, Lord. And  
I'm completely helpless. Oh, God...

Finally, John gets control of himself and starts to run again. Unseen, Julia paces a distance behind him. As John runs, he concentrates -- forcing himself to keep on going. But then, he hears another runner and turns. Julia pulls up beside him.

JULIA

Hi.

JOHN

Hi.

JULIA

Beautiful morning for a run.

JOHN

Yeah, I guess so.

JULIA

I've seen you running here every  
once in awhile...

(beat)

But, you're not very regular.

JOHN

Can't do it every day.

JULIA

Guess that's why you're so slow.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

John turns and stares at her.

JOHN

What?

JULIA

You know...a little out of shape.

JOHN

I beg your pardon.

JULIA

Listen, it's nothing to be ashamed of. Happens to the best of us. I hear the legs give out first.

JOHN

Really! Is that what you hear?

He picks up his pace. She picks up hers and stays right with him.

JULIA

Hey, be careful. You shouldn't push yourself.

He runs faster, bent on outrunning her. But he can't. She's with him every step of the way. Finally, it's a dead sprint, going at a pace that neither of them can maintain. They both start laughing. Then, they break into a walk -- laughing so hard that neither can speak. Finally...

JULIA (CONT'D)

My name's Julia Sinclair.

JOHN

John Brighton.

They shake hands.

JULIA

Can we do this at a reasonable pace?

JOHN

I think we'd better...before I have a heart attack.

They start jogging again. This time, much slower...and still laughing.

EXT. THE BRIGHTON HOME--ESTABLISHING -- DAY

It's winter. A week before Christmas. Snow is on the ground. Other houses on the block are decorated for the season. Christmas trees can be seen through front windows. But, there are no decorations on the Brighton house...and the front drapes are closed.

Kyle's car pulls into the driveway. He gets out and removes a big garbage bag of dirty clothes. Then, he goes inside.

INT. KITCHEN -- MOMENTS LATER

Kyle enters the kitchen.

KYLE  
Hey, anybody home.

No answer. Dropping the garbage bag on the floor, he walks into the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

No one here either. He calls out again more loudly.

KYLE  
ANYBODY AROUND?

Teri's voice comes from upstairs.

TERI  
Up here.

He heads toward the sound.

INT. TERI'S ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Teri is at her desk, doing homework. The decor of the room has shifted to reflect her new interests. In one corner is an aquarium with several tropical fish. Kyle enters.

KYLE  
Hey.

TERI  
(not looking at him)  
Hey, yourself.

KYLE  
Where are mom and dad?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TERI

Where are they always? At the hospital.

He looks at the aquarium.

KYLE

So, you finally got the fish.

TERI

(still not looking up)  
Yeah, I had more, but they ate each other.

KYLE

Cool.  
(beat)  
You seem a little down. You all right?

TERI

Just bubbling with happiness.

KYLE

How's mom?

TERI

On a disintegration scale of one to ten--ten being normal.

(beat)  
Oh, I'd say about a four.

KYLE

How's dad holding up?

TERI

Who?

KYLE

Dad.

TERI

Oh, you mean the older male who wanders through every once in awhile? Wouldn't know. Hardly ever see him.

Kyle walks over and sits down.

KYLE

Okay, Teri, what's goin' on?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TERI

(lashing out)

Nothing...except the usual insanity. This isn't a family anymore. It's an asylum. And I get to live here. Lucky me.

KYLE

Dad's doing the best he can.

TERI

If you're talking about the older male, I saw him this week for ten minutes. And last week I got fifteen. Mom thinks I'm her cousin Grace. I don't have any parents anymore. I might as well be renting a room.

KYLE

That's not true.

TERI

Really? In case you didn't notice, it's almost Christmas. You see any decorations? You see any cookies? Dad hasn't even had time to buy presents. There won't be any Christmas this year...and maybe that's for the best. Why fake it?

He stares at her.

KYLE

Sounds like a bad attitude.

TERI

Look, I don't want to hear anything from you. You get to leave any time you want to. I have to stay here.

A look of determination comes to his face. He stands up.

KYLE

Okay, pathetic. Let's go.

TERI

What?

KYLE

I said, let's go.

TERI

What are you talking about?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He grabs her and pulls.

TERI (CONT'D)  
Leave me alone.

KYLE  
Nope. You're coming. We've got  
work to do.

She groans.

TERI  
You belong in this family. You're  
as crazy as everybody else around  
here.

But she lets him lead her out of the room.

EXT. THE BRIGHTON HOME -- NIGHT

John and Ellen's car pulls into the driveway. They park  
next to their son's car. John helps Ellen out. He leads her  
like a little child.

JOHN  
Ellen, look. Kyle's home for  
Christmas break.

Ellen stares at the car as John helps her up onto the porch.  
They open the front door...and walk inside.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

The instant John and Ellen enter, lights flash on and Kyle  
and Teri yell, "SURPRISE." Tears well in John's eyes as he  
looks around. The room is completely decorated for Christmas.  
A Christmas carol begins to play on the stereo. Ellen walks  
into the room like a child into wonderland. Going to the  
tree, she gently touches one of the ornaments. John hugs  
Kyle and Teri.

JOHN  
Thank you, guys. I don't know how  
to thank you.

INT. DINING ROOM -- AFTERNOON

It's Christmas dinner. A huge, roast turkey is in the center  
of the table. The Brighton family is gathered. Alexander  
is with them. Kyle's girlfriend, CINDY is there. Ellen  
looks from one person to the other...smiling.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN  
Alexander, this is a very special  
dinner. My children made it.

TERI  
With a lot of help from Cindy.

Cindy smiles.

CINDY  
I didn't do very much. Teri's really  
good at this.

TERI  
I learned it all from mom.

ALEXANDER  
Well, it looks delicious. Of course,  
I won't know for sure until I actually  
test it. Which I can't wait to do.  
So, when are going to say "grace."

JOHN  
Let's do that right now.

He's about to bow his head, when Kyle stops him.

KYLE  
(very nervous)  
Uh...Dad, we have something special  
to give thanks for this Christmas.

JOHN  
What's that?

KYLE  
Well, uh...last night...I asked Cindy  
to marry me...and she said, "Yes."

Kyle lifts Cindy's hand from under the table. On her finger  
is a diamond engagement ring. Teri cheers.

TERI  
ALL RIIIIIGHT. I FINALLY GET A SISTER.

ALEXANDER  
Blessings on both of you.

John is shocked and doesn't know what to say.

JOHN  
This is...wonderful.  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN (CONT'D)

I...didn't even know that you were...that serious yet.

KYLE

I know, dad. You've just been so busy. We didn't want to bother you.

ALEXANDER

Well, there is a lot to be thankful for this year.

JOHN

You're absolutely right. Let's pray.

Everyone joins hands. Still shaken, John bows his head.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Father, on this Christmas day we thank you for all the gifts of joy that you have given. First, I want to thank you for my children, Kyle and Teri...and now Cindy. And for Ellen, my wonderful wife. Thank you for my friend Alexander who has stood beside me for so many years. But most of all we thank you for Jesus whose birth we celebrate on this day...

As John prays, Ellen's eyes remain open. Slowly, she looks at one person after another around the table. Finally, she looks at Kyle.

John's voice fades away. In her mind soft music whispers. And she hears the happy sounds of a child playing long ago.

POV ELLEN

Across the table she sees Kyle...not as a young man in his twenties, but as a little boy of eight. Holding hands with his head bowed.

Tears fill her eyes.

DISSOLVE  
TO:

INT. JOHN AND ELLEN'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

The soft music continues. One last time, Ellen tries to write in her journal. Next to the book is a picture of her husband and children.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

As she looks at it, her eyes are filled with love.

Her "writing" is only childish scribbles. But she makes each mark with great care. As she works, over and over she whispers...

ELLEN

Love them...love them...me...so much.  
Jesus...Jesus...love them.

Slowly, she lays the pencil down. As she looks at the picture...the journal drops to the floor.

DISSOLVE  
TO:

INT. JOHN'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

John is at the computer. His fingers move across the keys. His face is filled with pain.

JOHN (V.O.)

I'm so lonely. Ellen has forgotten my name. She hardly ever speaks anymore. How I miss her.

(beat)

Out of all the love that we have shared, only one thing remains. She loves to hold hands. So, we do it for hours.

(beat)

Strange to be so lonely, and yet have no time. No time for Teri or Kyle. No time for work. My business is suffering. Inside, I feel old and tired and broken. And for so long, all of my prayers have turned into screams.

(beat)

And the darkness never goes away.

EXT. THE BRIGHTON HOME -- ESTABLISHING -- MORNING

It's Spring. The front yard of the Brighton home is filled with flowers. John and Ellen's car is parked on the driveway.

INT. KITCHEN -- MORNING

Ellen is at the kitchen table in her bathrobe. A bowl of cereal is in front of her, but she isn't eating. She's very disturbed. Nervously, she looks around. Mrs. Grady is cleaning the sink.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MRS. GRADY

Ellen, you're not eating your  
breakfast. You need to eat.

(beat)

You're looking for your husband,  
aren't you? You don't like it when  
he's gone. But, everything is fine.  
He's away on a business trip and  
he'll be back tomorrow night.

(beat)

Now, you stay right here. I've got  
to put in another load of wash.

She heads down the basement steps. The instant she's gone,  
Ellen stands up. For a moment, she looks around, her  
nervousness growing. Then, she sees the car keys on the  
counter. Slowly, she picks them up and stares at them.

INT. BASEMENT STAIRCASE -- MOMENTS LATER

Mrs. Grady walks up the steps with a basket of clean clothes  
to be folded.

INT. KITCHEN -- CONTINUOUS

When she enters the kitchen, shock comes to her face. Ellen  
is gone. The door leading outside is open. Dropping the  
basket, she rushes over to it.

MRS. GRADY

ELLEN. ELLEN...

ANGLE OUTSIDE

To her horror, the car that was on the driveway is gone.

MRS. GRADY (CONT'D)

Oh, Lord, help us...

INT. JOHN AND ELLEN'S CAR -- DRIVING ON SUBURBAN STREET --  
MORNING

Wide-eyed and lost, Ellen drives down a suburban street.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET -- CONTINUOUS

She goes right through a stop sign. Another car almost hits  
her. She doesn't notice.

INT. HI-TECH CONFERENCE ROOM -- MORNING

Six powerful-looking executives are seated around a massive  
table in a lavish, hi-tech conference room.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Across from them are John Brighton and two of his associates, PHILIP CALDERON, an eagle-faced man in his forties and STEFANIE WOOLRICH, a bright, energetic, scientist of 38.

John is standing. On a large, monitor near him is a graphic that reads: BRIGHTON ASSOCIATES. SPECIALISTS IN GEOLOGICAL EXPLORATION. Appropriate presentational music is in the background. Stefanie is controlling the visuals from a notebook computer. The next visual comes up. It's a sea of oil derricks.

JOHN

Just a brief review of our corporate history. Founded only ten years ago, Brighton Associates has accumulated an unparalleled track record of success in oil exploration. From Malaysia, to the Saudi Arabian desert, to the Alaskan tundra, our geologists have guided over twenty major explorations. There is no consulting firm in the industry with such a high percentage of...

Suddenly, his beeper goes off. The sound jars him. He looks down at it...and his eyes grow wide.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Gentlemen...ladies...if you would excuse me. I need to make an emergency call. Stefanie, perhaps you could continue.

Picking up his cell phone, he leaves the room. Stefanie takes over.

STEFANIE

As John was saying, there is no consulting firm in the industry with such a percentage of high producing wells.

Philip Calderon gets up and follows John out.

INT. EXECUTIVE SUITE HALLWAY -- MOMENTS LATER

Calderon finds John just completing a cell phone call. His face is ashen.

JOHN

(into the phone)  
All right. I understand. Thank you. I'm on my way.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CALDERON

John, what's happened?

JOHN

I've got to fly home immediately.

CALDERON

Why?

JOHN

My wife got out of the house. She took the car and they can't find her. You and Stefanie will have to go on without me.

John starts walking toward the elevator. Calderon stays with him.

CALDERON

John, that's impossible. Larry and his team want to hear from you. This is the biggest deal we've ever had...and it's right in our hands. You can't do this to us.

JOHN

I don't have any choice, Phil.

CALDERON

NO. I don't accept that. You do have a choice. Are the police looking for her?

JOHN

Yes.

CALDERON

All we need are two more hours. You can't get there in two hours. And by that time they'll have found her.

JOHN

I've got to go home.

CALDERON

John, we can't run a business this way. You're never around. You miss meetings. And now you're going to blow the biggest deal of our lives.

John finds the elevator and pushes the button.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN  
I'm sorry, Phil.

The door opens. John gets in. The door begins to slide shut.

CALDERON  
WHAT ABOUT US? DON'T YOU CARE ABOUT  
US AT ALL?

John can't even look at him.

CALDERON (CONT'D)  
JOHN...

The door closes.

EXT. ALLEY -- DAY

A police car, with its lights on, is stopped in an alley beside Ellen's car. She has jammed it against a telephone pole. The driver's door is standing open. Ellen is nowhere to be seen. The officer is on his radio, calling it in.

EXT. HARRISON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL -- DAY

Ellen, in her bathrobe, wanders onto the school grounds. She stares at the building. The children are all inside.

ELLEN  
(mumbling)  
Late...late...late...

She walks up the front steps.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY -- MOMENTS LATER

Ellen is walking down the school hallway, mumbling to herself. All the children are in their classes except for several who see her and stare. Finally, she comes to her old classroom. The door is open. She sees another woman teaching in her place. (This is MRS. EDWARDS.)

INT. ELLEN'S CLASSROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Ellen enters the room. The class freezes. The teacher stares at her.

MRS. EDWARDS  
May I...help you?

Ellen walks over to the desk and begins rustling through the papers, mumbling to herself.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The teacher turns to a little boy on the first row.

MRS. EDWARDS (CONT'D)  
 (calmly)  
 Robert, would you go and get the  
 principal?

Robert quickly leaves the room. Mrs. Edwards walks up to Ellen and gently touches her arm.

MRS. EDWARDS (CONT'D)  
 My name is Mrs. Edwards. What's  
 your name?

Ellen completely ignores her. Abruptly, she walks over to the blackboard and picks up a piece of chalk. Mumbling louder and louder, she begins making meaningless marks. Several of the children giggle. Ellen gets very upset.

ELLEN  
 NO.NO.NO.NO.NO...

MRS. EDWARDS  
 Children, please be quiet.

The principal, Valerie Beach, arrives. When she sees Ellen, her heart goes out to her.

VALERIE  
 Ellen...

Ellen stares at her without recognition.

VALERIE (CONT'D)  
 Ellen, it's me, Valerie. Do you  
 remember me?  
 (beat)  
 Ellen, why don't you come to my  
 office. Let's sit down and talk.  
 Just the two of us. Like old times.  
 I've missed you so much.

Gently, she tries to lead her out of the room. But Ellen grows enraged. She shoves Valerie and begins screaming.

ELLEN  
 TEACH-TEACH-TEACH-TEACH-TEACH...

The screaming grows louder and louder. She pounds on the board.

EXT. THE BRIGHTON HOME -- NIGHT

A cab pulls up in front of the Brighton home. John pushes some money at the driver, then jumps out with a small suitcase. As the cab drives away, he runs toward the house.

EXT. LIVING ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

John rushes into the living room and drops his bag. Teri is lying on the couch reading a book, the soul of placidity.

JOHN  
Where's your mother?

TERI  
(without looking up  
from her book)  
In her room. So, how was the big  
trip, dad?

John rushes out of the room without answering.

TERI (CONT'D)  
That good, huh? Cool.

INT. KITCHEN -- MOMENTS LATER

John enters the kitchen. Mrs. Grady meets him.

MRS. GRADY  
Oh, Mr. Brighton. I'm so sorry. I  
went down into the basement for one  
minute and she was gone. It'll never  
happen again.

JOHN  
It's all right. Don't worry about  
it. I'm just glad they found her.

He moves on through the room.

INT. JOHN AND ELLEN'S BEDROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Ellen is sitting up in bed, in a beautiful nightgown, surrounded by her pictures. Her hair is combed and she's looking peaceful...almost pretty. When John enters, she doesn't seem to notice him. He sits down on the bed and takes her in his arms.

JOHN  
Ellen, I'm so glad you're safe. I  
was so worried about you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Suddenly, she looks up from the pictures straight at him. She smiles and whispers.

ELLEN

John. Teach. Teach-teach-teach-teach.

He hugs her and buries his face in her hair.

EXT. ROAD IN THE WOODS -- MORNING

John is jogging down the woodland road. Julia is beside him. They've been running together each morning for quite a while.

JOHN

...And that was the first time she'd said my name in months.

(beat)

You know, my partner was right. I didn't have to come home at all. She was perfectly safe.

JULIA

But you didn't know that.

They slow to a walk.

JOHN

Well, we didn't get the contract. My team is enraged at me and I can't blame them. I'm failing in everything.

JULIA

No, you're not.

JOHN

You should talk to my daughter. She's so angry. I'll bet we haven't had a real conversation in a year.

JULIA

What's unusual about that? She's a teenage girl.

JOHN

And my son. He's engaged. I'm afraid he's going to get married before he graduates. The girl seems wonderful, but she's a stranger.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN (CONT'D)

(beat)

Every week, I think the chaos can't get worse--but then it does. People tell me "there's nothing more you can do for your wife. She doesn't even know who you are. Put her into a nursing home."

(beat)

But...sometimes... she does know who I am. I see it in her eyes.

JULIA

Let's sit down for a minute.

She leads him over to a fallen tree at the edge of the woods.

JOHN

Julia, I'm sorry to dump on you this way. Having someone to talk to means so much to me.

Julia smiles.

JULIA

And I love to hear you talk. Sometimes I wish we could keep on running all day.

(tears well in her eyes)

Isn't life funny? Ellen barely knows you. You're lonely, and, yet, you agonize about putting her in a home.

(beat)

My husband left me for his secretary...even though I was always there for him.

(beat)

John, listening to you every morning, I've learned so much about love. About what commitment really means. I know your strength comes from faith in God. Faith like that must be wonderful. I wish I had it. But, I'm learning. I'm learning.

Suddenly, she takes his hand and looks into his eyes.

JULIA (CONT'D)

There's something I want you to know. I've been very lonely too.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JULIA (CONT'D)

This hour together every morning has become the high point of my day.

(beat)

I just want you to know...how much I care.

Her eyes are soft. As John looks into them, he's jarred by what he feels.

INT. JOHN'S BUSINESS OFFICE -- DAY

John's office at work is expensively furnished, though not lavish. It's decorated with unique items that represent his years as a geologist in the petroleum industry. John is behind his desk. He's in the middle of a heated meeting with his two partners, Phil Calderon and Stefanie Woolrich.

CALDERON

John, we can't go on like this. We're hemorrhaging people and money And now we've blown the biggest deal of our lives.

JOHN

Don't say, "we," Phil. I did it and I take full responsibility for that.

CALDERON

Look, we started this business together and we've known each other a long time. I'm going to tell you the truth. I'm tired of your "mea culpas." During this past year we've lost three major accounts and all of them have been your fault. You don't return calls. You cancel meetings at the last minute. You're not available for consultation. And every time it happens you apologize, but nothing changes.

STEFANIE

John, this morning Andy Powell and Karen Feldman turned in their resignations. The word is out. We're going down hill.

CALDERON

And you know what that means, the sharks are circling. All of the accounts are jittery.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN

I'll make some calls.

CALDERON

That is not enough. You've got to be here, John, every day.

JOHN

But, why is that necessary? We've got brilliant talent in this organization. It shouldn't all depend on me.

STEFANIE

But you're the one with the international reputation. When a hundred million dollars is at stake people want to talk to you.

CALDERON

And they are paying to talk to you.

JOHN

(suddenly very tired)

All right, I understand that.

(beat)

Look, I don't know what to tell you. Do you want me to lie and say I'm going to be here more often? Well, it isn't true. My personal situation grows more complex by the day.

Calderon erupts.

CALDERON

WELL, WHAT ABOUT OUR "PERSONAL SITUATIONS," JOHN? WE ALL HAVE HOUSES TO PAY FOR AND FAMILIES TO FEED. WHEN THIS BUSINESS STARTED WE MADE A COMMITMENT TO EACH OTHER. DOESN'T THAT MATTER ANYMORE?

JOHN

OF COURSE, IT MATTERS. DO YOU THINK I WANT US TO FAIL? I WILL BE HERE AS OFTEN AS POSSIBLE. I WILL DO EVERYTHING I CAN.

CALDERON

I KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS -- NOTHING IS GOING TO CHANGE.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STEFANIE

John, we're not insensitive to your tragedy. Our hearts go out to you.

JOHN

I know that. Everyone in this organization has been incredibly patient and supportive.

STEFANIE

That's because we care.

(beat)

I don't know how to say this...

JOHN

Say what you think, Stefanie.

STEFANIE

All right.

(beat)

You're not helping your family by letting your business die. We admire your commitment to Ellen. It's an example to all of us.

(beat)

But, there comes a time to let go. My grandmother had Alzheimers. After a few years, we couldn't keep her at home. Her mind was gone and she was destroying our lives.

(beat)

She just wasn't...a person anymore.

JOHN

Really? And when did that happen? What's the sign that a human being is no longer a person? When they can't speak? When they become incontinent? Or when we just don't want them around?

STEFANIE

You know what I mean?

JOHN

Yes, I do. I should put my wife in a home so that I can get on with "living"...making money and being successful.

CALDERON

Is there something wrong with that?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN

I've made my choice, Phil. And I'm not going back. My wife needs me. My children need me. And they are more important than all the money in the world.

CALDERON

This is a waste of time.

He starts to walk out.

STEFANIE

Phil...

CALDERON

IT'S NO USE TALKING TO HIM.

(beat)

Just remember one thing, John. When it's all over and your business is dead...YOU KILLED IT WITH YOUR OWN HANDS.

He stalks out. John turns away. Discouraged, Stefanie leaves too. John's SECRETARY enters.

SECRETARY

There's someone waiting outside.

JOHN

Who is it? I really don't want to see anyone.

SECRETARY

She said to give you her card.

John takes the card, looks at it...and is surprised.

CU CARD

It reads: JULIA SINCLAIR, Attorney at Law.

JOHN

All right. Send her in.

The secretary steps out. A moment later, Julia enters. She's in business attire and is very beautiful.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Julia! What a pleasant surprise.

She hugs him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JULIA

I hope I'm not interrupting your day.

JOHN

The way this day is going, I pray for interruptions.

JULIA

You were so 'down' this morning that I was worried. Do you have time for lunch? There's a little place close by.

JOHN

Let's get out of here.

EXT. GARDEN CAFE -- DAY

John and Julia are at a romantic, garden cafe. In this setting, Julia is even more beautiful. It's the radiance of a woman in love.

JOHN

So, basically, I've been given an ultimatum...my business or my wife.

(beat)

And I can't blame them for being angry. I've let a lot of things fall apart.

JULIA

I'm so sorry, John. What happens if your business fails? Will you be all right?

JOHN

Oh, I've been careful with my money. Kyle's university is paid for. Beyond that I've got enough to last about a year. And I'm sure I could get a job somewhere else.

JULIA

It's tragic. This was your dream.

JOHN

(sadly)

Yeah, but so much of it was for Ellen. For the future we had planned.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JULIA

But, John, your future isn't over. Would Ellen want you to give up your life for her? She loved you. I know what a woman wants for the man she loves. She'd want you to go on and grow and be even more successful...for yourself and Kyle and Teri.

Once more, she takes his hand.

JULIA (CONT'D)

I want to help you. Please let me. You're such a giving man. All you think about are the needs of others. Well, somebody's got to think about you. I want you to know that I am always available...night or day.

(beat)

I care about you, John. I care very much.

He looks into her eyes. And, what he sees is love.

INT. KITCHEN -- NIGHT

John arrives home from work. He's very tired. But, the instant he walks into the kitchen, he hears Teri screaming in anger.

TERI (O.S.)

LOOK AT THIS. LOOK WHAT YOU DID. I TOLD YOU TO LET ME HELP YOU.

He hurries to find her.

INT. BATHROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

John finds Teri and Ellen in the bathroom. Ellen's clothes are covered with a brown, foul-smelling mess. She's crying. Teri is yelling at her.

TERI

I AM SICK OF THIS. WHEN I TELL YOU TO DO SOMETHING YOU'VE GOT TO DO IT.

JOHN

All right, Teri. Okay. I'll take over from here.

Teri gladly steps back.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN (CONT'D)  
Where's Mrs. Grady?

TERI  
She had to leave early.  
(beat)  
I was helping her to the bathroom,  
but she kept pushing me away. I  
think she's got diarrhea.

JOHN  
It may be the change in her medicine.

Ellen is trembling.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
It's all right, Sweetheart.  
Everything's going to be fine.

Teri leaves. John starts cleaning her up. She's filthy and it's a terrible job.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
Let's take these clothes off and get  
you into the shower.

As he looks into wife's bewildered face, he realizes how much his life has turned into a nightmare.

INT. JOHN AND ELLEN'S BEDROOM -- LATER

Ellen is cleaned up and in bed asleep. John has been sitting next to her, holding her hand. Carefully, he disengages his fingers, then gets up and leaves the room.

INT. TERI'S ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Teri is sitting on her bed, crying. John enters.

TERI  
Daddy, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to  
scream at her. Sometimes I get so  
angry...

He sits down and puts his arm around her.

JOHN  
It's okay.

TERI  
...I just lose control. And I know  
it's not her fault. She doesn't  
understand.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN

I get angry too.

(beat)

Teri, I love you. And your mother loves you. You've been doing a wonderful job with her.

TERI

No, I haven't.

(beat)

Everything is so awful. It's like my mother is dead and all that's left is a shell.

JOHN

Remember what she said. It's only a veil covering her eyes. Her love for you goes on.

TERI

I know. I miss her so much.

John looks at her.

JOHN

Teri, I'm the one who needs to apologize. For years, I've hardly spent any time with you. When you've needed me, I wasn't there.

TERI

It's all right.

JOHN

No, it isn't. Will you forgive me?

She nods and hugs him.

TERI

I don't know how you handle everything, daddy, with work and with mom.

JOHN

Well, things at work are changing. I'm going to be home more often. You're growing up to be a beautiful, young woman.

(beat)

Let's get to know each other again.

Teri smiles through her tears.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TERI  
I'd like that very much.

EXT. ALEXANDER'S HOME -- NIGHT

John's car pulls up in Alexander's driveway. John gets out. He goes to the front door and rings the bell. Alexander answers.

ALEXANDER  
John.

JOHN  
Sorry to bother you this late. Do you have a minute to talk?

ALEXANDER  
Absolutely. Come on in.

INT. ALEXANDER'S LIVING ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

John and Alexander walk into the living room.

ALEXANDER  
Want some tea?

JOHN  
No, thanks.

John is wired. He paces back and forth.

ALEXANDER  
I take it something's going on.

JOHN  
Oh, nothing out of the ordinary. Just my everyday life in the middle of a nightmare.

Alexander waits for him to continue.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
Today was a real pit. I realized how much I've been neglecting my daughter. But, hey--good news--soon, I'll have a lot more time with her, because my business is falling apart. Isn't it wonderful how things balance out?

ALEXANDER  
I'm sorry, John.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN

And as if my life wasn't screwed up enough already, I've got a new problem. And, this one I've brought on myself.

John searches for words.

JOHN (CONT'D)

For about a year now, I've been running every day.

(beat)

And I...haven't been running alone. I met someone. A woman. Her name is Julia Sinclair. She's become...a very dear friend. And she amazes me. She listens endlessly to my whining.

He looks at Alexander. Alexander remains silent.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I'm just so lonely, Alexander.

(tears well in his eyes)

I keep trying to remember what it was like for Ellen to put her arms around me...to kiss me. But the memory is fading. She's like a child. She thinks I'm her father.

(beat)

Then, every morning I'm with Julia...and I'm alive again.

(pause)

I'm afraid I'm falling in love.

He waits for a response, but Alexander says nothing.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Well, aren't you going to tell me how screwed up I am?

ALEXANDER

Loneliness is a terrible thing. I'm an expert on it.

JOHN

I love Ellen. But sometimes I don't think I can stand it. To be holding her hand...and be completely alone. I want to be faithful to her. I feel like I'm being torn apart.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Alexander takes a deep breath.

ALEXANDER  
Are you free tomorrow night?

JOHN  
I suppose I can be. Why?

ALEXANDER  
Let's do something. I'll pick you  
up at six o'clock. Hamburgers are  
on me.

JOHN  
But what should I do about this mess?  
You haven't said anything.

ALEXANDER  
All right. Here's what you should  
do. No more talking.  
(beat)  
Go home and get some rest.

JOHN  
That's it?

ALEXANDER  
That's it.

EXT. STADIUM -- EVENING

A large stadium is surrounded by cars. From inside comes  
tremendous singing...and the voices are all male.

DISSOLVE  
TO:

INT. STADIUM -- EVENING

The stadium is filled with men. At one end of the playing  
field is a large platform. A man stands at a podium. His  
face is projected onto a gigantic screen. The man is FRANKLIN  
GRAHAM.

ANGLE ON JOHN AND ALEXANDER

John and Alexander are seated down toward the front. Graham  
is speaking.

FRANKLIN GRAHAM  
I want to read a passage from the  
Bible to you tonight.  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FRANKLIN GRAHAM (CONT'D)  
 Actually, it's only three words.  
 Those three words are found in First  
 Corinthians chapter thirteen, verse  
 eight. And here they are:

(beat)

"Love...never...fails."

(beat)

Let me read them again:

(beat)

"Love...never...fails."

John stares at the man. He can't believe what he's hearing.

FRANKLIN GRAHAM (CONT'D)  
 Just three, small words. But those  
 words are at the heart of the message  
 of the entire Bible. No matter how  
 low we get, no matter how much  
 darkness may surround us, no matter  
 how far we run...God's love for us  
 never fails.

(beat)

Now, I want to tell you that I am  
 living proof of that tonight...

Graham goes on to tell his personal story. The son of a  
 world-renowned evangelist, yet, as a young man he rebelled.  
 Ran from God. Wanted no part of him. And how God's love  
 pursued him, no matter where he ran.

INTERCUT

As John listens, his agony deepens. Then, Franklin Graham  
 concludes.

FRANKLIN GRAHAM (CONT'D)  
 This gathering of men is dedicated  
 to keeping promises--the vows that  
 we make to our wives, our children,  
 our churches, our communities, our  
 country and our world. But, brothers,  
 those vows are powerless--we don't  
 have the strength to keep them--unless  
 they are filled with the never-failing  
 Love of God.

(beat)

What vows have you made tonight?  
 There are men in this stadium who  
 are struggling, lonely. Everything  
 is going wrong.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FRANKLIN GRAHAM (CONT'D)

It seems like the Love of God is far away...and your hold on life is slipping.

(beat)

There are men in this stadium who have broken their vows. You know who you are. And those broken vows are breaking your heart.

John's eyes are filled with tears.

FRANKLIN GRAHAM (CONT'D)

The message of God to you is this: There is forgiveness. Whoever you are and whatever you've done. His Love For You Never Fails.

(beat)

And He will give you the strength so that your love will never fail. Is that what you want tonight? "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son." That's the love that is waiting for you. All of God's vows are fulfilled in Jesus.

(beat)

There are some of you who need to meet Jesus Christ for the first time. You need to confess your sin and accept God's gift of salvation. There are others here who need to renew vows that you made to Him a long time ago. Still others need healing for vows that have been broken.

(beat)

Whatever your need...I want you to stand up right now and make your way down to the front. This is the moment. Brothers are waiting down here to pray with you. You come from wherever you are...

As a choir begins to sing, men begin moving forward...by the dozens and by the hundreds. But instead of going forward, John leaves his seat and goes in the opposite direction. Alexander follows him.

EXT. STADIUM -- MOMENTS LATER

Outside in the shadows of the huge building, John stands with his head bowed. Tears are on his cheeks.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN  
 (heart broken)  
 I've got to go home, Alexander.  
 There's something I have to do.

He heads for the car.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE JOHN AND ELLEN'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

John enters the hallway leading to the bedroom that he shared with Ellen for so many years. The lights in the house are off. Everyone is asleep.

INT. JOHN AND ELLEN'S BEDROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

John enters the bedroom. Moonlight shines in through the window. On the bed, Ellen lies sleeping. John walks over and looks down at her. He is in agony.

From a table nearby, he picks up their wedding picture. Ellen is only a shadow of the beautiful, young woman he married. But, as he looks at her, John hears the minister's voice from long ago.

MINISTER (V.O.)  
 (softly echoing)  
 ...Love...never fails.  
 (beat)  
 Where there are tongues...they will  
 be stilled. Where there is  
 knowledge...it will pass away.  
 (beat)  
 But love...never fails.

FLASHBACK

Once more, John sees his lovely bride looking up at him. And he hears his vows...

JOHN (V.O.)  
 In the name of Jesus our Savior and  
 Lord, I, John, take you Ellen to be  
 my beloved wife...

As the words echo in his mind, he sits down on the bed beside her. With tears in his eyes, he takes her hand...and whispers...

JOHN (CONT'D)  
 To have you and to hold you. To  
 honor and to treasure you. To be at  
 your side in sorrow and joy.  
 (MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN (CONT'D)  
 To suffer with you and be transformed.  
 And to love and cherish you always.  
 I promise you this from my  
 heart...with my soul...as long as  
 life shall last.

Gently, he kisses her lips. Then, he kneels down beside the bed. With tears in his eyes, he lifts his hands.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
 This bed is my altar, Lord. On it  
 is the woman I love.  
 (beat)  
 I...give her...into your hands.

As John looks upward, his eyes are filled with overwhelming peace.

DISSOLVE  
 TO:

EXT. JULIA'S HOME -- NIGHT

John's car pulls up in the driveway of a lovely home. He gets out...and rechecks the address on a slip of paper. A light is on upstairs. Taking a deep breath, he walks to the door and rings the bell. A few moments later, Julia's voice comes from inside.

JULIA  
 Who is it?

JOHN  
 It's me...John.

The door opens. Though Julia is dressed in jeans and a sweatshirt, she still looks very beautiful. She's surprised and happy to see him. But, it's obvious that he's upset.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
 I'm sorry to come so late.

JULIA  
 It's not a problem. I was up reading  
 contracts. That's the story of my  
 life. Come in.

INT. JULIA'S HOME -- CONTINUOUS

Julia leads John into a beautiful living room.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JULIA  
Please...sit down. Can I get you  
anything?

JOHN  
No. No, thanks.

He remains standing. She sits.

JULIA  
What's happened, John?

JOHN  
I...had to talk to you.

He struggles for the words.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
Julia, I can't tell you how much  
your friendship has meant to me.  
The way you've listened and given  
comfort. But...I have a very serious  
problem.

(pause)  
I'm...falling in love with you.

JULIA  
(gently)  
Is that a problem?

JOHN  
(sadly)  
Yes. Yes, it is.

He takes a deep breath.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
Falling in love with you has been  
easy. You're a beautiful woman.  
But the reason I've grown to love  
you is much deeper than that.

(beat)  
Over these months, I've felt stronger  
when we were together.

(beat)  
You've brought the only happiness  
that I've known in years.

JULIA  
I feel the same way.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN

But there's something deeper still.  
Something I've learned. Love is not  
just an emotion. It's a choice.  
And it can't think only of itself.

(beat)

My wife is helpless right now. Only  
a shadow of the beautiful woman I  
married. And she can't give anything  
to me. But, inside, I know that she  
loves me--even if I never hear her  
say those words again in this world.  
And she's caught up in a loneliness  
far worse than mine.

(beat)

A long time ago, I made vows to Ellen.  
I told her that--no matter what--my  
love for her would never fail.

(beat)

I made those vows to God. And I'm  
going to keep them. Even if she  
doesn't know me. Even if all that's  
left of her is a little child.

Tears are in Julia's eyes.

JULIA

(just above a whisper)

I have a feeling that we're not going  
to be running together anymore.

JOHN

(softly)

I'll find a new place.

She smiles through her tears.

JULIA

Isn't it strange? It was your  
faithfulness that made me love you.  
And it's your faithfulness that's  
taking you away.

JOHN

Goodbye, Julia. Thank you.

John smiles at her. She gets up and walks toward him. He  
takes her hands...kisses them...and is gone.

CU JULIA'S FACE

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

As she watches him leave, she is crying.

DISSOLVE  
TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM -- DAY

The whole Brighton family is gathered. With them are Alexander, Mrs. Grady, Kyle's fiance, Cindy, and the pastor from the church. Ellen is in a wheelchair. She's very disturbed. She doesn't know what's happening. Alexander is carrying her suitcase.

JOHN (V.O.)

Three days after our twenty-fourth anniversary, we took Ellen to a nursing home. I put it off as long as possible. But, finally, there was no choice. Neither Mrs. Grady nor Teri could handle her anymore. There were episodes of violence.

They roll the wheelchair to the front door. Ellen is very frightened. John holds her hand, trying to console her.

EXT. THE BRIGHTON HOME -- CONTINUOUS

As they wheel Ellen out of the house, she gets more and more disturbed.

JOHN

None of us will ever forget that terrible day. She was so frightened. And I felt like a traitor--betraying the woman I loved.

As they get closer to the car, Ellen grows more upset. When John and Kyle try to lift her out of the wheelchair, she fights them. Kyle is crying.

KYLE

Come on, mom. It's gonna be okay. Everything is gonna be all right. We love you.

Teri, Cindy and Mrs. Grady are crying too. Finally, they get Ellen buckled into the car seat, but it's a harrowing ordeal.

INT. ELLEN'S NURSING HOME ROOM -- DAY

John, Teri, Kyle and Cindy wheel Ellen into her nursing home room.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Though it's decorated with Ellen's pictures and many flowers, there is a coldness in the walls. Ellen is like a terrified child who can't speak. All she can do is cling to John.

TERI

(fighting back tears)

See, mom. We brought all of your pictures. And look at the flowers. Aren't they pretty?

Ellen is almost hyperventilating. The nurse and a male assistant enter. The nurse is MISS HAYES.

MISS HAYES

(very cheerfully)

Hello, Mrs. Brighton. My name is Miss Hayes. So you're coming to stay with us for awhile. Well, I'm so glad to meet you. This is William. We're going to help you get into bed and get your things put away.

Ellen stares at her, then begins to sob.

INT. JOHN AND ELLEN'S BEDROOM -- LATER

John enters his bedroom and looks around.

JOHN (V.O.)

When I came home that day and walked into our bedroom, I thought my heart would break. Oh, the sharing that we had done here. So much happiness. So many times of sorrow. So much love.

(beat)

And I knew that she would never be in this room again.

John covers his face with his hands. Suddenly, he feels a strong hand on his shoulder. He turns. It's Kyle.

KYLE

(fighting back his own tears)

It's gonna be okay, dad.

JOHN

(a whisper)

Yeah. I know.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KYLE

I just want to tell you something.

(beat)

I want to tell you how much I appreciate the home I grew up in. How thankful I am for you and mom...and the love that you gave us.

John puts his arm around him.

KYLE (CONT'D)

Cindy and I have set the date for our wedding. It's the week after graduation.

JOHN

Kyle, we've had so little time to talk. You've lived through so much pain in our family. During times like this, it's hard to make important choices.

(beat)

Cindy's a wonderful girl. Just make sure you're ready.

KYLE

Don't worry, dad. Cindy and I have prayed about this for a long time.

(beat)

We've learned a lot about marriage. We've been watching you and mom.

(beat)

We know what vows really mean.

DISSOLVE  
TO:

INT. ELLEN'S NURSING HOME ROOM -- MORNING

Christmas at the nursing home. Ellen's room is decorated with a small tree and Christmas lights around the window. On the table is a tiny manger scene. The family is gathered around her bed. With them are Cindy and Alexander. As they smile and open presents, Ellen stares at nothing.

JOHN

That last Christmas, we tried so hard to joyful. We read the story of Jesus' birth, opened presents and sang carols. But Ellen wasn't with us.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN (CONT'D)

(beat)

And outside the nursing home, everyone cried.

(pause)

But life goes on no matter what. And my life had fallen into a new, heartbreaking pattern.

(beat)

Friends from the church were so wonderful. I'll never forget the comfort they brought. Doing the simplest of things. Praying for us every day.

DISSOLVE  
TO:

MONTAGE BEGINS

INT. ELLEN'S NURSING HOME ROOM -- DAY

1. Kay Hartly feeds Ellen baby food. Ellen stares at the wall.

2. The pastor reads the Bible to her, though she doesn't seem to hear.

3. As she falls asleep, John holds her hand. Then, he kisses her goodnight.

MONTAGE ENDS

JOHN

And I was with Ellen every day. Every day, I told her how much I loved her...as the flower of her life continued to fade.

(pause)

She passed away in the early Spring.

(beat)

But something happened at the end. The doctors said that such experiences were not uncommon. But to us...it was a gift from God.

(beat)

And it was given to Teri.

Ellen is lying in bed, with IV tubes in her arms. She's staring at the ceiling. Teri is sitting with her, talking, though she knows her mother can't understand.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TERI

...So, it was a pretty hard test, but I think I aced it. One thing's for sure. I hate chemistry. When I'm done with this course, I'm never getting near it again. But history's great. I never thought I'd like it, but I love to read about old times...

CU ELLEN'S FACE

As Teri talks, suddenly, a change comes to Ellen's eyes. An awareness.

TERI (CONT'D)

When I get to college I'm gonna take some history field trips. I'd like to go to Mexico and see the ruins.

(beat)

I don't know why I babble on and on. I know you can't understand.

(beat)

I just miss talking to you.

Suddenly, Ellen turns her head, looks straight into her daughter's eyes...and says her name.

ELLEN

(very weak)

Teri.

Teri stares at her mother in shock.

ELLEN (CONT'D)

(just above a whisper)

Teri, I love you. You're so beautiful. So grown up.

TERI

Mom?

ELLEN

I was dreaming a little while ago. About the day you were born. I was so happy.

Tears well in Teri's eyes. She can hardly believe what she's hearing.

TERI

Mom...are you really there?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLEN  
 (with a smile)  
 Yes. I'm here.  
 (beat)  
 What year in school are you?

TERI  
 A...senior. I'm...graduating in two  
 months.

ELLEN  
 Do you have a boyfriend?

TERI  
 (fighting back  
 tears;her voice  
 trembling)  
 I've...had several, but...nobody  
 right now.

ELLEN  
 And you're going to college?

TERI  
 Yes. I've already been accepted--  
 Mom--you can understand me.

ELLEN  
 Tell me about Kyle. Did he stay in  
 school?

TERI  
 He's graduating soon. And he's  
 getting married. His fiance, Cindy,  
 is a wonderful girl.

ELLEN  
 I'm so glad.  
 (beat)  
 And, what about your father?

TERI  
 Daddy...is always there for us...no  
 matter what.

ELLEN  
 Where is he? I want to talk to him.

TERI  
 He's outside. I'll go get him right  
 now.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ellen smiles. Suddenly, her eyes become radiant. Then, she reaches out and takes her daughter's hand.

ELLEN

Oh, Teri, heaven is so beautiful.  
Jesus was here a little while ago.  
He showed it to me. He's coming  
back to take me away. I love all of  
you so much.

(beat)

I want to tell your father how much  
I love him.

(beat)

And I want to tell him...goodbye.

Teri runs from the room.

EXT. NURSING HOME -- MOMENTS LATER

John is walking in front of the nursing home. Teri bursts out of the building.

TERI

DAD...DAD...IT'S MOM. SHE'S AWAKE.

JOHN

What?

TERI

SHE'S AWAKE AND SHE WANTS TO TALK TO  
YOU. COME ON.

They both run back inside.

INT. ELLEN'S NURSING HOME ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

John and Teri run into Ellen's room.

But the moment is over. They find her asleep. John touches her face.

JOHN

Ellen...

She doesn't awaken.

CU ELLEN'S FACE

It's filled with peace.

JOHN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

She never woke up again.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 Jesus did come to take her away.  
 That night I lost the woman I loved.

DISSOLVE  
 TO:

EXT. CEMETERY -- DAY

A crowd is gathered for Ellen's grave-side service. All of her loved ones are present. The pastor stands at one end of her casket. It's covered with red roses.

PASTOR  
 This day we commit Ellen's body to the earth and her beautiful spirit into the hands of God. Throughout much of her illness she kept a journal. Day by day she wrote in it, though as the years passed, the struggle became very hard. Nothing could stand as a witness to her faith more than her own words:

He lifts the journal and begins to read.

PASTOR (CONT'D)  
 Fading...  
 (beat)  
 Fading...  
 (beat)  
 My memory... Dying like a candle...in  
 the dark.  
 (beat)  
 Afraid...  
 (beat)  
 So afraid...  
 (beat)  
 But then...I pray...and feel His  
 peace.  
 (beat)  
 Becoming...like a little child. But  
 Jesus says to me. "I lift...the  
 children...in my arms."  
 (beat)  
 He carries heavy things. Our  
 hopes...and dreams...  
 (beat)  
 And even our broken hearts.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Many are crying...especially Teri.

DISSOLVE  
TO:

EXT. CEMETERY -- MOMENTS AFTER THE SERVICE

The crowd is moving away. John and Teri stand together.

TERI  
(through her tears)  
Daddy...

He puts his arm around her.

TERI (CONT'D)  
I'm tired of being angry. I'm tired  
of running away.  
(beat)  
I want to know God the way mom did.

John smiles and wipes away his own tears.

JOHN  
Jesus is waiting for you to talk to  
him. He's been there all along.

They walk away together through the trees. As they walk,  
Teri prays.

TERI (V.O.)  
I haven't talked with you in a long  
time, God. I've been angry at you  
for so long.  
(beat)  
I blamed you for what happened to my  
mother. And I've been filled with  
hate. But hating you means hating  
Love.  
(beat)  
I've done so many bad things and  
I've hurt myself. I know that Jesus  
died to take away my sins. He took  
my place. He shed His blood to make  
me clean.  
(beat)  
I want to be clean right now. I  
want to love you the way my mom did.  
(beat)  
I give you my life. It's yours  
forever.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TERI (V.O.) (CONT'D)

(beat)

And please...tell my mom...I'll see  
her again...someday.

DISSOLVE  
TO:

INT. CHURCH -- DAY

Light streams through stained glass windows.

The church is filled with candles and flowers.

At the front, a lovely bride stands beside a handsome groom.  
It's Kyle and Cindy. Teri is a bride's maid. And she's  
almost as radiant as the bride.

John watches, so proud of his children. The minister is  
speaking...

MINISTER

And now, these three remain...faith,  
hope and love. But the greatest of  
these is love.

(beat)

And Love...never fails.

Then, once again, John hears the vows that he spoke to Ellen  
so long ago.

KYLE

In the name of Jesus, our Savior and  
Lord, I, Kyle, take you Cindy to be  
my beloved wife. To have you and to  
hold you. To honor and to treasure  
you. To be at your side in sorrow  
and joy. To suffer with you and be  
transformed. And to love and cherish  
you always. I promise you this from  
my heart...with my soul...as long as  
life shall last.

Misty images of lace and flowers. The cross high above.

Rings given. Communion shared.

Then, two candles...burn into one.

FADE OUT:

THE END