

“Despair”

FADE IN:

EXT. THE CITY - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT. Los Angeles. But it could be any city.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

We're watching DOCTOR JACKSON, an elegant man in his mid-30s. He's making his way through the pedestrian traffic of Melrose Avenue or Santa Monica. He's preoccupied, not paying much attention to his surroundings.

CUT TO another man, same age, same social class, coming from the other direction, on the other side of the street. His name is BILL.

Bill looks across the street and starts in surprise. He has just seen and recognized his old friend Jackson. He starts waving wildly, trying to attract Jackson's attention.

BILL

Hey! Hey, Jackson! Hey!

But Jackson is too lost in his thoughts to notice Bill.

Bill runs across the street, avoiding traffic as best he can -- it's not an intersection and it's a busy street.

Then he runs after Jackson.

BILL

Jackson! Damn it! Jackson!

At last, Jackson hears someone calling him and turns. His face expresses a pleasant surprise as he recognizes his old buddy.

JACKSON

Bill?

They shake hands. Bill is a bit out of breath.

BILL

I'm so glad to see you.

JACKSON

Me too. How long's it been? A year?  
I thought you were working for that  
Swiss company in Geneva...

BILL

Nah, that didn't pan out. I've been  
back for eight months now. Working for  
Chalmers, downtown. Damn, I'm glad I  
ran into you. I've just had some  
amazing news and I was bursting to tell  
someone, then, Bam, you suddenly show  
up. Must be fate...

Jackson points at a bar, or a sidewalk cafe.

JACKSON

D'you have time for a drink? Then you  
can tell me all about it.

BILL

Great idea. I hope you don't think  
I'm nuts...

They walk into the cafe and we

CUT TO:

INT. CAFE - DAY

Jackson and Bill are sitting at a table, with half-empty  
glasses. Jackson is listening to Bill's story.

BILL

...So this guy turns out to be an  
attorney from Auckland, you know, in  
New Zealand? He tells me that I have  
this uncle, some guy on Mom's side that  
I've never met or even heard of before  
in my life. He was some kind of  
prospector and found a uranium mine in  
Papua New Guinea or some place like  
that. But the local cannibals or  
headhunters got to him before he could  
hitch back to town... Well, what it  
boils down to is that I've inherited  
his claim, and apparently it's worth  
millions, millions you hear me!

Jackson looks impressed.

JACKSON

Congratulations! What are you going to do with all that money?

BILL

I don't know yet, but hold on, I haven't told you the really weird part yet. You remember how in college I used to go and see that psychi c...

JACKSON

Yeah... Madame Zora, or was it Nora? Don't tell me you still believe in that crap?

BILL

Listen, I don't make fun of your beliefs. You're still voting Republican, aren't you? You know how many people go to psychics in this country? 35%! That's a lot of people.

JACKSON

Yeah but it's all so fake...

BILL

Some of them may be fakes, but there's a lot of quacks in the medical profession, and that doesn't make medicine fake. Anyway, I've been seeing this psychic woman, Laura Neli... She's a psychomancer. All the stars go to her. I heard she picks all of Jack Nicholson's roles... She's amazing... You can ask anyone... Anyway, she's predicted everything that happened to me, just the way I told you. The uncle. The mine. Everything. What do you say to that, eh, Mister Skeptic?

JACKSON

Um. I don't know.

(a pause)

It could be a coincidence, I guess. You know, like fortune cookies, "you're going to come into money", just kind of generic stuff that could happen to anyone...

BILL

No, it wasn't like that at all. She spelled it all out, with the details and everything. You had to be there... You should go see her. She's amazing. Here's her card...

Bill pushes a business card towards Jackson.

CLOSE-UP on the card, which is tastefully designed, and simply reads "Laura Nelli - Psychomancer" with an address and a phone number on it.

Jackson doesn't look convinced, in fact he seems to find the whole idea distasteful. He pockets the card distractedly.

JACKSON

You know I've never believed this crap...

BILL

You should keep an open mind. Listen to this: she told me I'm going to meet a gorgeous blonde, marry her, and have three kids -- two boys and a girl. I'm going to be very, very happy for a long time and live to the ripe old age of ninety-seven, with a bunch of loving grand-children and great-grandchildren around me. Isn't that great?

JACKSON

Only if you swallow what she told you. I don't believe in fate. As far as I'm concerned, there's just as big a chance that you'll be run over by a bus in the next half-hour.

Bill is clearly annoyed; he starts to get angry and agitated.

BILL

Now I remember how much you used to piss me off in college! You've always been a closed-minded bastard. You've never believed in anything.

JACKSON

That's not true. I...

But Bill gets up and angrily throws a few dollars on the table.

BILL

I can't believe I thought you'd be happy for me! I've already given notice to Chalmers. I'm leaving tomorrow for Tahiti. That's where I'm going to meet my future wife and mother of my kids.

Bill leaves the cafe. Jackson follows him.

JACKSON

C' mon, Bill! I didn't mean to...

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

They're outside. An angry Bill steps onto the street, preparing to cross it again. Jackson is just stepping out of the cafe.

Bill is so angry, he isn't paying attention. Suddenly, a BUS seems to come out of nowhere and SLAMS into him.

His body is thrown into the air, then crashes down onto the tarmac, several feet away.

The usual pandemonium follows: traffic stops, pedestrians gawk at the motionless, bloody body lying in the street, a POLICEMAN arrives to chase away the curious, etc.

Jackson just stands there, in a daze, looking at the body. It is quite obvious that Bill is dead. Stone cold dead.

We HEAR the SIREN of an approaching ambulance. Two ORDERLIES put Bill's body on a stretcher, cover his face and wheel him into the back.

Jackson watches the whole scene as if in an emotional paralysis. The sounds of traffic are muffled in a surreal silence.

He slowly puts his hand into his pocket, then frowns.

CLOSE-UP on his hand as he pulls out the psychic's card that Bill just gave him.

Jackson's face changes as his emotions finally kick into gear. He's furious now, his jaws clench; he's just reached a decision.

CLOSE-UP on the card: "LAURA NELLI - PSYCHOMANCER", with her address.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. LAURA NELLI'S TOWNHOUSE - DAY

A brass plaque that reads: "LAURA NELLI - PSYCHOMANCER".

CAMERA PULLS BACK to reveal Jackson standing on the sidewalk, checking that he's found the right address.

He goes inside and we

CUT TO:

INT. LAURA NELLI'S HOME - DAY

An elegant interior. A MAID has just let Jackson in.

MAID

Do you have an appointment?

JACKSON

No, but I have to see Ms. Nelli as soon as possible. It's urgent.

MAID

I'll tell her. If you'd care to wait...

The Maid leaves. Jackson sits down in a comfortable chair. He picks up a magazine, tries to read it but finds that he can't concentrate, so he puts it down and starts fidgeting.

Another door opens and LAURA NELLI walks in. She's tall, distinguished, classy-looking. A high society lady. She's got dark hair and a slightly oriental or Gypsy look about her.

Jackson gets up. Laura says nothing. She just looks at him, not smiling, but not looking hostile either. Just indifferent, waiting. This deflates some of Jackson's pent-up anger.

JACKSON

I had to talk to you because... I felt that... I...

He pauses as if he's trying to marshall his thoughts. His anger begins to rebuild.

JACKSON

Okay... I'm here because... A good friend of mine... A client of yours... Bill Dozier... You told him he was going to become very rich, marry a beautiful girl and live a long life... Damn! People like you are such frauds! You prey on people's fears and hopes and I just wanted to come here in person and tell you how...

Laura puts up her hand to stop Jackson.

LAURA

He was run over by a bus, wasn't he?

Jackson is stunned. Flabbergasted. Speechless. Almost.

JACKSON

Yes, but how?... How do you know? It just happened... I just came from there... You couldn't have...

LAURA

I saw it in his future when he came to consult me.

JACKSON

You saw it in his...

Jackson goes from bewildered to indignant in the blink of an eye.

JACKSON

Then why didn't you tell him that? Why did you tell him that he was going to live to ninety-seven?

LAURA

Because he was about to die. Nothing I could say or do could have changed that. I wanted his last moments on Earth to be as happy as possible.

(a pause)

Wouldn't you do the same for a patient  
dying of cancer?

Jackson finds nothing to say to that. She's right. He  
acts almost as if he is in a trance.

LAURA

Since you came all this way to see me,  
would you like me to read your future?

JACKSON

I... I don't know...

Laura becomes very persuasive. She's good at reading the  
man in front of her and knows how to manipulate him.

LAURA

I won't charge you, and that way you  
won't have wasted your time coming  
here.

She takes the unresisting Jackson by the hand and sits him  
on a sofa, then sits down next to him.

LAURA

I'm a psychomancer, I read your soul.  
No cards, crystal balls or mumbo jumbo.  
Just your immortal soul...

She takes both of Jackson's hands in hers and looks deeply  
into his eyes. He sits there, transfixed, staring at her  
hypnotic gaze.

A few, silent seconds pass. We HEAR the faint sound of a  
HEART BEAT. A light sheen of perspiration appears on  
Laura's brow.

Laura suddenly lets go of Jackson's hands as if she's been  
burned, and wipes her forehead. Jackson emerges from his  
trance-like state. Laura is clearly shaken by whatever she  
has just experienced.

LAURA

God! That's... incredible. I've never  
seen anything like it...

Jackson looks scared. He knows what she saw in Bill's soul  
and he can't imagine what might be in his...

JACKSON

What's wrong? What did you see?

LAURA

Who are you, Mr. Jackson?

Jackson forces a nervous laugh.

JACKSON

You're the psychi c. You tell me.

LAURA

Oh, I know who you are. The question is, do you?

JACKSON

What do you mean? My name's Jackson... I'm a... Bill and I went to the same school... At...

Jackson tries to remember his past and discovers that he can't. A look of growing horror spreads over his face. He puts a hand to his forehead, massaging it as if he's trying to control an incipient headache.

JACKSON

I've been under a lot of pressure at work lately...

Laura narrows her eyes as she looks at him. She's trying to force him to admit that something is wrong.

LAURA

What work?

JACKSON

I... I don't know... I can't seem to remember that either...

LAURA

What's your first name?

JACKSON

It's... I...

LAURA

You see?

JACKSON

It's all your fault! You're confusing me... You've done something to me.

Laura looks at Jackson in pity.

LAURA

Poor Mr. Jackson... If only you knew...

JACKSON

If only I knew what? You're trying to drive me crazy.

LAURA

Where do you think you are?

A pregnant pause. Jackson remains silent.

LAURA

You think you're here, in front of me, listening to me...

JACKSON

Yes, of course, I'm here. Where else would I be?

LAURA

Listen to me. You're not here. You're in a car. On a road. At night. In the country. You've just fallen asleep.

JACKSON

Who's driving?

LAURA

You are. You're alone. You're going to see your girl-friend. Alice. You're driving very fast. You've fallen asleep at the wheel. This is all a dream.

Jackson looks a bit like a hunted animal. He laughs nervously.

JACKSON

Is this a joke? I don't get it. You mean, I'm dreaming all this? You're in my dream?

LAURA

Yes. You created me. I'm only an invention of your subconscious.

JACKSON

You're nuts! That doesn't make any sense. Okay, I'll admit that my memory isn't very sharp right now, but I remember perfectly well my meeting with Bill, the accident and then coming here to see you... It's been...

(looking at his watch)

...over forty-five minutes already. How could I have been driving a car asleep for forty-five minutes?

LAURA

Time doesn't flow the same in dreams as it does in reality. Your eyes have only been closed for a second or two. You're going to die unless you wake up.

JACKSON

What! This is impossible!

Laura looks really worried over Jackson's inability to accept the truth.

LAURA

You're going to crash. Your subconscious mind is aware of the danger. It's sent me to wake you before it's too late. You can still brake, or turn the wheel...

JACKSON

But how can I wake up when I don't know I'm sleeping?..

(pause)

Try pinching me.

Laura pinches Jackson on the arm, but visibly, it has no result.

JACKSON

It's no good. I'm still here...

Laura becomes agitated in her desperation to find a solution.

LAURA

I don't know what else to do...

Suddenly, there is a LOUD NOISE -- the very recognizable sound of a car crashing into a tree at high speed .

LAURA  
Too late!

She hides her head in her hands.

The room starts spinning, faster and faster. Jackson is tumbling around as if in a tornado. There is a vertiginous sensation as we jarringly

WIPE TO RED.

EXT. LONELY ROAD - NIGHT

The blaring SOUND of a car horn.

CAMERA PULLS IN on a car that slammed head on into a tree, obviously at high speed.

CLOSE-UP on the shattered wind-shield. Jackson is sitting in the driver's seat, his face almost crushed by the wheel. He is covered in blood, but alive.

His eyes slowly open and he becomes aware of his surroundings.

With great difficulty, he manages to extricate himself from the wreck.

He staggers out, touches his chest, arms and legs to check for broken bones. He looks more badly injured than he is.

He takes a long, slow, uncomprehending look around. It's a lonely road, in the countryside or the desert somewhere. The silence is deafening. It doesn't look like another car is likely to come by anytime soon.

Stumbling, Jackson picks a direction and starts walking.

He's been walking/limping along for less than a mile when he reaches a gated property surrounded by a fence.

EXT. THE CLINIC - NIGHT

Jackson reaches the main gate. On it, a metal plaque reads: "DOCTOR DESPAIR - PRIVATE CLINIC".

Jackson rings the bell, once, twice, but there is no answer.

He pushes on the gate, it's unlocked; he opens it.

EXT. THE CLINIC GROUNDS - NIGHT

Jackson walks into the grounds. They are park-like. A large central alley ends at an imposing building -- obviously the clinic -- with garages, etc. to the side. All the windows are dark. It is completely silent, without even any night noises of crickets or rustling caused by the wind.

Jackson slowly walks down the central alley. It is clear that moving is becoming ever more difficult and painful for him.

He finally reaches the clinic's large double doors.

He manages to climb a few steps, then reaches the night bell, which is equipped with an intercom.

He RINGS it. Once. Twice. The second time demands an extra effort from his battered, bruised body.

Around him the world starts spinning again. He is about to pass out when a voice comes out of the intercom.

ALICE (V.O.)

Doctor... I think there's someone at the door...

CLOSE-UP on Jackson's face, an expression of total incredulity is on it.

JACKSON

(whisper)

A-Alice?...

Then he passes out and again we

WIPE TO RED.

INT. OPERATING ROOM - NIGHT

Jackson is lying down on an operating table, in a surgery. He tries moving his arms, then his legs. In vain. He is securely strapped. This could be normal medical procedure...

...Until he tries moving his head. It, too, is secured in some kind of torture device contraption. It is clear that the situation is anything but normal.

A look of fear fills Jackson's eyes.

DOCTOR DESPAIR MOVES INTO VIEW. He has a strange, manic energy about him, which is at the same time both amusing and deeply evil and disturbing.

DESPAIR

So, you've come back to us? Good, good... Well, not really. In fact, it's too bad. Too bad for you.

Dr. Despair puts on a surgical mask.

DESPAIR

I don't know if you remember me. I looked a little different last time we met. And of course, my name wasn't Despair. I had it legally changed. Cute, huh? Now, you must pay attention. I have to operate on you at once, otherwise you'll die. Unfortunately, I can't use any anesthesia because in your present condition, your heart couldn't take it. Frankly, it would have been better if you'd remained unconscious, but life's a bitch, isn't it? Ha, ha!

Dr. Despair has finished putting on his surgical gloves.

DESPAIR

The operation is not going to take long, but I warn you, it's going to be extremely painful, so try to relax and think of something else...

Dr. Despair inserts a metal device in Jackson's mouth that pulls back his lips.

DESPAIR

For example, why don't you think about when we were both prospecting for uranium in the mountains of Papua New Guinea? You remember how you left me to die at the hands of those savages in the jungle? Surely you haven't forgotten your old partner, Dr. Jackson?

From a tray located off-screen, Dr. Despair grabs a sculptor's chisel and a mallet.

Jackson's eyes grow even wider with fear and horror.

DESPAIR

I understand that mine made you very rich... I bet you'd all but forgotten me. You had no idea that I'd made it back. And now, thanks to one of those little ironies of life that we all cherish, here you are, on my operating table. As I said before, life's a bitch, isn't it? Ha, ha!

Methodically, Dr. Despair starts chiseling out all of Jackson's teeth. First, the upper incisors, then the canines, then the molars. There is the bone-chilling sound of metal scraping enamel.

When he finishes, he walks around the operating table and proceeds to do the same to the lower teeth.

During this truly horrible scene, Jackson screams, SCREAMS, and struggles madly to get free -- but in vain.

In the end, the SCREAMS turn into a low GARGLE and an agonizing MOAN.

Dr. Despair puts the bloody instruments down and mops his sweaty forehead.

DESPAIR

There. I'm finished with your teeth. Don't be such a crybaby, Dr. Jackson. I see in your eyes that you think I'm mad... Okay, I confess that I made up all that stuff about you being my partner and that uranium mine in Papua New Guinea. I was only trying to divert your attention, to force your mind to focus on something else, so that you wouldn't feel the pain as much. It's an old trick I learned in China...

Dr. Despair uses pincers to remove bits of bloody teeth and bone and drops them into a metal tray where they make a PING, PING sound.

He blots up the blood from Jackson's mouth with sponges and sprays a disinfectant solution on the wounds.

Then, he grabs a razor-sharp scalpel.

DESPAIR

Now I'm going to remove your lips and tongue.

Jackson desperately tries to move his head out of the way, but can't.

DESPAIR

Don't move please, you wouldn't want me to miss, would you? Ha, ha!

Dr. Despair starts cutting into the upper lips with a squishy, pulpy sound.

DESPAIR

Think of something else. Think of your wife for example. The wife that you just murdered... I'm not lying this time. I'm telling the truth. You poisoned her. It was a perfect crime, cleverly disguised to make it look like suicide. Why, you even included a forged note... Think of who gave you the idea of killing your wife... Your beautiful girl-friend... Alice...

Dr. Despair drops the lips into the tray. FLIP, FLOP.

DESPAIR

Now it's your tongue's turn. You remember asking Alice what she did for a living? After you had finished making sweaty love to her in that seedy motel out in the Valley? Sure you do. Well, surprise! She works for me! That's why I know so much about you, you see. By the way, Alice is also my girl-friend. Well, she was. Before you stole her away from me...

Despair throws the bloody tongue into the tray -- FLOP.

He sponges the blood from Jackson's face, checks his victim's pulse, and injects something into his arm.

DESPAIR

There. We can't have you dying just as things are getting interesting, can we? So you stole Alice from me and you were on your way to pick her up to run away with her to Acapulco when that stupid accident happened. And now, here you are, on my operating table... Life really is a bitch, isn't it? Ha, ha!

Dr. Despair now holds a long, sharp, nasty-looking needle in his hand.

DESPAIR

You don't need to worry about Alice anymore...

Dr. Despair slowly brings the needle closer and closer to Jackson's eye.

DESPAIR

...Because you won't ever SEE her again, if you catch my drift... Ha, ha!

A pause. Time seems suspended. The needle hovers over Jackson's eyes.

DESPAIR

Alice. Yes, this would be a good time to think of Alice. You need to focus your mind on something else. Alice. Alice. Rhymes with palace. Chalice. Malice... Let me tell you what else I have in mind for you. After this, I'm going to do a bit of micro-surgery on your brain to obliterate some of your short-term memory. Without memories, lips, teeth and eyes, it's a fair bet that Alice won't be interested in you anymore, don't you think? And you know what? Even all that is still nothing compared to what else I have in store for you. This is just an appetizer. The real meal is still to come. I'm about to start now. Think of Alice. Palace. Chalice. Malice...

Jackson's P. O. V.: The needle plunges towards the CAMERA as we hear a SCREAM and we

WIPE TO RED.

INT. OPERATING ROOM - DAY

Jackson comes to. He is still strapped to the operating table. His face is almost entirely wrapped in bloody bandages.

JACKSON  
(loud moan)

Dr. Despair MOVES INTO VIEW. He is the same character that we've just seen, except that now he seems somehow saner and gentler. Oddly reassuring.

DESPAIR  
So, you've come back to us? Good, good...

JACKSON  
(More moaning)

DESPAIR  
My name is Doctor Despair. It's an unfortunate name... However I knew a "Frankenstein" and a "Carrion" at med school, so perhaps it's not so bad after all... I'm the director of this clinic. I'm going to remove the straps that prevent your arms from moving.

Dr. Despair removes the right strap, then the left one.

DESPAIR  
You were in terrible shape. I had to operate on you right away, and I had to strap you down to stop you from struggling, even with the anesthesia. It was a very delicate operation. We had to pump you full of pain killers. You've spent ten days in a coma. We've fed you intravenously...

Dr. Despair is now done with the straps.

DESPAIR  
There, you can move now. If you understand what I'm saying, move your right hand for yes, and your left hand for no. Do you feel any pain?

JACKSON  
[moves right hand]

DESPAIR  
A lot of pain?

JACKSON  
[left hand]

DESPAIR  
Good. Do you remember what happened to you and why I had to perform surgery on you?

JACKSON  
[left hand]

DESPAIR  
You don't remember anything that happened to you?

JACKSON  
[left hand]

DESPAIR  
I see. Do you remember your name?

JACKSON  
[left hand]

DESPAIR  
Do you remember anything at all about your past?

JACKSON  
[left hand]

DESPAIR  
Hmm. This could be a consequence of the accident, or maybe the post-operative shock... In most cases memories usually return after a few days or weeks... Let's hope they do in your case.

(a pause)  
As I said, you were the victim of a very serious car accident. Your car crashed into a tree not far from this clinic. We heard the noise and pulled you from the wreckage. You were

unconscious, with severe internal bleeding. You couldn't be transported so I had to operate here. Strangely enough, none of your bones were broken, which is a miracle if you consider the state of your car and how fast you must have been driving... The pain that you're feeling now is mostly due to contusions. Nothing life-threatening. The most serious injuries were to your face. I had to remove all your teeth, because they'd been smashed and pushed back almost down your throat by the steering wheel. I also had to replace your palate which was crushed, and sew your tongue up, since it was sliced almost through. Your lips were completely pulped. They were a bloody mess of glass, plastic and mangled flesh. I had to amputate them as well, but eventually we'll be able to replace them with collagen. I'll also give you some denture implants that will enable you to speak and eat normally. Plastic surgery can do miracles today. The worst were your eyes...

(a pause)

I'm sorry to say, there was nothing I could do to save them. Shards of glass from the windshield went through them like a knife through butter and took out most of the optic nerve as well. One eighth of an inch further and your brain would have been injured permanently as well, you might even have died. I know you don't feel very lucky right this minute, but I assure you it could have been worse. Much worse...

Dr. Despair grabs a full syringe and prepares to inject Jackson.

#### DESPAIR

Please excuse me for being so candid with you, but I've always firmly believed that a patient deserves the truth above all. Tomorrow I'll remove your bandages, and we'll start talking about reconstructive surgery. It won't

be so bad, you'll see. Meanwhile, you need to sleep for at least another twenty-four hours to give your body time to heal...

As Dr. Despair injects Jackson, we

WIPE TO RED.

INT. JACKSON'S ROOM - DAY

A typical private hospital room: one bed, a television, some ordinary furniture, a closet and a small bathroom attached to the room.

Jackson is lying in bed still unconscious. Dr. Despair is sitting on a chair next to the bed, taking his pulse. There are charts, IVs, etc. surrounding the bed.

Jackson's face is not a pretty sight. There's two holes where his eyes used to be. The lower half of his face looks like a skeleton, except that the teeth are shiny: they're obviously his new dental implants.

Jackson moves slightly, indicating that he is awake.

DESPAIR

Good morning! How do we feel today?  
I've removed your bandages. You've  
healed nicely.

(a pause)

You can't see it, of course, but you  
can touch it. Your hands are clean.  
No risk of infection.

Jackson -- who is now blind -- feels his face. When his hands come to his eyes, he lets out a low MOAN.

Dr. Despair squeezes his arm in sympathy.

DESPAIR

Be courageous...

Jackson continues his facial exploration.

DESPAIR

During your sleep, I put in the dental  
implants we talked about, and replaced  
some bits of your jaws, so that you can  
eat and talk. Well, you won't be able

to articulate the labial consonants without your lips, but we'll work on that as soon as you're back on your feet. Now how do you feel?

[During the rest of this scene, when Jackson speaks it will be completely unintelligible; what he is actually saying could be represented on screen by sub-titles. For now, we will show what he actually means to say in square brackets]

JACKSON

[Okay. ]

DESPAIR

Very good! And do you remember anything at all about the accident now?

JACKSON

[Not a thing. ]

DESPAIR

Hmm. Still suffering from amnesia. That might end up being the hardest thing to cure... But don't worry, we'll work on it. By the way, my specialty is plastic surgery and I've had a lot of practice with the speech patterns of patients like you, so I should be able to understand most of what you're saying. Isn't that a relief?

JACKSON

[Hm. ]

Dr. Despair goes to a closet with contains a set of mangled clothes and comes back with a wallet.

DESPAIR

I've taken the liberty of looking through your clothing for a clue to your identity. I wanted to find an address, someone to notify about what had happened to you. Also, quite candidly, I was relieved to find that you had insurance... Well, here's what we've been able to piece together so far. Your name is Jackson, Doctor Jackson...

JACKSON  
[Doctor Jackson?]

DESPAIR  
Yes. You're a medical researcher working for I.P.C. as Director of R&D. You have a house in Beverly Hills, and a condo in Baja. I don't mind admitting that I'm a little envious. You're a very successful man, Dr. Jackson. You have a wife, but no children. Do you remember your wife's name?

JACKSON  
[No.]

DESPAIR  
It doesn't matter. It'll come back to you...

Briefly, a glimmer of the insane Dr. Despair of before emerges.

DESPAIR  
All women are the same anyway, aren't they? Whether they're called Mary, Rhoda... or Alice...

A flicker of anxiety seems to cross what's left of Jackson's face.

JACKSON  
[Ha-ha.]

As quickly as the insanity came, it passes, and Dr. Despair returns to being the kindly, concerned physician.

DESPAIR  
I tried calling her to let her know that you were here, but no one answered the phone...

JACKSON  
[No one?]

DESPAIR  
No one. I left a message, but I got a call back from the Police...

JACKSON

[The Police?]

DESPAIR

Yes. They found my message. They sent a Detective to talk to you. He's been waiting downstairs. I'm sorry to have to tell you this... Someone found your wife dead. The officer said it looks like she took some kind of poison. Suicide, apparently. She left a note behind. Has anything come back to you?

Jackson says nothing. Dr. Despair continues.

DESPAIR

I didn't think it would. What are you planning to tell that Detective?

JACKSON

[I don't know.]

DESPAIR

You don't know? If you don't mind my saying so, that doesn't seem very wise. If you tell him you don't remember anything, he'll be suspicious. He'll want to come back to talk to you. It would be a disturbance. I won't have it. I want you to tell him something that he'll just accept. Say that your wife was depressed because, I don't know... Yes, I found a letter in your wallet, from a young woman named Alice. It seems you were planning to run away with her. Do you remember?

Jackson looks aghast, but says nothing. Dr. Despair continues, and this time the old, maniacal tone that we remember so well starts creeping into his speech.

DESPAIR

I didn't think you would. But it doesn't matter. It'll all come back to you... Just tell the Detective that your wife found out about your affair, but that you never dreamed she would kill herself... That should be enough to convince him that you're innocent... even though you and I know better, eh, Dr. Jackson? Ah, ah!

Jackson grows agitated as the "mad" Dr. Despair slowly re-appears.

DESPAIR

I see that we understand each other now. Good. Some of your memories must be returning. Excellent. Don't upset yourself. I'm going to get the Detective.

Dr. Despair walks out of the room, leaving Jackson alone, the nightmare and the reality colliding in his mind.

DETECTIVE (O. S.)

Oh!

The POLICE DETECTIVE enters the room, followed by a smiling Dr. Despair. The Detective doesn't look like the type that solves murder mysteries. He couldn't stop himself from reacting in shock when he saw Jackson's face.

DESPAIR

You should have seen him last week... At the speed he was driving... I did my best to patch him up but his face was completely destroyed... You can question him now, but if he shows any signs of fatigue, I'll have to ask you to leave, OK?

DETECTIVE

OK.

The Detective sits down on the chair. He avoids looking at Jackson. After collecting his thoughts, he begins.

DETECTIVE

Your wife, Dr. Jackson... Was she alive the last time you saw her?

There is a pause. It is obvious to us that Jackson is taking his time before answering. Finally:

JACKSON

[Yes.]

DETECTIVE

Why did you hesitate before answering?

DESPAIR

You must understand, Detective. In his condition, without lips, he has enormous difficulties in shaping words. He must learn how to talk again, almost like a baby.

The Detective seems to accept this explanation.

DETECTIVE

Ah, I see.

He turns back to Jackson.

DETECTIVE

The Doctor told you that your wife has apparently committed suicide, is that right?

JACKSON

[Yes. ]

DETECTIVE

Do you know why she might have done it? Was she depressed? Are you surprised by her death? Do you know where she might have gotten hold of poison? Why did she leave a note saying...

The Detective takes a small notebook from his pocket and flips through it until he finds what he's looking for.

DETECTIVE

Let me see... I have it here... "I'm taking my life of my own volition"...

He closes the notebook and looks at Jackson again.

DETECTIVE

That doesn't sound much like a suicide note, does it? "Of my own volition"... Usually, when someone leaves a suicide note it's some kind of long, rambling explanation. This reads like it's too thought out, you know?

There is a long pause. This time, the Detective is looking at Jackson, who is figuratively sweating bullets.

Suddenly, in an emotional outburst, Jackson grabs the Detective's arm and launches into a pathetic supplication.

JACKSON

[Please get me out of here! That man's a maniac! A monster! I was okay after the accident. He disfigured me! Broke my teeth! Blinded me! Oh my God! Now he wants to kill me! Please help me!

Understandably, the Detective is left completely baffled and clueless by the outburst of gibberish. He turns to Dr. Despair for an explanation.

DETECTIVE

Why is he getting so agitated? What's he trying to say?

DESPAIR

Apparently his wife was horribly jealous because he'd had an affair. He never thought that she'd kill herself over it. You never know with women, though, do you? Ha, ha! He's a medical researcher and he thinks she may have found the poison in his laboratory. As for the note, he said that she used to leave little post-its all over the house, with things like "wipe your feet" or "your dinner is on the top shelf". He thinks she just did the same thing this time...

DETECTIVE

Wow. That's amazing. You could understand all that?

Despair looks pleased with himself, but tries to feign modesty.

DESPAIR

Years of practice, Detective.

The Detective stands up to leave.

DETECTIVE

It's still incredible. I guess this clears things up for my report. I don't think I'll have to bother you again, Doctor...

JACKSON

[Please don't go!]

DETECTIVE

And you, Dr. Jackson, you have my sincere condolences for your loss. Don't worry, I'll do everything in my power to wrap the investigation up quickly. Just concentrate on getting better. And remember don't drive so fast in the future.

He walks to the door followed by Dr. Despair. The Doctor shakes the Detective's hand.

DESPAIR

One of my nurses will see you out. I need to check on Dr. Jackson now. Thank you for your patience, Detective.

DETECTIVE

No, thank you, Doctor. You've been real helpful.

Exit the Detective.

Dr. Despair returns to the side of the bed in a few, savage steps. The pleasant, smiling composure he was affecting is now gone. He looks angry, dangerous.

DESPAIR

Why did you tell him about the teeth and the eyes? Are you mad? Do you realize what would have happened if he'd been able to understand you?

JACKSON

[It's true, it's true! You broke my teeth! You stabbed my eyes!]

DESPAIR

It's not true! I did no such thing. You had a hallucination or a nightmare induced by the anesthetic.

JACKSON

[I don't know...]

DESPAIR

Well, I do, and I can tell you that that's the truth. What do you think would the Detective have done if I'd told him you'd murdered your wife?

JACKSON

[I did not murder my wife!]

DESPAIR

Please! Everyone here can see that you did it. Everyone can SEE it but you, of course, ah, ah! Alice herself told me she'd asked you to do it. She's downstairs, by the way, do you want me to get her? A beautiful woman, Alice, Palace, Chalice... I can't fault you for your taste. I think she'd be happy to see you. She'll cry a little, she'll want to kiss you, but I'm not the jealous type.

JACKSON

[I don't want to see her!]

DESPAIR

You don't want to see her? But you can't see her, ah, ah! What with? Ah, ah! Seriously, Dr. Jackson, you're in no condition to go anywhere, so you might as well relax and let her take care of you. Yes, I know, some people would say it's immoral, what with the two of you being accomplices in the murder of your wife and all, but I'm above those petty conventions. I'll go get her. I'll be right back. Stay where you are.

Exit Dr. Despair. Jackson remains alone for a few minutes, his body expressing his utter helplessness. A single bloody TEAR slowly rolls down his cheek.

Then, we HEAR FOOTSTEPS coming closer. The door opens. Dr. Despair walks in, immediately followed by ALICE, a beautiful blonde dressed in a nurse's uniform. Her face has a slight pouty expression.

When she sees Jackson's horrible face, her eyes grow wide, she SCREAMS, turns around and runs away crying.

DESPAIR

Tsk, tsk. Women. That didn't go quite as well as we thought, did it? I'd guess that you've just been dumped, Dr. Jackson. To be fair to the lovely

Alice, palace, chalice, she remembers you as a handsome man with beautiful eyes and a human face... She's probably not going to want to be your nurse either. You're not very lucky with women, are you? Your wife commits suicide, your lover deserts you. What can I say? Women are like that. We must learn to accept it, I suppose...

Jackson is grabbing his head in his hand, shaking it gently, as if he was crying -- which he can no longer do, of course.

DESPAIR

You've just discovered you can't cry anymore... Believe me, some people would actually envy you. I'm afraid that if I were to bring your other friends to see you, they'd react the same as Miss Alice and it'd have a terrible impact on your morale and jeopardize your recovery. Speaking of which, it's time for your injection...

Dr. Despair goes to the side table, and prepares an injection.

DESPAIR

I also wanted to tell you that I checked with your HMO and you can stay here until you're fully recovered. It's cheaper than rotting away in the hospital, or hiring some private nurse that would either mistreat you or rob you blind, eh, eh.

Dr. Despair returns to the bed, swabs Jackson's arm and injects him.

DESPAIR

Believe me, we'll take very good care of you here. You'll make friends with my other patients, and there'll be all kinds of distractions, I can assure you of that...

Jackson relaxes as the drug starts to take effect.

JACKSON

[Okay...]

DESPAIR

Good. At last you're being sensible.  
I only want what's best for you.  
Speaking of which, you'll have to sign  
a few releases, so that we can take  
care of your affairs while you're here,  
as snug as a bug in a rug.

Despair pulls a sheet of paper and a pen out of his inside pocket, then holds them in front of Jackson.

DESPAIR

You do want me to take care of you,  
don't you, Dr. Jackson?

JACKSON

[Hm, yes...]

DESPAIR

Well then you'll need to sign these.

Despair puts the pen in Jackson's hand.

DESPAIR

Let me help you... A little signature  
here... You've forgotten how to sign?  
Just write your name... Like that. J-A-  
C-K-S-O-N... Very good...

He quickly pulls the signed paper away from Jackson.

DESPAIR

If you could see at all, you'd notice  
that this pen is filled with red ink.  
I thought it'd be a nice, ironic  
gesture. You know, like in all those  
stories where someone sells their soul  
to the Devil by signing a pact in blood  
that guarantees they're going to Hell.  
Do you believe you're in hell, Dr.  
Jackson?

JACKSON

[Fuck you!]

DESPAIR

Good! I'm glad you exhibit such strong sentiments, Dr. Jackson. You'll need all your strength in the days ahead, in preparation for the Big Day. You're totally at my mercy, you know. Your body and soul belong to me. You can't do anything -- eat, sleep -- unless I will it. Now, I want you to rest, but before you do, I want to leave you with one final thought...

Despair leans forward and whispers conspiratorily in Jackson's ear.

DESPAIR

Life's a bitch! Ah! Ah! Ah!

Jackson slumps in his bed as Dr. Despair exits, and we

WIPE TO RED.

INT. JACKSON'S ROOM - THE NEXT DAY

A PAIR OF HANDS (Dr. Despair's) shake Jackson awake.

DESPAIR

Wake up, Dr. Jackson. You mustn't oversleep. It's not healthy.

Jackson wakes up. Dr. Despair helps him sit up, fluffs his pillow and makes him comfortable. Then he CLAPS his hand.

NAM, a wrestler-sized Australian aborigine (with strange tattoos on his face) ENTERS THE ROOM, wheeling a cart with a bowl of unappetizing porridge on it. He is dressed as an orderly.

DESPAIR

This is Nam, who serves our meals and will take care of you. Until you can learn how to use your new teeth, I'm afraid it's only porridge for you, Dr. Jackson. Say hello to Nam.

JACKSON

[Hello Nam.]

DESPAIR

Good. I'm glad to see you're in a good mood today. Nam comes from Papua New

Guinea, by the way. It's a long story that I'll be happy to tell you another time, but now I've got my morning rounds to do. You're not my only patient, you know, even if you're the most interesting. I'll leave you in Nam's capable hands.

Exit Dr. Despair with a "toodle-oo" wave of the hand.

Meanwhile, Nam has wheeled the food cart next to the bed. Jackson waits to be fed normally. But shockingly, Nam grabs Jackson's hair and pull his head back, with a swift, savage gesture, forcing his mouth to open.

With his other hand, he pours the contents of he porridge bowl into Jackson's mouth.

Jackson swallows hard and quickly, like a chicken being force fed, as he tries not to suffocate.

When the contents of the bowl are gone, Nam repeats the operation with a big glass of water.

Then, as silently as he entered, he leaves, taking the cart with him.

Jackson COUGHS and SPUTTERS as food dribbles down onto his bony chin and pajamas.

Dr. Despair returns, and notices the situation. He sponges off the bits of food with a napkin.

#### DESPAIR

You'll have to remember to keep your head way back, Dr. Jackson, otherwise the food won't go down. Without lips what else could you expect, eh? Don't you find the idea of that rather funny? Mind you, we're used to funny sights in this clinic... Now that you've had your breakfast, how about a short walk? It's only the first day, and I don't want to tire you, but I thought you might enjoy meeting the other patients in the dining room. Can you get up?

Dr. Despair half helps, half pushes Jackson out of bed, helps his feet towards a pair of slippers, hands him a

cane, takes his arm and assisting him to take his first steps.

DESPAIR

That's excellent. In a few days, you'll be able to move about on your own...

Dr. Despair leads Jackson out of the room...

INT. MAIN HALL - DAY

...Across the main hall...

DESPAIR

I had the forethought of putting you in a room just across from the dining room, by the way...

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

As we'd expect, there's a long, refectory table. About a dozen PATIENTS are sitting there, waiting for their breakfast. They all wear the same uniforms. Some are clearly victims, with fear in their eyes. Others may be mad, or suffering from retardation, lost in worlds of their own. A few are physical freaks and oddities. It is not a pleasant sight.

Nam is going around, pouring warm porridge into the bowls. The room is filled with the low din of conversational noise, a few cackles, stifled laughs, even a softly-whispered song.

When Dr. Despair walks into the room with Jackson, all the noise stops. Abruptly. Totally. All the faces turn towards the Doctor and his guest.

DESPAIR

I want you all to meet our new guest, Dr. Jackson. Frankly, he's someone quite a few notches above you pathetic wretches. Say hello to Dr. Jackson.

PATIENTS (AD LIB, ALL)

Hello Doctor Jackson.

Despair turns to Jackson and speaks in a proprietary manner.

DESPAIR

I wish you could see them. They're not much, but they're mine.

He turns back to the patients, and speaks to them sternly.

DESPAIR

Dr. Jackson wants to know about the Big Day. So I'd like all of you to sing the Big Day Song. You know the song, we've sung it many times before. Okay? Start.

This is a truly pitiful spectacle. These sad creatures really can't sing, and they're obviously terrified of the madman who controls their lives. The song sounds a bit like a Gregorian chant.

PATIENTS

To Life, to Life  
To years of sacrifice!  
Let's celebrate The Big Day when it comes!  
To Sight, to Sight  
To years without light  
Let's waken to the Big Day when it's here!  
To Death, to Death,  
To years beneath the earth  
Let's mourn The Big Day when it's gone!

DESPAIR

This amusing little medley, Dr. Jackson, is only a prelude. You'll soon find out all about the Big Day that we've all been waiting for... But I think that's enough excitement for one day...

He turns to Nam who stands silently, awaiting the orders of his master.

DESPAIR

Nam, take Dr. Jackson back to his room and put him to bed.

Obediently, but not gently, the Papuan grabs Jackson's arms and they exit the Dining Room.

INT. MAIN HALL - DAY

As Nam propels Jackson back towards his room, we HEAR voices from the Dining Room.

DESPAIR (O. S.)

I don't see Helen. Where is she?

We HEAR the sound of LIGHT FOOTSTEPS entering the room from another entrance.

HELEN (O. S.)

I'm here, Doctor.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

There is a RUMBLE of chairs. With almost choreographed grace, all the Patients stand up, as if they were in court, then sit down again.

The newcomer is a beautiful, dark-haired woman in her early forties -- hard to tell her age -- with a sad and forlorn expression on her face. This is a woman from whom all hope and all life has been extinguished. She speaks in a listless voice.

DESPAIR

Helen, did you know that we have a new guest?

HELEN

No, I didn't, Doctor.

DESPAIR

What? Alice didn't tell you? How terrible of me to break such important news to you without any preparation. The shock could cause your poor, weak heart to stop beating. We can't risk you having a coronary, so close to the Big Day, can we, my love?

HELEN

No, Doctor, we can't.

DESPAIR

Call me Dominic, or darling, as you used to.

HELEN

Yes, darling.

DESPAIR

Would you like to see our new guest, Helen?

HELEN

If that's what you want, darling.

Despair begins to get irritated at Helen's constant agreement.

DESPAIR

I'm familiar with the routine.

He briefly loses his carefully studied composure.

DESPAIR

Don't you think it's become a bit tiresome after twelve years of it!

He takes a deep breath and visibly calms himself.

DESPAIR

Go and see him. He's in the room across the hall.

Helen turns and walks towards the door, obeying Despair's instructions.

Before she can leave the room, however, he raises an index finger to stop her.

DESPAIR

Wait!

He goes to the door and shouts across the hall.

DESPAIR

Dr. Jackson, a lady is coming in to see you. She's very beautiful. She's also my wife, but as you know, I'm not the jealous type, ah, ah! So if you want to impress her, make an effort to look your best.

He turns again towards Helen.

DESPAIR

Go ahead, my love. Dr. Jackson is a very handsome man with beautiful eyes and a finely-turned mouth.

Helen walks out of the Dining Room as we

CUT TO:

INT. JACKSON'S ROOM - DAY

Jackson is sitting on his bed. He HEARS Helen's footsteps approaching. He covers his face with his hands and turns his head away.

Helen's footsteps stop before she walks in the door, then we HEAR her retracing her steps and we

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Helen walks in.

DESPAIR

So, my love, what did you think of him?

HELEN

As you said, he's very handsome, darling.

There is a pause. We watch Dr. Despair think, wondering what he's going to say or do, but his face offers no clue, until he turns and shouts down the hall:

DESPAIR

Nam! Tie his arms behind his back and keep his head turned towards the door!

CUT TO:

INT. JACKSON'S ROOM - DAY

Nam grabs Jackson, who struggles weakly but in vain. The Papuan ties Jackson's wrists behind his back. Then grabs his head between his huge hands and twists it until it squarely faces the door.

We HEAR Dr. Despair's voice from the Dining Room.

DESPAIR (O. S.)  
Shall we try again, my love?

We HEAR the FOOTSTEPS again, except that, this time, they don't stop.

Jackson makes a last minute and totally useless effort to turn his head away. But in vain. Nam's grip cannot be broken.

Helen walks into the room. She looks squarely at Jackson's horribly disfigured face.

We CUT from one face to the other: his expressing pain and shame; hers expressing absolutely no emotion.

Finally, she turns and leaves the room, and we

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Dr. Despair gleefully questions Helen as soon as she steps back into the room.

DESPAIR  
So what did you think of him?

HELEN  
Exactly as you described him, darling.  
A very handsome man.

This is, of course, not the answer Dr. Despair wanted to hear. He grits his teeth. He's obviously having difficulty controlling his rage.

DESPAIR  
Yes, I said he was very handsome and you tell me he's very handsome. You'd say that even if he had the head of a pig. You always say and do what I want, don't you? I can't trip you up, not even once. But we'll see who has the last laugh on the Big Day! Ha! Ha!

He turns towards the waiting patients and begins to shout at them.

DESPAIR  
Laugh with me! I said, laugh!

Obediently, the Patients stop eating their porridge and launch into a MAD CACKLE of HYSTERICAL LAUGHTER.

DESPAIR  
Enough! Stop!

They stop on command. Silence returns.

DESPAIR  
Eat!

They all return to their gruel.

DESPAIR  
I'm very disappointed in all of you.  
This is not how I'd planned to  
introduce Dr. Jackson to our happy,  
little family, and to tell him about  
the Big Day, which we have all been...

Suddenly, one of the patients (let's call him NICK), who looks less defeated and less mad than the others, stands up. His chair, pushed back, falls to the floor.

NICK  
Enough! I've had enough of this  
madhouse I can't stand it anymore! I  
don't want to stay here! I've got to  
get out of here! Let me go!

Nick starts running towards the door.

DESPAIR  
Nick! What do you think you're doing?  
Come back here! At once!

Nick doesn't stop, but as he reaches the door, he finds his escape blocked by Nam's hulking silhouette.

Nam grabs the patient in a bear-hug hold.

DESPAIR  
I'm terribly disappointed in you, Nick.  
You were doing so well. A relapse so  
close to the Big Day... Tsk, tsk. You  
must be treated at once.  
(to Nam)  
Tie him up and tear all the nails off  
of his right hand.

CAMERA PULLS IN on a pair of blood-encrusted chains and manacles sealed into the wall, and an ominous pair of bloody pincers lying on the floor next to them.

As we HEAR Nick's rebellious SCREAMS, CAMERA PANS to the Patients, all looking straight into their bowls, studiously avoiding looking at the scene.

As we CLOSE IN, we SEE that many Patients have NO FINGERNAILS on one or the other of their hands!

DESPAIR  
(to the Patients)  
Scream!

Obediently, they all start screaming in unison with Nick's screams as we

CUT TO:

INT. JACKSON'S ROOM - DAY

Jackson is still sitting on his bed, his wrists tied behind his back.

He HEARS Nick's horrible SCREAMS coming from the Dining Room.

He struggles to free himself of his bonds, finally succeeds but in so doing, loses his balance and falls off the bed.

His head hits the floor and we

WIPE TO RED.

EXT. THE CLINIC - EVENING SUNSET

ESTABLISHING SHOT. Birds are chirping in the park. Things look fairly idyllic.

CAMERA PULLS IN on one of the windows. We HEAR the sound of an ELECTRIC RAZOR as we

CUT TO:

INT. JACKSON'S BATHROOM - EVENING

Jackson is shaving himself. Even though he doesn't need the mirror, habits are hard to break. His face is still awful, without eyes or lips, but he looks better, stronger.

When he is done, he walks back into...

INT. JACKSON'S ROOM - EVENING

... And groping like a blind man, he goes to the closet and with difficulty starts dressing in a set of nondescript clothes.

We HEAR the voice of Dr. Despair coming from the corridor, on the other side of the door.

DESPAIR (O. S.)

Helen, dinner is about to be served.  
Will you ask Dr. Jackson to join us in  
the dining room? I'm afraid he and Nam  
aren't getting along very well. At  
lunch, I thought they'd come to blows.  
Perhaps your sweet disposition will  
succeed where all my efforts seem to  
have failed...

We HEAR the sound of FOOTSTEPS approaching. There is a KNOCK on the door. It opens. Helen ENTERS.

HELEN

Will you please join us for dinner, Dr.  
Jackson?

Jackson remains silent, immobile.

Helen walks closer to him, and very softly:

HELEN

Please?

Jackson surrenders to Helen's request. She takes hold of his arm and, with her leading him gently, they exit the room...

INT. MAIN HALL - EVENING

...Cross the Hall and...

INT. DINING ROOM - EVENING

...Enter the dining room.

Dr. Despair is sitting at the head of the table. At his left is a young, very handsome man (GABRIEL). There are half a dozen empty chairs on either side of him. Then, towards the other end of the table, sit all the Patients.

Dr. Despair waves at Jackson, who is still being led by Helen, and indicates that they should come and sit at the head of the table.

DESPAIR

Ah, Dr. Jackson. So good of you to join us. Come and sit here will you? We can't have someone of your qualities sitting amongst the riffraff.

With Helen's help, Jackson makes his way across the dining room.

Despair points towards his patients.

DESPAIR

You should consider it a blessing that you can't see them. Hydrocephalics, macrocephalics, microcephalics, goiters, hunchbacks... Ugh. At least, you don't have to worry about losing your lunch.

Dr. Despair points at the empty chair to his right.

DESPAIR

Come and sit on my right. My lovely wife will sit next to you.

He turns to Helen.

DESPAIR

Help the Doctor to his chair, my love.

HELEN

Yes, darling.

Helen helps Jackson find his chair and sit. She does it with perhaps a little too much TLC because Dr. Despair, who's watching them like a hawk, frowns when he notices it. With a sudden change of mood, he remarks:

DESPAIR

You'll have to learn to fend for yourself, Dr. Jackson. My wife has better things to do than play at being your seeing-eye dog all the time, you understand?

Helen says nothing and takes her seat, next to Jackson. Despair with his typical mercurial mood swings becomes once again congenial.

DESPAIR

Still, everything in its time. I'm not the jealous type, ah, ah. Speaking of which, you might be interested to know that, normally, your lovely Alice would be sitting where you're sitting right now, but as you may recall, today is her day off. She's probably found some new lover-boy in town already. I hope you're not the jealous type either, Dr. Jackson, ah, ah!

Dr. Despair then introduces Gabriel, who's remained silent and grim.

DESPAIR

I forgot to introduce my assistant, Gabriel. He's sitting right across from you, but the poor boy has been very depressed lately and hasn't felt much like talking, have you, Gabriel? You see, Gabriel is in love with my wife, but unfortunately for him, and fortunately for me, she rather despises him. Don't you despise Gabriel, my love?

No reply. There is silence in the room, except for the vague noise of the Patients at the other end of the table.

DESPAIR

I said, don't you despise Gabriel, my love?

HELEN

Yes, darling.

DESPAIR

I wish you had eyes to see Gabriel, Dr. Jackson. He's a Greek god. So handsome, with blond hair and blue eyes... Did you know that Dr. Jackson's eyes were brown, my love?

HELEN

No, darling.

DESPAIR

A lovely shade of brown... Ah, the food  
is here!

Nam and another Papuan orderly (NAM 2, who looks exactly like NAM except for different tattoos on his face) have come in, pushing carts with plates of food on them.

DESPAIR

You'll find the food here excellent,  
Dr. Jackson. I've hired the best chef  
I could find.

Nam is putting a plate containing an assortment of hors d'oeuvres in front of them, starting of course with Dr. Despair.

DESPAIR

The plate in front of you contains an  
assortment of hors d'oeuvres. Try  
pressing a hand against your mouth. It  
will help replace your lips. And don't  
feel embarrassed. If you could see how  
some of my other patients ingest their  
food, you'd feel positively dignified  
ah, ah! Isn't that true, Helen?

HELEN

Yes, darling.

Despair now addresses the entire company.

DESPAIR

Aren't we all forgetting something?

Total silence. Fearful glances.

DESPAIR

The song. Because Dr. Jackson is our  
guest, we must sing it in his honor. I  
want to hear everyone singing.

PATIENTS

To Life, to Life  
To years of sacrifice!  
Let's celebrate The Big Day when it  
comes!  
To Sight, to Sight  
To years without the light

Let's waken to the Big Day when it's  
here!  
To Death, to Death,  
To years beneath the earth  
Let's mourn The Big Day when it's gone!

DESPAIR

Very good. You may eat now.

He turns to Jackson again.

DESPAIR

It's a tradition. I'm very attached to  
tradition... But I see you're having  
trouble with your shrimp. You have  
such delicate fingers, my love, will  
you help Dr. Jackson with his shrimp?

HELEN

Yes, darling.

Helen starts helping Jackson.

A CLOSE-UP reveals their hands touching for the first time.  
Perhaps a little too much, a little too long. A little too  
intimately.

JACKSON

[Thank you.]

There is a pregnant silence. Jackson starts chewing on his  
food, holding one hand against his mouth as instructed.  
Everyone in the room is watching him. He is the only one  
eating -- and he knows it.

Dr. Despair, who misses nothing, has taken note of the  
hands touching and we can see that he is looking for a way  
to express his seething anger.

CAMERA PANS to a Patient (MARTIN) -- probably a retarded  
man -- who is eating in a particularly sloppy fashion.

Dr. Despair notices it and erupts.

DESPAIR

Mister Martin! What did I tell you  
about table manners?

Martin looks fearful, terrified, as if lightning had just  
struck him. He utters some apologetic borborygmi.

DESPAIR

Nam! Five lashes!

Nam pulls out a riding crop and delivers five resounding BLOWS to poor, whimpering Martin's back. Each blow visibly puts Despair in a better mood.

DESPAIR

Now that we're all gathered together, should we tell Dr. Jackson about the Big Day or not? What do you think, my love?

HELEN

Yes, darling.

DESPAIR

Yes, we should, or yes, we should not?

For the first time, Helen shows some of that actual emotion that she has kept hidden beneath her acquiescent exterior.

HELEN

Please, Dominic, don't!

Despair appears delighted that he has finally elicited a truly felt response from Helen.

DESPAIR

I'm afraid I disagree. Dr. Jackson cannot understand what's going on in his new home if we don't tell him. And if he doesn't understand, how can he play his part properly in our little drama? No, I'm afraid I think the time has come to tell Dr. Jackson the truth...

He turns to Jackson.

DESPAIR

You remember yesterday, after the Detective's visit, I asked you if you thought you were in Hell, and you gave me some kind of flippant answer? Well, you were wrong. You are in Hell. Oh no, of course not the one they tell you about in Church, with its pointy-tailed devils carrying pitchforks, but a Hell of a kind nevertheless... A small

Hell, a private Hell you might say...  
And one that, unlike the other one, is  
not eternal. My Hell will end on the  
Big Day, a day that is fast  
approaching... I can see you wondering,  
what is the Big Day? To answer that, I  
must first tell you about a time  
fourteen years ago, when I first met  
Helen... You know the French saying,  
"Cherchez la femme"? "Seek the Woman"?  
I like to add, "There you'll find  
Hell". In fact, it's become one of my  
favorite sayings. What do you think?

JACKSON

[Very funny.]

DESPAIR

You think it's funny? I'm glad you do.  
Maybe that's because you've lost your  
memory. After all, remember that you  
killed your wife. What kind of hell  
must your life together have been like  
to drive you to commit murder, eh? But  
let's not dwell on that. Helen, would  
you agree with me that, where there are  
women, there is Hell too?

HELEN

Anything you say, darling.

Once again, Despair blazes with anger.

DESPAIR

Ah, that infernal harmony! Always  
anything I want! Anything I say! It's  
like a wall behind which you hide your  
real feelings, so I never know what  
you're really thinking.

Nam begins taking away the hors d'oeuvres plates, starting  
with Dr. Despair's.

DESPAIR

No need to rush things, Nam. We have  
plenty of time tonight. What's our  
main course? Sole meuniere?  
Excellent! It's one of our chef's best  
dishes, Dr. Jackson. You'll love it.  
(to Nam)

Make sure you remove all the bones from Dr. Jackson's portion. We don't want our guest to choke if we want him to hear the rest of our little domestic tale...

(to Helen)

I see that you've left your shrimp, Helen. They're very good. Is it because they remind you of something?

Helen trembles slightly.

HELEN

No, darling.

DESPAIR

You lying bitch! You know very well that you were eating shrimp at that dinner party fourteen years ago, when we first met... When I fell in love with you... I've told you that a million times!

Nam is now putting plates with hot fillets of sole in front of them.

DESPAIR

Don't let the sole get cold, Dr. Jackson. There's nothing worse than cold fish... Where was I?...

He turns to Helen again and begins to speak intensely

DESPAIR

Do you remember how we used to go and spend our week-ends together in that little fisherman's village in Baja? How we used to go and gorge ourselves on shrimp and lobster at that seafood restaurant by the harbor?

(almost shouting)

Tell me you do remember!

Helen looks distraught as the CAMERA PANS to the uneaten shrimp as we

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. BAJA CALIFORNIA RESTAURANT - SUNSET

A plate of shrimp on a different table. This is a flashback to that fateful time, fourteen years in the past.

CAMERA PULLS BACK to reveal a small fishing village.

CAMERA PANS to a restaurant terrace where a younger, smiling Helen and Dr. Despair sit at a sumptuous seafood meal. The sun is beautifully setting over the ocean and romance is in the air.

DESPAIR

Are you enjoying your shrimp, my love?

HELEN

Of course I am. You know how much I love them.

DESPAIR

Do you know what I love, Helen?

HELEN

What, Domini c?

DESPAIR

You, my love. I love you more than I can ever express to you. I want that love to go on forever and ever. I want us to spend the rest of our lives together. I want you to be my wife, Helen.

HELEN

I... I don't know how to answer you.

DESPAIR

I think it should be an easy answer, just one word... Yes.

HELEN

I need time to think about it.

DESPAIR

But why? When you know how I feel about you, why don't you feel the same way about me?

HELEN

I do love you, but there are times when you frighten me a little. You lose your temper so easily, especially when

you get jealous. Last week at the lab I was talking to that young pharmaceutical salesman. You stormed in on us and I thought you were going to kill him. Your face was white with rage, it was terrifying.

DESPAIR

But it's because I love you. I can't bear the thought of losing you... I don't understand what you want. Women are always saying that men are afraid of commitment, but when one of us wants nothing more than to spend our every waking moment belonging to the one we love, you say we're asking too much... You have to decide!

As his speech goes on, it becomes clear that his temper is getting the best of him, indeed he is an illustration of the very point that Helen was trying to make. By the end he's banging his hands on the table, causing the other diners to look at him in concern.

Helen puts her hand on his to calm him.

HELEN

I'm sorry, I hurt your feelings. I apologize...

Just then the WAITER comes over to the table with their beverages and begins putting them on the table in a way that clearly interferes with their conversation.

He sets cups of coffee in front of both Helen and Despair

DESPAIR

I just feel that you're being unfair. Maybe I'm a little more emotional than some men, but in the six months that we've been going out, can you name one single time when my so-called temper has hurt anyone?

HELEN

Excuse me, waiter, I asked for tea, not coffee.

With bad grace, the waiter roughly grabs at her cup to take it back. At the same time, Despair, angry at being

interrupted is reaching his hand across the table towards Helen.

DESPAIR

Helen, will you answer m...

Despair's hand and the coffee cup collide. Some of the hot liquid spills out and burns the Doctor.

Enraged, Despair swats the man's arm away, causing him to drop the cup on the ground.

DESPAIR

You idiot! Isn't it bad enough that you couldn't get the lady's order right in the first place? Now you've burned me and made a mess to boot! Do you live in a barn? Don't you know how to behave around your betters?

The waiter tries to mop up the mess. He apologizes in a mix of Spanish and broken, although in a slightly ungracious manner.

WAITER

I'm sorry, Señor, but if you hadn't put your hand in the way, none of this would have happened...

DESPAIR

What are you mumbling about! I don't need to speak your heathen language to know when I'm being insulted! You son of a bitch! I'll teach you to insult me in front of a lady!

Despair leaps from his chair and stands aggressively.

Now the waiter gives up any pretense of trying to placate this mad gringo. He starts for Despair, ready to beat him to a pulp.

Other WAITERS rush from around the restaurant and hold him back. The other diners are hastily getting up from their tables and moving out of the way.

Helen sits watching the events, transfixed with horror and embarrassment. The scene is one of utter chaos.

Despair is white with rage. He yells at the men holding the waiter back.

DESPAIR

Let go of him! I've had enough of his insolence! No one treats Dominic Despair like this, no one!

The other waiters manage to pull their comrade back and out of the way.

The MAITRE D' HOTEL rushes over and begins calming the various patrons, then starts apologizing.

MAITRE D' HOTEL

I am so sorry, Señor and Señorita. Please accept the meal from the management as an apology. I'll send a new waiter over immediately. That man will be fired at once. Helen puts her hand on Despair's arm to pull him back into his seat.

HELEN

(to Maitre d')

It's all right. Give us a couple of minutes to calm down, please.

The Maitre d'hotel bows slightly and leaves them.

Despair sits in his seat, still white with anger. Helen reaches into her handbag and pulls out a small make-up mirror, which she holds up to his face. She speaks to Despair with real anger in her voice.

HELEN

Look at your face! This is exactly what I meant when I said you frightened me. That's not the face of a rational and loving man.

DESPAIR

What did you expect me to do? The man was a fool! He got your order wrong and then spilled boiling coffee on my hand. I was only trying to protect you.

HELEN

Protect me? Don't make me laugh! You didn't care a thing about me. You were only interested in revenge. I don't think I can even find words to express how odious your behavior was just now. There was a sadistic glee about you as you tried to humiliate that man!

DESPAIR

You can't be defending him?

HELEN

Of course not. He's incompetent as a waiter. But that's not the point. I can't stay with someone who reacts that way to things. Dominic, I'm leaving you. I can't bear this any longer.

Helen stands up and prepares to leave. Despair grabs hold of her hand and looks at her imploringly.

DESPAIR

Please stay. Please. I love you, Helen. What can I do to make you change your mind?

A pause. She considers her answer.

HELEN

I'll stay with you on one condition... You have to apologize to the waiter.

DESPAIR

To that fool?

HELEN

It's the only way.

Despair's face reflects his rage as we

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - EVENING

Back to Scene. Despair is still angry at the memory of that night. Helen has tears running down her face. The patients all sit looking down at their plates.

DESPAIR

Apologize! Me, an American doctor! To a Mexican waiter! I felt like a fool! But I would have done anything to keep you, so I went after that waiter and begged for his forgiveness. If only you could have seen how I felt inside, but I was cunning and hid my true feelings... Afterwards, you told me that you felt reassured, because it showed that I could control my anger and, yes, you would marry me. And I hugged you, and I cried. But they weren't tears of happiness... They were ones of rage and resentment for the humiliation that you'd forced on me, all in the name of love, and of disgust at myself for having surrendered so totally... It was at that very minute that I began to hate you... Hate you like the damned in Hell must hate the thought of Heaven...

Despair turns towards his patients and shouts.

DESPAIR

You're all damned too! Make her hear your cries of hatred!

PATIENTS (AD LIBS)

(screams, hisses, etc.)

Helen starts to cry in earnest. Jackson takes her hand. She doesn't pull it back. Despair looks at them coldly.

DESPAIR

Take your hand off my wife, Dr. Jackson!

Jackson does.

DESPAIR

I'll spare you the details of the pitiful life we led for the two years that followed our wedding. We had no children. Had my hatred made our love sterile? Helen was ill. I was unhappy. We slept in separate bedrooms. I tried to cheer her up by giving parties, inviting colleagues for

dinner, then, one night, when I came home, she wasn't there.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Another flashback.

Despair walks into a dark kitchen in an empty feeling house.

He puts on the light and sees a note taped to the refrigerator.

He takes it in his hand, but doesn't read it. Instead, he sets it down on the table and goes back to the refrigerator where he takes out a wrapped plate containing some kind of shrimp salad.

As he eats, he opens the note and reads. At first, tears run down his cheeks, then anger takes over and he throws the salad across the room.

DESPAIR (V. O.)

She'd left me for one of my colleagues.  
A good dancer. His name was... Well,  
it doesn't matter anymore. We'll just  
call him the Other Man. The only thing  
that mattered was that I was a fool,  
and she was a slut...

FADE TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - EVENING

Back to Scene. Despair is still angry at the memory.

DESPAIR

(to the Patients)  
Let her hear what we think of sluts in  
this establishment!

PATIENTS (AD LIBS)  
(screams, hisses, etc.)

DESPAIR

I bought a gun, because I wanted to  
kill them both. I looked for her  
everywhere, but she and her lover had

already left town. I hired a Detective, but they'd covered their tracks too well. Three years went by, three very long years... I thought I'd never see her again... I started this clinic out here in isolation to help me forget, but I couldn't forget... Then, one day, my secretary came to tell me that there was a woman who wanted to see me. I asked her who it was, and she said, the woman had told her to tell me she was my wife. Since I'd never filed for divorce, I knew it could only be Helen. You cannot even begin to comprehend my stupefaction. I took the gun from my drawer, but then I thought about it more and decided I would use my hands. Yes, I intended to strangle her, then and there, and damn the consequences. I rushed to the foyer, and there she was...

He looks at Helen with a sadistic gaze.

DESPAIR

My love, will you demonstrate the exact position in which I found you when you came to see me that day?

Helen can barely speak, she is so choked up with tears. But Despair shows her no mercy.

HELEN

D-Domi ni c, p-pl ease...

DESPAIR

You swore to do anything I want. You know the penalty for disobeying. Think of the Big Day...

As if the weight of the world is on her shoulders, Helen gets up and lies on her stomach on the floor, her arms extended.

DESPAIR (O. S.)

I wish you could see her as I first saw her that day, Dr. Jackson. She was like those priests who beg the Lord to forgive them after they've sinned. Her

posture as a sign of total repentance  
and submission...

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. FOYER - DAY

Flashback to a younger Helen, dressed differently, lying in the same position on the floor.

DESPAIR (V.O.)

She knew me well, too well, because  
when I saw her like that, my anger just  
vanished. How could anyone strangle a  
woman who's lying at your feet like  
that?

Despair paces for a few minutes looking at her. Helen just lies there.

DESPAIR

Get up Helen. Did he throw you out?

HELEN

No. He's dead.

For a second, Despair is taken aback.

DESPAIR

Is this why you've come back?

HELEN

I don't have any money, or friends. I'm  
was hungry. I've no place else to go.

Despair laughs bitterly.

DESPAIR

I don't know what I expected you to  
say... Perhaps excuses, justifications,  
appeals to any remaining love or mercy  
I might feel for you... But no, you're  
here simply because I'm your only  
alternative to death! That's rich!

Despair walks to a wall intercom and presses the button.

DESPAIR

Alice, could you join me please.

Alice enters the room.

DESPAIR

This woman is my wife Helen, Alice.  
She says she is hungry. Please have  
Nam bring her something to eat.

Alice leaves and Despair and Helen stand there silently.

DESPAIR

That girl -- Alice -- is my lover now.

Helen's head is bowed in defeat and she remains silent.  
Despair simply stares at her.

Soon Nam appears bearing a tray of food; there is shrimp  
somewhere on the plate.

He sets it down on a low table next a couch or armchair.  
Despair gestures at Helen to go over and eat.

This she does ravenously, almost animalistically.

DESPAIR (V. O.)

I watched her eat her food, hungrily,  
with desperation, like a dog, without  
looking at me... I couldn't guess how  
long she'd gone without food... Five  
days, a week maybe... It's funny, but I  
remember there were shrimp on that  
plate... Isn't it strange how shrimp  
have become like a leitmotif in this  
story? I wonder what Jung would say...  
Perhaps this small crustacean with its  
hard shell on the outside and its  
tender flesh inside is a symbol of  
something...

Helen finishes eating and sits there, her head bowed low  
over the plate, the picture of submissive defeat.

DESPAIR

What do you want? Do you want to stay  
here?

HELEN

Please Dominic. I'll do anything you  
want.

DESPAIR

I need time to think about it.

HELEN

There's something more that you need to know... I... I'm carrying his child...

CLOSE UP on Despair's face as we

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - EVENING

Despair's face, as he completes his story.

DESPAIR

Then I understood the depths of her duplicity. Why she'd come back to me instead of killing herself. Why she'd eaten my food and abased herself... I was stunned. I couldn't do anything but nod and leave the room...

(to Helen)

You can get up now. Sit back at the table.

Helen gets up and returns to her seat.

DESPAIR

I spent the next two hours pacing alone in my office. That was when I first formulated the concept of my revenge, what I called -- the Big Day...

He turns again to his patients.

DESPAIR

Sing about the Big Day again!

PATIENTS

To Life, to Life  
To years of sacrifice!  
Let's celebrate The Big Day when it comes!  
To Sight, to Sight  
To years without the light  
Let's waken to the Big Day when it's here!  
To Death, to Death,  
To years beneath the earth

Let's mourn The Big Day when it's gone!

DESPAIR

Enough! And for twelve years now,  
Helen has been living in anticipation  
of the Big D...

Helen looks like a woman on the verge of a nervous  
breakdown.

HELEN

Please, Dominic, I can't take it  
anymore...

She bursts into tears. Jackson takes her hands.

DESPAIR

Dr. Jackson, I told you to take your  
hands off my wife!

JACKSON

[No!]

DESPAIR

Let go of her!

JACKSON

[No!]

In an act of defiance, Jackson takes one of Helen's hands  
and places it delicately on his cheek.

DESPAIR

Nam!

The Papuan delivers a whipping blow of his crop to  
Jackson's back.

Furious, Jackson lets go of Helen's hand, grabs a knife,  
gets up and tries to rush towards Dr. Despair.

But Nam trips him and he falls to the floor.

DESPAIR

Teach him a lesson, Nam!

Nam starts kicking Jackson. Despair turns towards his  
patients and screams at them.

DESPAIR

You too, all of you!

The hysterical mob of Patients descends on Jackson, who crouches in a fetal position and tries to protect his head from the blows. The beating goes on for a while.

DESPAIR

Enough. Nam, take him back to his room.

Nam starts dragging Jackson's body by one of his arms.

DESPAIR

Not like that. By the hair!

Nam obeys.

DESPAIR

After the sole meuniere, you could have enjoyed an excellent cheesecake and some very fine coffee. You're a fool, Dr. Jackson.

As Nam is about to open the door of the dining room, Jackson manages to free himself and kicks the Papuan hard in the genitals.

The Papuan collapses on the floor. Jackson rushes out. Nam No. 2 looks like he's going to sprint after him, but Dr. Despair holds him back with a gesture of his hand.

DESPAIR

No, let him.

He shouts at Jackson's retreating footsteps.

DESPAIR

You want to leave, Dr. Jackson? Fine! Go! All the doors are open. But you'll find that there's only one way out of my domain, and you don't know where it is yet! Ha, ha!

CUT TO:

INT. MAIN HALL - NIGHT

Jackson runs stumbling along, groping at the walls, desperately seeking an exit.

INT. THE CLINIC - VARIOUS LOCATIONS - NIGHT

He turns once, twice, then he feels a draft.

He follows the draft, rushes down a small flight of stairs, clinging to the bannister, half-tripping, and finally makes it to a back-door.

EXT. THE CLINIC GROUNDS - NIGHT

Jackson comes out not from the front entrance of the Clinic, but from the back, directly onto the grounds.

The following scene is (mostly) silent, takes place entirely in the dark and is quite surreal.

It is pitch dark, Jackson is blind and totally unfamiliar with his surroundings. So HE doesn't see anything, and WE see very little.

He stumbles onward, away from the Clinic.

Then something causes him to trip. He falls to the ground.

He puts his hand out and we see that the object which tripped him is (or looks like) a wooden cross, the rough shape and size you find in country cemeteries.

Understandably, Jackson utters a small CRY and backs away from the cross -- only to feel the presence of yet another cross.

He figures out that he must be in a cemetery -- as spooky as the notion may be -- and decides to bravely continue forward, feeling his way between the crosses, intending to get out of the cemetery.

But the crosses don't stop!

As he keeps running faster, we SEE a vast, almost endless field of crosses.

Jackson's run is no longer straight and assured. He runs in a panic, in circles, like an animal desperately trying to escape from a trap.

Finally, he collapses on the ground. In front of him is some kind of dark mass. We can't see quite what it is, but we see enough to recognize the shapes of writhing tentacles and some wet, spongy, globulous, internal organ-like masses.

Jackson stumbles forward and falls into the mass.

We SEE his hand pulling up, emerging from the mass, touching his face. It is oozing with red liquid.

Jackson SCREAMS the scream of the damned and faints as we

WIPE TO RED.

EXT. THE CLINIC - THE NEXT DAY

Same ESTABLISHING SHOT as previously, except that it's morning. Birds are still chirping in the park. Things still look fairly idyllic.

DESPAIR (V. O.)

Wake up, Dr. Jackson. Wake up.

CAMERA PULLS IN on Jackson's bedroom window as we

CUT TO:

INT. JACKSON'S ROOM - DAY

Dr. Despair is sitting on Jackson's bed, removing bandages from his victim's face.

DESPAIR

How are we feeling today? I've got some good news. While you slept, I did some of that reconstructive surgery on your face I told you about. I used collagen to make you new lips, I hid all the scars...

When Dr. Despair is finished, we SEE Jackson's face at last. His eyes are still closed. His lower face seems back to normal -- at first.

Then, upon a CLOSER LOOK, we realize that his lips, chin and eyelids have a shiny, glossiness to them, leading us to realize that they are, in fact, artificial and the product of plastic surgery.

DESPAIR

You should be able to talk and eat normally now. You look wonderful. Just be careful when you shave... Jackson moves his head back and, just like a doll, his plastic eyelids open.

Behind them are two brown GLASS EYES,  
staring at us, cold, devoid of  
recognition, of humanity.

DESPAIR

I so wish you could see your new eyes.  
I'm very happy that I was able to come  
up with a set that almost matches the  
original color. Perhaps a little  
darker, but they goes very well with  
the rest of your face. Your eyelids  
work like a doll's. To open them, tilt  
your head back like this.

He demonstrates with his hand on Jackson's head.

DESPAIR

More gently. That's right. To close  
them, tilt your head down. With a bit  
of practice, you'll be able to get it  
right in no time, you'll see. Or  
rather, you won't, but you know what I  
mean, ah, ah! If you don't stare at  
people, I bet no one will ever guess  
that you're blind. And you have  
beautiful eyelashes. You're going to  
be very popular with the ladies, Dr.  
Jackson. Don't I deserve at least some  
thanks?

From now on, Jackson is able to speak clearly.

JACKSON

Fuck you.

DESPAIR

Listen to you. You articulated that  
"F" so clearly! Come on, surely you  
must concede that few doctors could or  
would have done all that I've done for  
you. Why, you look almost human now.

JACKSON

Go to hell.

DESPAIR

Tsk-tsk. I can't get over how well you  
pronounce those consonants. Why, I can  
even see you purse your mouth. Plastic

surgery is a wonderful thing. You should really be grateful, Dr. Jackson.

JACKSON

I'll show you my gratitude by killing you, you son of a bitch!

DESPAIR

A fine speech, with perfect pronunciation. Well, since you're so well disposed towards me, I think you'll want to hear the good news. Incredible news, really. A miracle to make your recovery pale by comparison. Something truly mind-boggling. Are you sitting for this? Of course, you are. Ah, ah! Here it is, then: My wife asked how you were.

He pauses and stares at Jackson.

DESPAIR

My wife asked how you were. What do you say to that?

JACKSON

Where's the miracle?

DESPAIR

You, ignorant fool! Never in the twelve years since Helen returned to me has she ever inquired about anyone. She's never once asked, "Where is so and so?" Even my assistant, Gabriel, who is the epitome of male beauty, leaves her totally indifferent. She's let him be consumed by his unrequited love without giving him even the favor of a glance. Ever since she came back, she's shown as much emotion as a piece of wood. You heard her: she'll do anything I want. Well, she means it. Literally. She's turned herself into some kind of living robot, with no feelings, no emotions, no life. Then, here you come, with no eyes and no lips, looking like the very portrait of death itself, and she asks how you are! Frankly, I was speechless. Now what do you say?

JACKSON

It's very nice of her.

DESPAIR

Nice of her? Is that all? You're lying. I'm sure your heart is beating a little faster already. Let me see...

Despair reaches over to take Jackson's pulse.

DESPAIR

I was right. It is! That's quite normal. You're a healthy male, you're proud to have seduced this woman that no one before you seemed to able to reach. Anyone's heart would beat faster in your position...

Despair gets up and slaps his hand together.

DESPAIR

But it's getting late and I don't have time to chat with you. I've got my rounds to do. I think you should get up and take a shower. I had Nam polish your shoes and put a new set of clothes in your closet. And a cane too. I'd like you to make yourself presentable for lunch.

Jackson stands up and speaks belligerently.

JACKSON

I don't want to have lunch with you and your damned freaks anymore.

DESPAIR

You mean, in the dining room? Of course not. From now on, I've given instructions that you should be served in the private dining room. You'll be having lunch with my wife. What do you say to that, eh? We should celebrate this good news with a glass of wine.

Dr. Despair pours two glasses of wine from an open bottle on the table by the window. He then hands one to Jackson, who takes it and sniffs it suspiciously.

JACKSON

What's this?

DESPAIR

You're so suspicious of me... I'm hurt, Dr. Jackson, really I am. It's only wine. Listen to me, I'll drink from my glass first...

He puts his glass to his lips and slurps noisily.

DESPAIR

It's from my own vineyards, just behind the clinic. That's where we found you last night...

JACKSON

Vineyards? You mean, the crosses?..

DESPAIR

What crosses? You stumbled on the stakes, and then fell into a vat of grapes. You were hysterical and covered with grape juice when Nam brought you back... Would you like some more? You should, you know. It's excellent for your arteries. It'll give you strength to flirt a little with Helen. I told you I wasn't the jealous type! Ah, ah.

Despair finishes his glass and smacks his lips in appreciation.

DESPAIR

Mmm... Very good. "The blood of the dead", the ancient Romans called it... You don't seem too happy at the idea of having lunch with my wife. Why?

JACKSON

What kind of sick game are you playing this time?

DESPAIR

You constantly misjudge me, Dr. Jackson. You act as if I'm some kind of monster. Let me see if I can explain... I don't know if you ever smoked, but if you did, you'd know that the first cigarette in the morning

always tastes wonderful, compared to the last one in the evening which seems bland and tasteless. That's because your taste buds grow used to the flavor. Well, it's the same thing with hate. I've been hating my wife for twelve years. That's a long time. As I told Gabriel not long ago, I can't taste my hate anymore. I've enjoyed it too much. It's horrible, when you think about it. That's why knowing that my wife cares for you, knowing that you're going to be flirting with her, no, no, don't deny it, I know you, that's what you're going to do, you can't help it, it's in your nature... Knowing all this is going to rekindle my hate. It's like adding more wood to the fire, or pepper to a boring recipe, or...

JACKSON

I don't give a fuck about your hate! I'm not a piece of wood or pepper, to provide you with some kind of sick pleasure. I won't have luck with your wife!

DESPAIR

You won't? I'm very disappointed in you, Dr. Jackson,. But you'll change your mind. You'll see...

Despair LEAVES the room, SLAMMING the door. Jackson waits for a minute, then shrugs and walks into the bathroom.

CUT TO:

INT. JACKSON'S ROOM - DAY - LATER

Jackson is finishing dressing. The new clothes make him look quite handsome, as he was at the beginning. He is practicing with a white cane, feeling his way around the room.

Suddenly there is a KNOCK at the door.

JACKSON

Come in.

Helen ENTERS.

HELEN

Will... will you please have lunch with me, Dr. Jackson?

There is a pause, the time for Jackson to realize that he hasn't the strength to turn her down, and that Dr. Despair has won again. He surrenders.

JACKSON

It will be my pleasure, Mrs. Despair.

HELEN

Please call me Helen.

JACKSON

Helen.

She turns and walks to the door. Jackson follows her, using his cane.

INT. MAIN HALL - DAY

When Jackson comes out, following Helen, there is a THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE.

CAMERA REVEALS Dr. Despair, Gabriel, the Papuans and all the patients, lined up against the wall, as if this was the army and they were awaiting for Jackson to review them.

PATIENTS

To Life, to Life  
To years of sacrifice!  
Let's celebrate The Big Day when it comes!  
To Sight, to Sight  
To years without the light  
Let's waken to the Big Day when it's here!  
To Death, to Death,  
To years beneath the earth  
Let's mourn The Big Day when it's gone!

DESPAIR

Silence! What do you think of our new guest? Isn't he handsome in his new clothes? Like a butterfly out of its cocoon...  
(to Jackson)

Dr. Jackson, before you step into the dining room to have lunch with my wife, on my behalf and that of all your fellow patients, let me present you with our heartfelt congratulations.

(to the Patients)

Let him hear how you approve of his metamorphosis.

PATIENTS (AD LIBS)

Cheer, Hear, hear, etc.

DESPAIR

Enough! We're all very envious of you here. My Dionysian assistant, the handsome Gabriel, who is here, standing next to me, has been in a state of seething rage ever since I told him of your success with the lovely Helen, haven't you, Gabriel?

CLOSE-UP on Gabriel: we SEE that his hands and ankles are shackled together, his eyes are blood-shot and unfocused, and some spittle is dribbling down his chin.

DESPAIR

Why, if I hadn't had him shackled and tranquilized, I believe he might try to kill you right now. I wish you could have seen him earlier, when I told him about your good fortune. Blood-shot eyes, his hands clutched like claws, his teeth clenched... He could have posed for a portrait of jealousy incarnate. Look at him now. Peaceful as a little angel. The angel Gabriel, ah, ah!...

GABRIEL

(moan)

DESPAIR

Sorry. I keep forgetting that you can't see. Well, hear him moaning. Aren't you enjoying his moans, Dr. Jackson? Even a little?

Despair steps aside to reveal Alice.

DESPAIR

And speaking of star-crossed lovers, you'll be delighted to know that Alice is back with us today. The beautiful, lovely Alice, Palace, Chalice... She loved you so much... before your accident, of course. But now that you have pretty new eyes to look at, and beautiful new lips to kiss, she's apparently fallen madly in love with you again. Isn't it true, Alice?

Alice throws a dark look at Dr. Despair but remains silent.

DESPAIR

She refuses to answer, but I know I'm right. You should see how she looks at you. She's just sulking. Everyone here is envious of you, Dr. Jackson, except possibly Nam and his brother...

He turns to Nam.

DESPAIR

Are you envious of Dr. Jackson, Nam?

Nam doesn't seem to understand or care about the question.

DESPAIR

Well, they don't matter anyway. Even I, who is not the jealous type, as you know, can't deny a certain twinge... If you could see my face, I think you'd be very, very afraid right now... But why am I rambling on? I don't want to do anything to spoil your appetite. A word of caution however. You should be gentle with Helen, or else...

JACKSON

Or else what?

DESPAIR

What are you thinking? What I meant to say was that her heart is very weak. She's been on medication for years. Any violent emotion, an intense shock, a lover's quarrel... Anything like that might cause her to drop dead right at your feet. You wouldn't want to see that, I mean, to hear that, would

you?... But here I am, prattling again  
and your food is almost ready...

Despair turns towards the patients.

DESPAIR

Let Dr. Jackson hear the screams of  
your envy!

PATIENTS (AD LIBS)

(screams, wails, etc.)

Helen grabs Jackson's hand and drags him inside the private  
dining room, while the WAILING continues.

INT. PRIVATE DINING ROOM - DAY

We're in a small dining room with a table that has seating  
for six, decorated in a continental style. We still HEAR  
some WAILING outside, then it stops abruptly.

Helen guides Jackson to a chair and helps him sit down.

JACKSON

Thank you.

She then goes and sits across from him.

Jackson feels the plate, the cutlery, the bread and butter  
that have been placed before him.

The door OPENS and NAM 2 ENTERS, pushing a cart with  
several covered plates. He puts the cart next to Helen,  
then LEAVES the room, closing the door behind him.

HELEN

He brought our dishes on a dinner cart.  
They're covered so they don't get cold.  
I'll start with the appetizers.

She lifts one of the covers and describes the contents to  
Jackson.

HELEN

There's some paté, tomatoes, carrots,  
radishes... and some shrimp too. Do  
you want any?

JACKSON

No, I don't think so.

HELEN

Me either...

She starts serving him. They eat in silence. Jackson is a little clumsy at first because of his facial surgery, but he manages to finish.

HELEN

Would you like more?

JACKSON

No, thanks.

HELEN

Some wine?

JACKSON

Yes, please.

She pours him a glass of wine from a crystal decanter on the table. He drinks it quickly, to gather strength for his next move.

JACKSON

Hel en. . .

HELEN

Yes?

JACKSON

Why don't you run away from here? Why do you stay in this hellish place, with a murderous maniac who humiliates you, degrades you... Is plotting some kind of horrible revenge for something you did to him more than ten years ago...

Helen doesn't answer. She appears lost in silent reverie.

JACKSON

I'm sorry... It's none of my business... I shouldn't have asked...

HELEN

No, don't apologize. I know you mean well. And after what you've been through yourself, you've earned the right to ask... I'm staying because, I can't go, at least not until what Dominic calls the "Big Day"...

JACKSON

What is that anyway?

HELEN

I'll tell you... In fact, Dominic ordered me to tell you...

JACKSON

Then I don't want to hear it!

HELEN

No, I can't disobey him. If I did, and he found out, which he would, he always does, then the consequences would be... unimaginable... The "Big Day" is both the day of my punishment, and of my deliverance. The day when Dominic said I'll experience the greatest joy any woman could feel, and the day I will die. That's how I'm finally going to leave this place. In fact, it's the only way out of here.

JACKSON

You're going to die? Why? How?

HELEN

It's very simple. On the "Big Day", my husband will...

JACKSON

Yes?

HELEN

...kill me.

Jackson stands up with such force he almost tips his chair over.

JACKSON

Kill you! And you're waiting here, like a lamb going to the slaughter, doing nothing? I don't understand...

HELEN

Sit down, and let me explain...

She removes the covers from the other dishes and starts serving.

HELEN

I'm serving you chicklen marsala. Be careful not to burn yourself, it's hot... Yesterday, when you bravely came to my defense, my husband had begun to tell you the story of our life together, but you didn't leave him time to finish and tell you what happened after he found out I was pregnant, you remember?... I waited in this very room for two hours, while he was sequestered in his office, wondering if he was going to let me stay, or kick me out like a dog... When he finally came back, he said I could stay, but that he would never forget what had happened or forgive me. We would no longer be husband and wife, other than in the legal sense. To humiliate me, he introduced me to his lover, a woman named Alice. I believe you know her?

Jackson nods somewhat embarrassedly, and continues eating.

HELEN

Then, he laid his final condition on the table: he would recognize my child, but have him raised abroad. He said that, having him around the clinic would always remind him of Daniel -- the Other Man as he called him. It would always be a living reminder of what had happened. He said the child would be reared in England, by a nanny, go to the best public schools and would be taken well care of. I could write to him, he could write to me, but there would be no other form of communication. No telephone calls. No secret visits. He wanted his home to be totally free of the child's presence for thirteen years... Why thirteen years? It was such a long time that I forgot his reasons. Perhaps he felt that it was long enough for him to forget? To finally welcome the child as a stranger that he could love, and not as a hateful reminder of his wife's infidelity? That was his last condition. He made me swear the most

solemn oath. If I disobeyed him in any way, he would see to it that my child would die. And if I obeyed him faithfully for thirteen years, then my child would be returned to me to hold in my arms at last, and on that same day, he promised me that I would either live or die. That's what the "Big Day" is...

JACKSON

That's... That's monstrous... And you agreed to it?

HELEN

What choice did I have? I never saw my child because I was sedated when Dominic delivered him. He told me it was a boy. I named him Mark. Since then, I've spent twelve years imprisoned in this house, never allowed to set foot outside, to see anyone... Buried alive within these walls...

Jackson is devastated by what he has heard.

JACKSON

Helen...

HELEN

Please, let me finish... Do you want another piece of chicken?

JACKSON

I don't think I'm hungry anymore...

HELEN

Some dessert then? The apple pie is excellent.

Jackson shakes his head no. Helen starts serving him as indicated in the dialogue below:

HELEN

Then have some fruit. A pear. I've put some cookies on your plate, and I'm pouring you another glass of wine...

She finishes serving him. As she continues to speak, his voice cracks with the emotion of her story.

HELEN

So, now you know what the "Big Day" is all about. It's the day when I'll see my son Mark for the first time in my life... When I finally get to hold him in my arms, to hug him, kiss him... He'll be thirteen in two weeks... That's when the "Big Day" is... In two weeks.

There is a silence following that revelation. Jackson extends his hand towards Helen. She takes it. They remain holding hands silently for a minute.

HELEN

Let me serve you some coffee. It's very good coffee...

She serves him coffee.

HELEN

Milk?

Jackson shakes his head negatively.

HELEN

Black then. Like me. How many sugars?

Jackson indicates two lumps. Helen drops them in his cup

HELEN

Careful, it's very hot... Another woman might have tried to reclaim her husband's love, but I knew that Dominic would never ever forgive me. That turned to horror when I realized that he'd only taken me back in order to make me pay, to expiate my sin... Not physically, of course. He bought me anything I could possibly want, the best clothes, the best food. He gave me money to send to Mark every month. But emotionally, it's been an unending series of humiliation and horrible threats. I was healthy as a horse before, but I began to develop a heart condition, either because of his torture or perhaps some kind of drug he fed me without my knowledge... I had to have several bypasses... Which

Dominic performed brilliantly. Now, I pray every day that I'll live until the "Big Day" when I'll see my darling son... Two more weeks, only two more weeks... before I die.

JACKSON

You won't die, Helen. I won't let it happen.

HELEN

I will. You don't know Dominic. From the very start, he made sure that I knew he'd never forgive me. At lunch... I only saw him at those awful lunches and dinners... he'd tell me stories about his vindictiveness. Once, he got a young man fired from his job on some kind of trumped-up charge because, believe it or not, twenty years before, when they were at school together, that other boy had beaten him at some kind of game or something childish like that... He became more and more detestable... He constantly humiliated me in front of his gallery of freaks, entertaining them with intimate details of our past life together... He abused me, forced me to obey absurd and degrading orders, just to test the limits of my submission... He even found a photo of Daniel, the "Other Man" as he calls him, and blew it up and had my entire room wallpapered with it, then put a huge eye on the ceiling, staring at me... He calls it the Eye of Retribution. It's meant to judge me, to remind me of my sin... He's paraded his lover, Alice, in front of me. Then, when he got tired of that, he found Gabriel, and hired him to seduce me... I accidentally learned that he wasn't a nurse but a mental patient from another hospital. He wanted me to fall in love again, with a madman, but I didn't, and Gabriel's love eventually turned to hate... Together, they began plotting new ways of driving me mad.. Of killing me... Dominic left the door to his

office open on purpose so that I could hear them talking. He'd ask Gabriel if he'd found a new, interesting way to cause me to have a heart attack on the Big Day...

JACKSON

No... It's too horrible. It can't be true. Tell me it's not true, Helen!

HELEN

How could I invent such abominations? How could anyone? Once, Gabriel suggested sending a fake telegram to tell me that the plane carrying my son had crashed... My husband's favorite was a scheme to pass off some kind of deformed ape they were keeping locked in the cellar as my son... You should have heard him laugh at the thought of me dropping dead when the poor creature stumbled towards me saying "Mommy, Mommy"... Dominic collected hundreds of ideas like that in a notebook, and at lunch, he would read them to me, insisting that these were the ideas that they'd rejected...

JACKSON

How could you endure such torture?

HELEN

Wait. There's worse. Finally, my husband got tired of playing that game. He told Gabriel that none of his ideas were any good because they'd all kill me before I saw my son, and he'd promised me that I'd see my son alive and healthy before I died. So how could I see him if I was already dead? Gabriel said, I wouldn't die if I saw my son. On the contrary, it would strengthen my heart... Dominic laughed at him with pity, and told him that his imagination was as limited as his talent. He said that he'd found a way. A way sure to make me have a heart attack just after seeing my son, not before. And while I sat there shivering in fear, he added that the

wonderful thing about his idea was that it was totally irreversible. Meaning that, even if he changed his mind at the last minute and forgave me, he could do nothing to stop it happening. He lowered his voice and added that he'd come up with his plan the day I came back, when he was alone in his office for two hours, and that he'd been working on it for ten years, and that nothing, absolutely nothing, not even all the forces of Heaven and Hell, could stop it. Then, Gabriel got mad at my husband, accusing him of having used him to entertain him, when he'd in fact had a plan all along and...

JACKSON

And you stayed there, in that room, listening to this? Why didn't you do something... I don't know... Strike your husband?

Helen smiles wanly at Jackson.

HELEN

If I'd struck my husband, I knew I would never see my son alive. No, I've long since resigned myself to death, but I'll die happy as long as I see my son alive, and can hold him in my arms.

JACKSON

This is crazy! What can he do? If you see your son, as he promised, how could that give you a heart attack? He's not a magician...

HELEN

I've spent many nights lying awake in bed, staring at the giant eye on my ceiling, trying to figure out what he meant... Trying to divine his monstrous scheme... But I never could... Knowing him, I know it must be something horrible, that I can't escape, like fate...

JACKSON

I'll find out, and I'll save you. I  
give you my word.

HELEN

Please, don't. He'll destroy you too.

Jackson laughs bitterly.

JACKSON

As if he hadn't done that already! I  
swear I'll kill him, if it's the last  
thing I do.

HELEN

Poor, poor, Dr. Jackson...

Helen takes Jackson's hand again and caresses it. He leans  
forward towards her.

JACKSON

I... I love you Helen...

Helen moves her hand to gently caress Jackson's hair. He  
leans forward. Their faces are close. He feels her breath  
on his face. She closes her eyes, and surrenders to his  
kiss.

His hands start exploring her body. As his caresses become  
more intimate, she pulls her face away, takes his hand  
away from her body.

HELEN

No! I'm sorry... I can't love you...  
Not like that...

JACKSON

Helen...

HELEN

...And besides, he's watching us.

CAMERA SHARPLY TURNS 180 degrees and we SEE Dr. Despair  
watching the scene with a hungry, voyeuristic look. He's  
standing in a doorway that wasn't there before -- from a  
door previously hidden by the wallpaper.

Jackson gets up as if he'd been bitten by a snake and turns  
his head around in all directions, trying to "see" Dr.  
Despair.

JACKSON  
What? What do you mean? Who's  
watching us?

HELEN  
My husband.

JACKSON  
Your husband? He's here? In this  
room? But I didn't hear the door  
open...

HELEN  
It didn't. He uses a secret door, that  
leads directly into his office. He's  
there now.

JACKSON  
What is he doing?

HELEN  
Nothing. Just watching us.

JACKSON  
Has he been there for long?

HELEN  
Since the beginning the meal, I think.

JACKSON  
You think? Didn't you see him? Why  
didn't you say something?

HELEN  
You don't understand what living here  
means. My husband can do anything he  
pleases. None of us have any rights.

JACKSON  
(sotto)  
Where is he exactly? Can you position  
me so that I'm directly in front of  
him?

With her hand, Helen moves Jackson a few degrees to the left so that he does face Dr. Despair, who still stands in the doorway, with a morbid, hungry look in his eyes.

JACKSON  
Am I standing in front of him?

HELEN

Yes.

JACKSON

How many steps away?

HELEN

Hal f- a- dozen.

JACKSON

With no chairs or no furniture between us?

HELEN

No.

With surprising swiftness, Jackson takes several leaps forward and rushes to attack Dr. Despair.

Dr. Despair obviously sees him coming at him and strikes out with a blow to the throat. But Jackson lands on top of Despair and causes him to fall to the ground.

The two men grapple briefly, Jackson on top, Despair underneath. They're SNARLING, BREATHING HEAVILY... Jackson tries to strangle Despair.

While the two men are locked in this deadly embrace, SOMETHING ODD HAPPENS. It doesn't last more than a fraction of a second. If you were to blink, you'd miss it entirely...

The two men are very close. Jackson has succeeded in wrapping his hands around Despair's neck. Dr. Despair is trying to pry Jackson's hands away. AT THAT MOMENT, THEIR TWO FACES MORPH BRIEFLY AND FOR THAT FRACTION OF A SECOND, YOU CAN'T TELL WHICH MAN IS DR. DESPAIR AND WHICH IS JACKSON!

Then, Dr. Despair succeeds in getting free of Jackson's hold.

Just then, NAM and NAM 2 rush in from behind and hit Jackson on the head with a truncheon.

His body falls to the floor, unconscious, as we

WIPE TO RED.

EXT. THE CLINIC GROUNDS - DAY

CLOSE-UP on Jackson's face. His eyes are closed. He looks asleep.

As a musical background, we HEAR the grim tunes of the "Big Day Song" sung by an unseen chorus. The impression is one of being at a funeral.

DESPAIR (O. S.)

Enough.

The SINGING stops.

Suddenly, a HAND (Dr. Despair's) COMES INTO FRAME and pulls Jackson's head back. His doll-like eyes open, but we still don't know if he's awake or not.

DESPAIR (O. S.)

He's awake. I've seen him move.

CAMERA PULLS BACK to reveal that we're outside, facing the clinic. (We do not see the grounds.)

Jackson, his body snugly wrapped in a blanket, is in a wheelchair. Behind and in charge of the wheelchair is Helen. Dr. Despair is holding Jackson's head with one hand, slapping him gently with the other. They're all dressed in black.

DESPAIR

Dr. Jackson, can you hear me?

(slap, slap)

I know you're awake. I saw your lips move when the music started...

No reaction from Jackson. He turns to Helen, and speaks with irritation.

DESPAIR

Helen, try talking to him. You're better at this sort of thing...

Helen leans over Jackson.

HELEN

Dr. Jackson, are you awake? Can you hear me?

JACKSON

Yes, Helen. I hear you.

DESPAIR

Good, good. You couldn't have picked a better time to come to, Dr. Jackson. Do you know where you are? Yes, we're outside... I know you can tell from the wind, but do you know what we're doing outside? I'm going to tell you. We're at a funeral! Yes, we're going to be burying someone. In fact, Nam has just finished digging the grave, alongside the others...

CAMERA ROTATES 180 DEGREES and we see the bare vineyard, in full daylight, with its rows of cross-like stakes. A grave has been dug in one of the "plots". Nam is walking away, holding a shovel. All the Patients, dressed in black, stand in the background.

DESPAIR

Do you know who we're burying today? Wouldn't you be surprised if I were to tell you it was you? Ha, ha, ha!

A pause, to let the horror of the notion sink in.

DESPAIR

No, don't worry. It's not you who we're going to be burying today. No, no, no. You'll die on the "Big Day" like the rest of them, ah, ah. It's Gabriel who's our star today. The idiot tried to commit suicide. Somehow, he managed to escape Nam's surveillance and he threw himself out of the window. It knocked him out like a light. Probably broke his neck as well. I couldn't tell. He was unconscious. Life's a bitch, isn't it, Dr. Jackson? Ah, ah, ah!

Nam and Nam 2 come back carrying a makeshift coffin. CLOSE-UP on the coffin. Is Gabriel truly dead, or still alive inside? We'll never know...

DESPAIR

The body's still warm, but there's no point in waiting, is there? The Papuans dump the coffin unceremoniously into the grave.

DESPAIR

Start shovelling, Nam. We're all getting cold here.

Nam and Nam 2 start filling the grave.

DESPAIR

When I think of all the things I did for that ungrateful bastard... I rescued him from that asylum where he was, took him into my home, fed him, trained him, even offered him my wife...

(shakes his head in mock disbelief)

And how does he repay me? By throwing himself out of the window! People are just no damn good, Dr. Jackson. The idiot! He couldn't even wait for the "Big Day"... Had to try to spoil my fun...

(to the patients)

Let's all show him our contempt. Spit on his grave! Spit!

Obediently, the Patients do. Then, they start SINGING their lugubrious song again.

Quickly, the grave is filled.

DESPAIR

(to Nam)

When you're done, put another stake on top and plant a vine, just like you did for the others...

Helen turns Jackson's wheelchair around and starts wheeling him back to the Clinic. After a last, satisfied look to the grave, Dr. Despair walks alongside them.

DESPAIR

Did you know that after our little scuffle, you had a fracture of the skull, Dr. Jackson? Yes, I'm sorry that Nam hit you a little too hard... The poor boy just doesn't know his own strength...

They reach the backdoor and enter the Clinic.

INT. CLINIC LOBBY - DAY

Helen calls an elevator.

DESPAIR

You almost died from a brain hemorrhage. It took all my surgical skills to save you. If you don't mind my saying so, there are few doctors alive that could have performed that operation as well as I did, under the circumstances...

The elevator opens. Helen wheels Jackson in. Despair follows.

INT. CLINIC ELEVATOR - DAY

Helen pushes the first floor button. The elevator goes up.

DESPAIR

Do you know how long you were out?  
Twelve days! Aren't you surprised?

(waiting for an answer that  
doesn't come)

I see... I spend all my precious time fixing you up, and all the thanks I get is, you don't want to talk to me... That's a very childish attitude, Dr. Jackson...

The elevator stops. The doors open.

INT. MAIN HALL - DAY

Helen wheels Jackson out, then turns to go towards another wing.

DESPAIR

Do you know where you're going now? I'm going to tell you. You're going to my wife's room. Yes, all this time, you've been staying in her room. Don't you find it a little exciting?

Helen arrives at an oak door. She walks around the wheelchair to open the door. Then she returns to push the chair in.

INT. HELEN'S SUITE - DAY

From top to bottom, and including the ceiling, the room is wallpapered with the same, huge photograph of Daniel -- the "Other Man". And on the ceiling, there's a huge picture of an evil, unblinking eye staring.

Like a hotel suite, there is a "living room" with a couch, coffee table, desk, sofa, etc. The bedroom is to the side.

DESPAIR

Yes, you've been sleeping in her bed.  
Granted, you were comatose at the time,  
but it's still something, isn't it?

Helen continues to wheel Jackson towards the bedroom.

INT. HELEN'S BEDROOM - DAY

Same decoration. The windows are shut, but the lights are on. The bed looks comfortable. The sheets have been pulled. There are IVs and other medical paraphernalia next to the bed.

DESPAIR

All this time, Helen's been your loving nurse, sleeping on the couch in the next room. Now that you're well again, I have no doubt that you'll soon be tip-toeing to her in the middle of the night to satisfy your lust...

Helen helps Jackson to stand, and puts him to bed. She then covers him with the sheets.

DESPAIR

And since you obviously can't stand my presence, I give you my word that I won't set foot in this room again. You know that I'm a man of my word, don't you? Ah, ah!

Despair leans forward to whisper in Jackson's ear.

DESPAIR

But you'll have to hurry, because the "Big Day" is only three days away, and that's when Helen will die! Ah, ah!

Chuckling, Despair LEAVES the room.

Helen puts her hand on Jackson's forehead to feel his temperature, then silently, she turns off the light, closes the door and LEAVES the room too, as we

WIPE TO RED.

INT. HELEN'S BEDROOM - THE NEXT DAY

Daylight comes in through the open windows. (There are bars at the window.)

Jackson is sitting up in bed, propped up by pillows. He is finishing a meal on a tray. Helen is sitting next to him, helping him.

JACKSON

...And you swear he's not here, somewhere, watching us?

HELEN

No, I swear. We're all alone. Really... This morning, we got a letter from Mark's school in England... He's packed his cases and is ready to leave. He'll be here the day after tomorrow...

Helen sighs and gets a wistful look on her face.

HELEN

...On the "Big Day"...

JACKSON

Tell me more about Mark...

HELEN

Really? You want me to? I don't want to bore you...

JACKSON

You won't. Something that's important to you is important to me too, Helen. Besides, I'm curious...

HELEN

Let me get the pictures...

She looks embarrassed as she realizes he's blind.

HELEN

Oh, I'm so sorry...

JACKSON

It's okay. In fact, it kind of makes me happy that for a minute you managed to forget that I'm blind.

HELEN

But I have letters, and tapes too, you can hear his voice...

She walks to a dresser, and comes back with boxes of photos, letters, audio tapes, etc.

HELEN

I'm so happy to be able to share all this with you... We've corresponded every week... I've got photos, tapes, copies of his schoolwork, awards, even a videotape of his performance in a school play... "Charlotte's Web"... He played a little pig... We've become very close, even though we've never talked or met...

She spreads things on the bed, and starts rummaging through the pile.

HELEN

There's so much stuff here... I don't know where to start... I've read and reread all these letters a million times...

She picks up a letter.

HELEN

This is the very first one he wrote to me. His nanny helped him hold the pen. Listen: "My lovin'gest Mummy: I'm fine. I love you. Kisses. Your son, Mark."

She grabs another.

HELEN

He wrote this one when he was four. You can't tell, but the handwriting is still a little clumsy... "Dearest Mummy: I wish you a happy Mother's Day. Thank you for all the candies. They were very good. Your loving son, Mark."

She rummages through the pile again and picks up one more letter.

HELEN

Here's one of my favorites. He wrote it when he was six. "Dearest Mummy: I loved the new photos that you sent me. I'm very lucky to have such a beautiful mummy. I'm enclosing some photos of me they took last week at school..."

Helen puts the letter down and closes her eyes, it's obvious that she knows its contents by heart.

HELEN

...I wish you could come and visit me, like all the other mothers do. Why can't you come for Easter? I loved the train set you sent me for Christmas. I play with it all the time and all my friends are jealous of it. I want to see you very much. Your son who loves you very very much, Mark."

She starts crying softly. Jackson puts his hand on top of hers to comfort her.

After she's recovered, she grabs an audio tape and a small tape recorder, searches for a tape, loads it in and presses the play button. The British-accented voice of a ten-year-old boy comes out.

MARK (V. O.)

"Dear Mummy. I'm very happy that now we'll be able to talk to each other this way. I'd written you a letter but I'll just read it to you now. Thank you for all the presents that you sent me. They were great. I'm happy in my new school and I'm getting along with the other boys. We do a lot of fun stuff. I'm doing okay with my grades. Even Mr. Mortimer my math teacher says I'm getting better at geometry. I asked Mr. Parnell-Jones the headmaster why you never come to see me. He said you were suffering from a contagious disease that forces you to remain in total isolation. It was very complicated but I think I understood

his explanations. I hope it's not too serious. But then he told me I would be permitted to go to America and visit you in two years. It seems a very very long time away but I'm happy anyway. I've made up a calendar with all the days on it, and I'm going to cross out each day until the day I come to America and see you. I'm looking forward to it ever so much. I send you tons of kisses and hugs. Your loving son, Mark."

Then, Helen grabs a videotape, and goes to the TV set.

HELEN

This is tape that came in with today's letter. It's a videotape... I'm going to play it...

She presses play. The picture of a handsome thirteen year-old dressed in a British public school uniform comes up on screen. As Helen describes the image to Jackson, she clasps her hands together with pride and happiness.

HELEN

He's wearing his school uniform. He's so handsome...

MARK (TAPE)

Hello Mummy. I'm in Mr. Long's office, the solicitor who pays my school fees... He let me record this tape privately for you. Another three days and I'll be on my way to America to see you. I've been waiting for this day for so long...

Mark holds a pocket calendar with all the days crossed out up to the camera.

MARK (TAPE)

You remember the calendar I told you about? Almost all the days are crossed out now. I'll be fourteen the day I see you, my lovinest Mummy. It's the most beautiful birthday present any boy could wish for... I've been doing a lot of thinking lately, Mummy... I don't think I believe that story Mr.

Parnell-Jones told me, about you having some kind of contagious disease and stuff... My friend Tom thinks it's a lot of bull too, because he said there's no such disease. Is he right?

(lowering his voice)

One day, when Mr Long came to see me at school, afterwards, I heard him talk with Mr. Parnell-Jones, and he said something about revenge... Is there someone who hates you, Mummy? Is that why you couldn't come and see me?

(back to normal)

You told me your husband owns a private clinic. Clinic... I hate the sound of that word... Is he the same Doctor Despair that you said would wait for me at the airport? If he's your husband, how come you never called him my father? And if he isn't my father, then who is? Why don't you ever mention him in your letters?...

I'm sorry about all the questions, Mummy. I hope you're not mad at me, but I want so much to make you happy... Because I know you're really sad, even if you make your letters sound like you're happy. I can tell. You always sound like you're afraid... Are you afraid for me, Mummy? It's like you're trying to prepare me for something, but I don't know what... I suppose you'll tell me when I see you. It's only three days now. I'm really, really impatient to see you Mummy. I've been picturing myself running towards you, rushing into your arms, kissing you. All those kisses I could never give you, for all these years... I've been bursting to kiss you... I know I'll be crying...

Mark does start to cry, but looks embarrassed about, the way most boys his age would be.

MARK (TAPE)

I'm sorry, Mummy, I'm crying... Snif... Good-bye, Mummy, I'll see you soon. Very soon...

The tape ends, the screen goes blank. Helen is crying too.

HELEN

Snif... You couldn't tell... But he looks... Just like Daniel... The "Other Man"... Younger... Dominic will hate him... My God, what's going to happen to him after I die... What's going to happen to him..

JACKSON

You won't die, and nothing will happen to Mark, you hear me. I'll find a way to kill your husband, and we'll all get out of here safely. And even if something happens to you, I swear I'll take good care of Mark.

Helen pats Jackson's hand to thank him, and kisses him on the forehead.

Then, she starts gathering all the spread out letters and tapes, puts them back in the boxes, and takes the boxes back to the closet.

She pulls out a toy, from a box of toys and rattles it.

HELEN

I even bought every toy I sent him in duplicate. In my letters, I would instruct him to play with it at a certain time, and I would make sure that I'd do the same here at the same time, taking the time difference into account. It helped me feel I was part of his life somehow... Wasn't that crazy?

She puts the toys back.

JACKSON

Not crazy. Adm irable. Movi ng...

HELEN

I did his homework... I would fax him my answers to the problems, and he never once made fun of me, even when I got all the answers wrong... I learned geometry and French that way... He's really gifted, you know. He wants to

be a writer... He wrote me some  
beautiful poems that I... Ah!

Suddenly, Helen winces, gasps, and clutches her heart.

JACKSON  
(concerned)  
Helen? Are you okay?

Helen stumbles across the room and goes to sit down on a  
chair. She finds a bottle and swallows a couple of pills.

JACKSON  
Helen, answer me! What happened? Are  
you all right?

HELEN  
(slightly out of breath)  
I'm here. I'm fine. It's my heart.  
Just a twinge. It'll go away...

JACKSON  
I'm sorry I made you read all those  
letters. It was selfish of me... It's  
what he wants... It only adds to your  
misery...

HELEN  
On the contrary, it's the only thing  
that keeps me alive. My heart only  
beats for the day that I'll see Mark...

Helen walks back to the bed, sits on it and takes Jackson's  
hand in hers.

HELEN  
Thank you for worrying about me...  
You're so very kind...

We STAY on the two of them, sharing their pain silently, as  
we

WIPE TO RED.

EXT. THE CLINIC - NIGHT

ESTABLISHING SHOT. Total silence. No lights.

CAMERA PULLS IN on one of the first floor windows as we

CUT TO:

INT. HELEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jackson is asleep. Suddenly, we HEAR a low MOAN from the other room. And another.

Jackson awakens. He hears the MOANING, cocks his head to better catch the direction it comes from. Then, he reaches a decision.

Carefully, he gets up (he's wearing pajamas) and, feeling his way around, silently tip-toes to the door to the suite.

He opens it...

INT. HELEN'S SUITE - NIGHT

...And enters the living room of the suite.

Helen (in a nightdress) is asleep on the couch, which has been converted into a pull-out bed. She's the one who's been MOANING. She's obviously having a nightmare.

CAMERA STAYS on Jackson as he carefully feels his way across the room and, guided by the MOANS, manages to reach the couch.

There, he kneels down next to the bed. He whispers.

JACKSON

Helen, is that you? Are you all right?

But Helen doesn't wake up and continues to WHIMPER.

Jackson extends his hand, cautiously, and touches her naked shoulder.

A pause. He lets his hand wanders lovingly down her body... Lower... Lower... He's now touching her breast...

JACKSON

I love you...

He lowers his mouth and kisses her on the shoulder.

That does it. Helen awakes. She turns around and recognizes Jackson.

There is a pregnant pause. Then:

HELEN

Go back to bed. You're not thinking clearly... And we're not alone...

Jackson springs back to his feet as if he'd been bitten by a snake. He turns his head around, trying in vain to detect another presence.

CAMERA STAYS on Jackson so we, too, don't see anyone. When he speaks, it's with bitter anger.

JACKSON

Is he here?

HELEN

No. He gave his word. It's her now.

CAMERA TURNS 180 DEGREES to reveal Alice, very much awake, laying on a sofa, her legs wrapped in a blanket.

JACKSON

"Her" who?

HELEN

That woman. Alice. She's on the sofa, at the other end of the room.

JACKSON

Is she asleep?

HELEN

No. She's watching us.

There is another minute, during which Jackson silently ponders his next move.

Alice remains motionless, watching the couple without displaying any emotion. Jackson reacts with as much dignity as he can muster.

JACKSON

I'm sorry, Helen.

Jackson turns around and returns to his room, closing the door behind him as we

CUT TO:

INT. HELEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The door slowly CREAKS open.

The shape of a WOMAN ENTERS the room, but we don't yet see who it is.

CLOSE-UP on Jackson asleep. A WOMAN'S HAND ENTERS FRAME and gently shakes him awake.

JACKSON

Uh?

ALICE

Hush, Honey. It's me.

JACKSON

Who?

ALICE

Alice.

JACKSON

Alice?

ALICE

Hush. Quiet. We don't want to wake her up...

There's suspicion in Jackson's voice when he answers.

JACKSON

What do you want?

ALICE

I've come to give you this.

CLOSE-UP on Alice placing a mean-looking switchblade inside Jackson's hand.

He automatically activates it -- SNIP! SNIP! -- and we see the blade spring out and back in.

JACKSON

Why are you giving me this?

ALICE

Call it a keepsake in memory of the time we spent together... The afternoons we used to spend making love in that motel room... You remember how you were always asking me where I lived... What I did... Now you

understand why I could never give you any answers...

JACKSON

I've forgotten almost every thing about the past... He's done something to my memories...

He holds the knife up.

JACKSON

Do you want me to kill him with this?

ALICE

I don't think you could. No, it's because I feel sorry for her, and for you too... I know what he's got in store for her. It's horrible. If you're truly in love with her, kill her. Spare her the agony. Kill her now, honey. And then kill yourself too... It's better that way...

JACKSON

What is he planning to do?

ALICE

I can't tell you. But it's horrible. Horrible. Kill her before it's too late.

She turns around, walks back to the door and, as silently as she came, LEAVES THE ROOM.

CAMERA RETURNS to Jackson, who is pondering the meaning of Alice's visit. He plays with the knife, even putting the blade against his chest, just where his heart is...

But finally, he puts the knife on the nightstand, next to a clock indicating it's 2 a.m. We CLOSE on the knife, as we

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. HELEN'S BEDROOM - DAY

ANOTHER CLOSE-UP on the knife on the nightstand, except that it's daylight and the clock now marks 10 a.m. The knife is bathed in the dull, red light seeping through the curtains.

In the b.g., we HEAR the BLARING BRASS SOUNDS of DeSOUZA BAND music.

CAMERA PULLS BACK to show Jackson as he finishes getting dressed. With a swift movement of the hand, he pockets the knife.

Then, he walks to the window and opens it. As we've said before, there are bars at the window.

The MUSIC BECOMES LOUDER as we

CUT TO:

EXT. THE CLINIC - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT. The Clinic has been decorated in the July 4th style, with garlands, flags, etc. A banner across the door reads "WELCOME MARK" and "THE BIG DAY IS HERE".

A group of Patients dressed in Band uniforms practices playing the De Souza music.

CAMERA PULLS IN to show Jackson at the window, listening to the scene.

HELEN (O.S.)  
Dominic's gone to the airport to fetch  
Mark...

CUT TO:

INT. HELEN'S BEDROOM - DAY

Helen has entered the bedroom. She is holding a sheet of paper in her hand.

HELEN  
He left some very specific instructions. The plane landed at nine. He's expecting to be back at eleven. Until then, I'm supposed to stay in this room. Five minutes before eleven, I'm instructed to go to the dining room and sit in a chair on the left side of the table, facing the door. When Mark comes through the door, I'm allowed to stand up and open my arms, but I'm totally forbidden to take a step forward, run towards him or

even leave my spot... Those are his precise orders.

JACKSON

How dare he! You should be running through this house, making sure that everything is ready for your son. You should greet him at the door...

Helen looks frightened at the very thought.

HELEN

I can't disobey him. I mustn't. Who knows what he might do... Only my total compliance can prevent Dominic from killing my son. I have to obey, don't you understand?

JACKSON

What about me? Have I been assigned a seat in this mad, little performance as well?

HELEN

I don't know... I haven't received any instructions about you...

JACKSON

Well, that's one thing at least. Maybe I can go check out the dining room...

HELEN

You can't. The door's locked. I suppose Nam will unlock it just before eleven but no earlier.

Jackson looks incredulous.

JACKSON

You mean, we're prisoners in this room?

HELEN

Yes.

JACKSON

Is there any way out of here?

HELEN

All the windows have bars.

JACKSON

I could break the door down...

HELEN

Please, don't... It would be useless anyway... Whatever Dominic's planned, we can't stop it now... Stay with me... Have some coffee...

She walks towards the living room part of the suite.

CLOSE-UP on Jackson pulling the switchblade from his pocket. His hand clenches around it, then he buries it again in the pocket.

And follows Helen...

INT. HELEN'S SUITE - DAY

...Into the living room.

Coffee and croissants have been served on the coffee table. Helen sits down and starts buttering one of the croissants.

She hands it to Jackson when he sits across from her.

JACKSON

Why this ridiculous ceremony? There must be a reason...

HELEN

Don't think about it. It's pointless.

JACKSON

I'm trying to figure out what his plan is, but I can't...

HELEN

Maybe there's nothing more to it than what he said... After all, what does it matter where I sit...

JACKSON

With him, there's always something more... No, all this must serve a purpose, but what? Why aren't you supposed to leave your spot? Why are you supposed to wait for your son to come to you?..

As Helen starts serving the coffee, we see her hand shaking slightly. Her voice becomes more breathy. Her diction becomes a little more difficult. She is obviously under enormous stress, which she is not managing to hide well.

HELEN

It's just part of his torture, that's all. He wants me to wait even more. To delay the reunion until the very last possible minute...

Then she starts crying, softly, silently.

Even though Jackson is blind, he feels the shaking of the coffee cup on the saucer as she hands him his coffee. He hears her irregular breathing.

JACKSON

Helen? Are you all right?... Your heart... You have to relax...

Helen begins crying from the pain and stress.

HELEN

My heart... is fine...

JACKSON

You're in pain.

HELEN

No. It's joy I feel...

Helen dries her eyes with a handkerchief, then she gets up and goes to look at herself in a mirror.

HELEN

If only you could see me... I put on my best dress for Mark... It's a white silk dress with embroidered flowers... I did my hair, I put on make-up...

She leans forward to check her make-up and then fixes it to erase the mark of her tears.

HELEN

Don't make me cry anymore... It'll ruin my make-up... I look ten years younger... Just like on the first photos I sent him... I want him to see that his mother is still beautiful...

Jackson gets up. He walks to the place where Helen stands, and puts his hands around her shoulders.

Suddenly, they hear the door being UNLOCKED.

Nam opens the door wide, then leaves.

HELEN

It's time. I want you there with me.  
Please.

Helen LEAVES the room, followed by Jackson.

INT. MAIN HALL - DAY

Following Nam, they walk along the main hall, turn, and arrive at the great dining room.

They enter...

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

At the front of the long table -- the end that is closest to the entrance -- two chairs have been set: one on the right side, the other on the left.

As instructed, Helen goes to sit on the chair on the left. Jackson follows her and stands behind her.

The Patients are all sitting like a Greek chorus on two rows of chairs that have been lined up at the far end of the room. They're totally silent.

Then, Alice ENTERS the room and sits on the chair on the right.

Jackson HEARS her come in, and leans towards Helen. He and Helen speak sotto voce.

JACKSON

Who just came in?

HELEN

Alice. She's sitting on the other chair.

JACKSON

Why?

HELEN

I don't know.

JACKSON  
Anyone else in the room?

HELEN  
Just my husband's patients. They're at  
the other end of the room, behind us.  
And the two servants by the door.

The silence is oppressing. The minutes tick away. Jackson  
hears the voice of Helen in his head:

HELEN (V. O.)  
"Even if he changed his mind at the  
last minute and forgave me, he could do  
nothing to stop it.... Nothing,  
absolutely nothing, not even all the  
forces of Heaven and Hell, could stop  
it...."

Then he hears Alice's warning in his head:

ALICE (V. O.)  
"I know what he's got in store for her.  
It's horrible. Horrible. Kill her  
before it's too late."

Jackson leans towards Helen and whispers:

JACKSON  
Helen... There's still time. You don't  
have to wait here like a victim... Get  
out before it's too late.

HELEN  
(out of breath)  
I can't... I can't...

JACKSON  
Okay... I'm here... With you... I'll  
protect you...

Helen speaks as if trying to convince herself.

HELEN  
He gave me his word... He's always  
respected his word... I'll see my  
son... Alive and in good health...  
Everything will be okay... He just  
wanted to teach me a lesson... Just a  
lesson...

CLOSE-UP on Jackson. He is far from confident that everything will be okay. Through the folds of his pocket, we can see his hand squeezing the knife.

A few more seemingly endless minutes pass, then:

HELEN  
I hear his car.

We don't hear anything.

JACKSON  
Are you sure? I didn't hear an--

Now, we hear the SOUND of a car pulling in, driving along the central alley.

HELEN  
You don't have a mother's ear. Listen. It's driving along the alley... It's stopping. I hear the doors... One door, two... He's here!

JACKSON  
Your heart. Think of your heart, Helen...

HELEN  
Nothing will happen to me. My heart is fine.

There is some more waiting. It seems even longer, but in reality it isn't. Helen is growing more and more anxious.

HELEN  
What's he doing? Why aren't they coming up?

Suddenly, we hear FOOTSTEPS coming up the stairs.

DESPAIR (O. S.)  
Your mother is waiting for you, young man. In the dining room. The first door to your right.

The sound of the boy's FOOTSTEPS accelerate and come closer.

JACKSON

You're going to see Mark and you'll  
live, Helen. I want you to believe  
that!

Then, Jackson takes a step to the side, so as not to be in  
the way.

The door to the dining room OPENS.

Mark -- the same healthy, vibrant-looking boy from the  
video tape -- ENTERS the room and PAUSES. His expression  
is one of undiluted joy.

MARK  
Mummy! Mummy!

THEN MARK RUSHES INTO ALICE'S OPEN ARMS!

CLOSE-UP on Helen, the blood rushing from her face,  
standing like a frozen statue, mouth open, speechless.

Then she SCREAMS -- the SCREAM OF A WOUNDED ANIMAL.

Mark, who is still hungrily hugging and kissing Alice,  
turns his head and looks at her quizzically.

MARK  
Who's that woman, Mummy?

Alice smiles evilly.

ALICE  
One of my husband's patients, my love.  
Just a poor, deluded madwoman...

Appearing as if from nowhere, Dr. Despair suddenly stands  
just behind Helen and Jackson.

At that moment, the Patients start singing their lugubrious  
song which becomes a musical background for the rest of the  
scene. Despair first speaks sotto voce, then louder.

DESPAIR  
For twelve years, I had Alice  
faithfully recopy every one of your  
letters. Rerecord every word. It's  
her photos I sent. Her letters. Her  
tapes. The feelings were yours, but  
your son only knows Alice's  
handwriting, Alice's voice and Alice's

face. He will never recognize you as his mother. Never. To him, you'll always be a poor, deluded madwoman... Life's a bitch, isn't it? Ah, ah, ah!

Helen clutches her heart, then with a THUMP, she drops dead at Despair's feet.

Quick as lightning, Jackson pulls the switchblade from his pocket.

The blade GLINTS in the light as he STABS Despair repeatedly. Again and again. With snarling fury.

The two men fall to the floor, struggling together.

The scene takes on a NIGHTMARIISH QUALITY with the chorus music of the Patients GROWING LOUDER and DISTORTED, some weird LIGHTING EFFECTS and the MORPHING of Dr. Despair into a blurred shape...

Just as in the fortune teller sequence, the room starts spinning, faster and faster. We experience a feeling of VERTIGO as we jarringly

WIPE TO RED.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

CLOSE-UP on Jackson's hand still holding the knife (note: no blood), still making stabbing motions, but this time, the only thing he's stabbing are the floor's wood boards.

We're back. No more spinning. No more weird effects. And no singing. Total silence.

CAMERA PULLS BACK to reveal Jackson, alone, lying on the floor on his stomach. (We don't see his face.)

Dr. Despair, Helen's body, Alice, Mark, the Patients, even the two Papuans, are gone.

Jackson struggles to his feet. The silence remains oppressive.

Suddenly, Jackson TURNS AROUND and we SEE that his eyes are back to normal. So are his lips.

Simultaneously, Jackson realizes that HE CAN SEE!

JACKSON

I... I can see... I've got my eyes  
back... But that's impossible..

He touches his face with his fingers, blinks incredulously,  
looks around him at that decor that HE SEES FOR THE FIRST  
TIME!

He takes some hesitant steps around, touches the empty  
chair, the table, then walks to the door, cautiously.

He then leaves the room..

INT. MAIN HALL - DAY

...Crosses the Main Hall...

...Takes a peek in the bedroom across the hall, which used  
to be his room.. There is a pause as he reflects on  
this...

JACKSON

Anyone here? Is anyone here?

HELEN (O. S.)

I'm here.

He turns swiftly and sees Helen walking towards him, from  
the opposite end of the hallway. Jackson stares at her in  
shock.

JACKSON

Helen? You're... alive?

HELEN

Are you surprised? Don't you know that  
at the end of a play, all the actors  
stand up to take their bows? Even the  
ones who got killed?

JACKSON

Play? Actors? I don't understand...

HELEN

The play's over. Well, almost over.  
The curtain's fallen and the epilog  
takes place backstage. Come with me.  
Everything will be revealed...

She takes his hand and leads him to a grand staircase...

INT. STAIRCASE - DAY

They descend the flight of stairs.

JACKSON

What happened here? Where's Doctor  
Despair?

HELEN

There was never any Doctor Despair.  
What happened is the "Big Day", the day  
when you've finally woken up. Don't  
you remember the song? "To Sight, to  
Sight, To years without the light"...  
The soul's sight, of course, not the  
the body's... Because yours is gone for  
all eternity.

JACKSON

But...

HELEN

You know, if I could have laughed, I  
think I would have when I saw you use  
that knife to attack yourself with such  
fury, such savagery...

They've reached the bottom of the stairs...

INT. GRAND LOBBY - DAY

...And a grand, carpeted lobby, leading towards the open  
double doors through which we see the park outside.

Jackson stands there, at the bottom of the stairs, in a  
daze. Helen shakes him a little and leads him towards the  
doors.

JACKSON

Attack myself? I don't understand...

HELEN

Come on, Dominic. It's time for you to  
remember...

JACKSON

Dominic? Why are you calling me  
Dominic?

HELEN

Because that's your name. You're  
Dominic Jackson. You've been my  
husband for thirteen years...

JACKSON

I must be dreaming... Everything that  
happened here was a dream, wasn't it?

HELEN

Not like you think... Yes, we're  
outside reality right now, but I'm  
taking you back to it. There, you'll  
be yourself again. But first, you must  
remember, Dominic. You've been  
reliving your life... Our life...

They then exit the Clinic.

EXT. THE CLINIC GROUNDS - EVENING

Now they're walking down the central alley, towards the  
gates. Throughout the scene, daylight decreases until it's  
night by the time they reach the gates.

HELEN

...Our courtship, your wedding proposal  
in Baja, my infidelity and my return...  
And then your jealousy. Your abuse.  
Your hatred. It all happened... To  
you... To me...

JACKSON

It's absurd. How could have I been  
Doctor Despair? Why should I torture  
myself?

HELEN

But you did. Hate and jealousy are  
like boomerangs. They always return to  
the one who threw them. For thirteen  
years, your soul suffered from the same  
hatred you directed at me.

JACKSON

But Doctor Despair was a monster...  
Nothing like me...

HELEN

A caricature of you, yes, but also very  
much a reflection of your evil self...

JACKSON

Lies! I've never tortured you the way Dr. Despair did!

HELEN

Didn't you? Your torture may have been less... outrageous, less colorful, but I suffered just the same.

JACKSON

I never humiliated you in front of a freak show!

HELEN

No? Yet you always invited people whom you knew I disliked and abused me in front of them.

JACKSON

I never invited any girlfriend to live with us...

HELEN

But you didn't hide their existence. You even let letters and photos lying around, knowing I'd find them.

JACKSON

I... I never owned a Clinic...

HELEN

You filled our house with Doctors.

JACKSON

I... I never made up something as evil as the "Big Day" to kill you from a heart attack.

HELEN

That's because I didn't have a heart condition. What you did was much simpler. You poisoned me.

JACKSON

I... I didn't...

HELEN

Yes, you did. You didn't even bother to hide it. I saw you put the poison in my glass. I saw you write a fake

suicide note, wearing gloves to make sure that you wouldn't leave any fingerprints... How long did it take you to learn to forge my handwriting? Months at least. Don't tell me you didn't plan my murder, Dominic. You did.

JACKSON

Why... Why didn't you stop me then?

HELEN

Don't you remember? You'd made me swear to obey you, and you wanted me to die, didn't you? Besides, real death was better than the living death that you'd condemned me to live.

JACKSON

It's a lie! You're not dead! You're here, alive, with me!

HELEN

I'm dead, Dominic.

They've reached the gates. Helen pushes them. They open silently. They step out...

EXT. LONELY ROAD - NIGHT

...And start walking on the lonely country road, towards the scene of the accident.

JACKSON

I didn't see you drink that poison...

HELEN

True. But that's because I followed your orders there too. You said that I should wait until after you were gone. You drove away to be with your girlfriend Alice... Do you remember how before you left, I served you a cup of coffee? Of that excellent coffee you were always so fond of. I asked you if you wanted a cup before you left, and you said yes...

JACKSON

Yes...

HELEN

... You drank the cup and made a face because you thought it was bitter. You accused me of not putting enough sugar...

JACKSON

Yes... I remember now...

HELEN

It was bitter because I'd slipped some of my sleeping pills in it... It was late at night, I knew you were going to be driving in the country, and I prayed to God, or the Devil, that you would fall asleep at the wheel and have an accident. And that's exactly what happened. You killed me, and I killed you...

She pauses.

HELEN

But your action was motivated by pure jealousy, while I was only trying to save my son. Yes, my son Mark, the Other Man's son, who was scheduled to arrive the next day and who, without me to protect him, would have become your victim too. I knew you planned to destroy him, body and soul, because he reminded you of Daniel. I had no choice. I had to kill you for my son...

JACKSON

I... I wouldn't have...

HELEN

Yes, you would have. I know you, Domini c.

JACKSON

I did love you, Helen, at the beginning... If you hadn't left me... To go with... Daniel... You see, I can say his name now... And when you came back, I took you in... Others would have kicked you out...

HELEN

You took me in not because you'd forgiven me but for the exact opposite reason. To satisfy your insane craving for revenge. I could have loved you again, Dominic, because there was much that was good in you... You are the same person who tried to protect me from Doctor Despair...

JACKSON

You see, I've changed. I could be different... Could you... come back?

HELEN

I told you I'm dead, Dominic. I drank poison after you left.

JACKSON

Am I dead too then?

HELEN

No. Not yet...

They have now reached the place where the car crashed -- and it's still there, flattened against the tree, a monstrous crushed mass of metal, glass and plastic...

...AND THE REAL JACKSON IS THERE, CRUSHED IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT, UNCONSCIOUS!

JACKSON

That's... me? How can that be?

HELEN

You've always believed that a patient deserves the truth above all... It all happened in your mind. You never left the car. No one rescued you. There is no Dr. Despair. There is no clinic. And only a fraction of a second has passed since the accident. One of the shards is slowly making its way to your brain as we speak. In a few seconds, you'll be dead.

CLOSE-UP on the real Jackson's face, still unconscious. His head is in a precarious position. His teeth have been smashed by the wheel. There are two shards of glass penetrating both his eyes.

HELEN

Good-bye, Domini c. My role here is over. I'm now going on another journey...

JACKSON

Can you forgive me?

HELEN

For what you've done to me, personally, yes, I forgive you. You have after all, even if unintentionally, given me thirteen years to love my son. But for him, who is going to find his mother's body alone in an empty house, who'll be raised by others without ever having kissed his mother... For that, no, I can never forgive you, Domini c. Ever.

Jackson starts to cry.

JACKSON

Helen, please don't go! Don't leave me alone!

HELEN

You're not alone, Domini c. The Powers always send someone... To take you to your next journey. Good-bye, Domini c.

And Helen vanishes, softly, discretely, just as a shadow would under the light of the sun.

ALICE (O. S.)

Hello, Honey!

Jasckson turns and sees a smiling Alice in front of him.

JACKSON

Alice?

ALICE

Come to me, Domini c. You don't need any forgiveness from her. That bitch only got what she deserved. Come to me Honey, I'll make you feel better...

Walking like an automaton, Jackson goes into Alice's arms. She hugs him. He puts his head on her chest.

ALICE

There, there. Don't you feel better now? Close your eyes. Relax. Let me take care of you...

CLOSE-UP on Jackson, his head on Alice's chest. We don't see Alice's face. Her voice starts changing, becoming deeper and more evil (with some electronic twang to it).

ALICE

(weirdly)

You and I are going to be spending more time together, Honey...

Jackson raises his eyes to look at the face of what is obviously NOT Alice anymore -- and SCREAMS. (Perhaps we get a brief glance of something truly horrible.)

We INTERCUT to a CLOSE-UP of the face of the real Jackson in the car. His head, which was in a precarious position, slides an inch further, and IMPALES itself (SQUISH) on the shard of glass, and we

WIPE TO RED.

EXT. OPERATING ROOM - DAY

A REPRISE OF THE EARLIER SCENE: Jackson is strapped to the operating table in Dr. Despair's operating room.

Dr. Despair ENTERS FRAME, wearing his maniacal smile triumphantly. In his hands, he holds his sculptor's mallet and chisel. Alice stands silently behind him.

DESPAIR

Welcome back, Dr. Jackson! Didn't I tell you? Afterlife's a bitch! Ah, ah, ah!

We CLOSE-UP AND FREEZE on Jackson's eyes -- reflecting the awful awareness of his hellish fate, before a RED SMEAR washes across the screen and we

FADE OUT.

THE END