

HAPPILY EVER...OPPOSITE

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FADE IN

INT. - STRETCH LIMOUSINE -- DAY

The limo's parked in front of a small building with a sign near the door that reads, "Judge Vernon McLaren, Esq."

In the back seat, NIGEL FOULKES, 50s, long hair falling across a natty vest and shirt tucked into jeans, sucks the life out of a joint.

He holds it in as he flicks ashes from his vest, then coughs uncontrollably as he exhales and looks at the joint.

NIGEL
(British accent, to
himself)
Blimey. Righteous shit.

Nigel exits the limo and enters the building, still coughing.

INT. - MCLAREN LAW OFFICES -- DAY

A large architectural drawing of a squared-U-shaped estate house and property leans on an easel, photos pinned along its edges. In large print at the top is "McLaren House."

VERNON MCLAREN, 60s, sits at a polished table, his nephew CARSON MCLAREN, 30s, next to him. Vernon passes papers to Nigel, who stonedly bends into signing them.

VERNON
...and the fact that you've pulled this magnificent property from the very edge of sheriff's sale is the most heartwarming for me, Mr. Foulks.

NIGEL
Name's Nigel, mate. And it's Robert Cross who's buyin' it. I'm just handlin' it for 'im.

CARSEN
Robert Cross? The rock star?

NIGEL
The same...

INT. - LEAR JET CABIN -- IN FLIGHT -- DAY

NIGEL (V.O.)
...His plane should be arrivin' in
Philly within the hour.

ROBERT CROSS, 40s, the consummate rock and roll star in long hair, denim, and silk, leans unsteadily gazing into an in-flight refrigerator. He looks up at MARTIN PRESTON, 50s, his long-time manager, who sits nearby, cellphone to ear.

ROBERT
(British accent, slurred)
There's no more bloody champagne!?

INT. - MCLAREN LAW OFFICES -- DAY

Vernon slides another paper for Nigel's signature.

VERNON
I'm sure Mr. Cross will be thrilled
with McLaren House. It's an
historic property.

CARSEN
Been in our family for generations.
We'll miss it. If it weren't for
these hard economic times...

NIGEL
It happens, eh? But you can come
visit anytime. Robert likes
parties, you know.

Nigel laughs, coughs heavily, shoots papers to Vernon.

NIGEL
That it, then?

VERNON
Yes. Congratulations. Your Mr.
Cross is now the proud new owner of
McLaren House.

INT. - LEAR JET CABIN -- IN FLIGHT -- DAY

Martin snaps his cell phone closed.

MARTIN
(clipped British accent)
Talk to Nigel about the bubbly,
Robert. That's what we're paying a
tour manager for.

Robert flops wearily on a plush couch across from Martin.

MARTIN
Where is he, anyway?

ROBERT
He's handlin' somethin' for me.

MARTIN
(wary)
Like what?

ROBERT
Real estate.

MARTIN
(sarcastically)
Oh, wonderful.

INT. - MCLAREN LAW OFFICES -- DAY

Nigel stands, shakes Vernon's hand, leads him to the door.

NIGEL
I'll be off then. Robert's got a
concert tonight downtown. You
fellas want some passes?

Vernon and Carsen look at each other, Vernon shakes his head.

NIGEL
Well, let me know if you do.

Carsen closes the door after Nigel leaves.

CARSEN
One down, one to go.

VERNON
The other one here?

CARSEN
In the other conference room.

VERNON
Let's do it.

Carson opens a second door. MARTHA MARSHALL, a darling, sweet, grandmother, stands waiting, a huge, long-haired cat under one arm. She's well-dressed, with the bearing of a woman of money.

CARSEN
Ms. Marshall. Please, won't you
join us? Sorry to keep you waiting.

Martha takes a step toward Carsen, but bumps into a chair, nearly toppling over. Carsen catches her, guides her to the table.

MARTHA

Sorry, dear. Old eyes.

CARSEN

(to Martha)

Not a problem. I believe you know my uncle, Judge Vernon McLaren. He's handling the bankruptcy sale for our family, as well as serving as Notary and representative of the Court.

MARTHA

Yes. We met at the Cricket Club the other day. Nice to see you again, dear.

Vernon smiles as he holds Martha's chair.

VERNON

You know, the fact that you've pulled this magnificent property from the very edge of sheriff's sale is the most heartwarming for me, Ms. Marshall.

MARTHA

(nuzzling the cat)

Well, I had just been telling Miss Withers here that we needed a new house, and that very afternoon, you introduced yourself. We thought it was such a stroke of good fortune, didn't we, Miss Withers?

VERNON

Will your granddaughter be joining us?

MARTHA

No, no. Susan's at a rehearsal. She plays with the Orchestra, you know.

VERNON

Didn't know that, no. How nice. Well. Let's proceed then. I'm sure you and Susan are excited about becoming...

(points to the drawing)

...the proud new owners of McLaren House...

EXT. STREET CORNER -- PHILADELPHIA -- DAY

A busy street corner. The "Don't Walk" sign blinks.

SUSAN MARSHALL, 30s and dressing her beauty a bit conservatively, stands at the corner. She clutches a violin case across her chest, her eyes focused on the blinking sign.

Next to Susan is her son, MICHAEL, 13, pulling uncomfortably at the tie he doesn't want to be wearing. He carries a guitar case.

A steady stream of walkers moves past Susan and Michael, a few annoyed at having to walk around them.

Michael begins to step from the curb, but Susan stops him. She remains motionless, despite the absence of cars. Michael looks up at her.

MICHAEL

Mom, there's no...

Susan points at the blinking "Don't Walk" sign. Michael rolls his eyes and groans.

Susan glances impatiently at her watch, continues to stand and wait, watching the sign.

It finally changes. She looks both ways again, then puts her arm across Michael's shoulders and draws him into the street.

SUSAN

It's safe now, Michael.

MICHAEL

It was safe before, Mom...

SUSAN

Don't start.

A FLOWER VENDOR on the corner looks up as she steps onto the sidewalk.

FLOWER VENDOR

Hi, there, Susie. How you doin'?

Susan throws him a smile as she hurries past.

SUSAN

I'm fine, Benny. You?

FLOWER VENDOR

Terrific. Got some beautiful tulips here, hon. Want some for your granny?

Susan calls back over her shoulder.

SUSAN

Maybe later, Benny. Don't want to be late.

Benny waves as Susan half-jogs to the midpoint of the block, almost pulling Michael along with her.

At the Stage Door of the large concert hall, a large crowd stands behind stanchions and rope, two UNIFORMED POLICEMEN nearby.

Susan eyes them as she stops to show her ID to JAKE, the doorman.

SUSAN

Hey, Jake.

JAKE

Ms. Marshall. Michael.

MICHAEL

Hey.

JAKE

(nodding at crowd)
Concert tonight.

Susan nods absentmindedly as she looks up at the sound of a jet overhead. It's a black Lear heading toward the airport, gear down.

INT. CONCERT HALL -- BACKSTAGE REHEARSAL/DRESSING ROOM -- DAY

Susan gently lifts her violin and bow from their case. She tucks the violin under one arm and tightens the strings on her bow as she glances at Michael. He sits nearby, pulling his guitar from its case.

SUSAN

Oh, no, mister. No guitar.

MICHAEL

(histrionically)
Aw, MOM...

She reaches over and pulls a violin from a shelf and hands it to Michael, who reluctantly sets his guitar back in its case.

SUSAN

You have scales to work on.

MICHAEL

But...

SUSAN

The scales, Michael. Then the Rachmaninoff piece. I'll want to hear it after my rehearsal. Understood?

MICHAEL

Yes, ma'am.

SUSAN

That's my man.

Susan blows him a kiss and winks at him, then exits the room.

Michael leans over to see that she's really gone, then sets the violin down and picks up his guitar again.

MICHAEL

I'll *rock-* you, *-man-*, *-enough*.

INT. CONCERT HALL -- BACKSTAGE -- DAY

Susan checks herself in a mirror in the hallway, fixing a hair or two.

ARTHUR (O.S.)

Think he's gonna notice those two hairs out of place?

Susan turns to face ARTHUR BILINSKI, a violist with the orchestra. He's a rotund, double-chinned man in his 60s, whose infectious smile spreads to Susan's face.

SUSAN

You noticed, Arthur.

ARTHUR

But I love you, dear. Can you say the same for our Maestro?

SUSAN

Love you too, you old flirt. But you shouldn't judge Sergei. You don't know him the way I do.

ARTHUR

It's the "why" you do that worries me.

SUSAN

He's a good man, Arthur. We speak the same language.

ARTHUR

Are the words "I do" in that language?

SUSAN

Don't go there.

(grabs his arm)

Come on. We're going to be late.

They weave their way through the backstage area.

ARTHUR
So how's the Evaluation piece
coming?

SUSAN
Good. I have the fingerings down.

ARTHUR
And the soul?

SUSAN
The soul?

Arthur touches his hand to his heart. Susan shakes her head.

SUSAN
It's notes and time on a page,
Arthur. Basically math. You play it
as it's written, the rest takes
care of itself.

Arthur looks at her a moment.

ARTHUR
When do you play for the Board?

SUSAN
Two weeks.

ARTHUR
What's Sergei say?

SUSAN
You know he can't say anything.

ARTHUR
Or won't. You can win First Chair,
Susan.

Susan smiles at him.

SUSAN
Since I'm the only one the Board is
evaluating for the Chair, I think
my chances are pretty good.

ARTHUR
Frankly, I think you deserve it
just because you're dating *il*
maestro. Reward for hazardous duty,
you ask me.

SUSAN
Stop it, Arthur.

Susan changes the subject.

SUSAN

You see the crowd outside?

ARTHUR

Fans of one of our rock and roll
brethren. Some guitar God.
He's sold every seat in here
tonight.

They emerge from the backstage area.

INT. - MAIN STAGE -- DAY

The rest of the orchestra is finding their seats for
rehearsal.

ARTHUR

It's a wonder the soul of this old
hall can take the musical abuse of
those guys.

SUSAN

Neanderthals bellowed in their
caves, too, Arthur. The caves are
still here.

Arthur laughs. Susan finds her seat in the violin section,
Arthur directly behind her in the viola section.

At the podium, towering over the orchestra, stands SERGEI
GROTOFSKY, 40s, a handsome Russian with a regal air. He flips
pages of a folio, glancing up occasionally.

SERGEI

(Russian accent)

Let's go, children. Settle. Tempus
fugit.

Sergei catches Susan's eye as she sits. He quickly winks at
her. She smiles.

As she arranges her music, Susan smiles politely at the
violinist next to her. JAMES ALLEN WINSTON, 50s, sits ramrod
straight in his chair, his impeccably-trimmed beard already
resting on his violin.

Winston barely nods at Susan, then smiles to himself.

Sergei picks up his baton, cracks it on the side of the
podium.

SERGEI

All right. The Mozart, please.
Second movement. At the *allegro*.
Susan, if you'll please assume
First Chair duties for this run-
through?

Susan smiles and nods, glances around at Arthur, who smiles back.

Sergei raises his arms. The orchestra responds with their instruments. Sergei's hand dances the time with the baton, and with a flourish, he brings the orchestra to life.

EXT. - AIRPORT -- RUNWAY -- DAY

The animated Mozart piece plays under as Martin and Robert's band, Hellbroth -- MITCH and BRYAN ECHO, and RONNY ALGIERS -- exit the black Lear.

Martin pops his cell phone and starts talking. The others move toward a string of limos parked on the tarmac.

Robert slumps from the Lear, walking like he's just learned how. He's got a beer bottle in his hand, a smoke on his lower lip. He looks around, getting his bearings.

ROBERT

Where is it we s'posed to be?

Robert starts down the stairway.

ROBERT

(sighing to himself)

It all looks the same anymore.

Two GROUPIES, early 20's, stand with Nigel -- a BLONDE and a REDHEAD. The girls have the nervous energy of retrievers, waiting to be let loose on a hunt.

NIGEL

Well, there he is, ladies. Why don't you give Bobby a nice hello?

The girls spring toward Robert. As he notices them, he seems to come alive, straightens up, smiles hugely, opens his arms.

ROBERT

Ladies! Nice of you to meet me here in...in...well...good to see ya!

He wraps his arms around them as they paste themselves to him, giggling and cooing.

REDHEAD AND BLONDE

Hi, Bobby...Hey, Bobby...Love you..

They move toward the lead limo.

ROBERT

Climb in the limo, girls. I'll be right with ya. We'll party.

The Redhead and the Blonde -- all legs and not much else -- fold themselves through the limo door, giggling.

Robert slumps against the side of the limo.

NIGEL

Like 'em, Bobby? Handpicked 'em meself.

ROBERT

Not bad, Nigh. Look like they can toss ya a nice one. Hope I'm up to it. Feelin' a little worn.

NIGEL

Get unworn. The blonde can buckle your knees, Bobby. Very talented.

ROBERT

(smiles at his friend)
Always willin' to give new talent a shot at the big time, aren't ya?

Nigel rattles a laugh as he and Robert climb into the limo.

INT. - LIMOUSINE -- MOVING -- DAY

Orchestra music continues under.

Nigel fires a joint, passes it to Robert, who's nestled between the Redhead and the Blonde.

NIGEL

Careful, Bobby. Stuff's righteous, but a bit harsh on the throat.

Robert takes a pull on the joint, hands it to the Redhead.

ROBERT

Want a hit, sweetheart? Loosen up a bit?

The Redhead takes the joint, looks at Robert through its smoke as she takes it.

REDHEAD

(holding it in)
Hey. I just noticed something.

Robert is staring at the Redhead's breasts, which are barely contained by the skimpiest of tank tops.

ROBERT

So did I, baby.

REDHEAD

Up close, you have wrinkles around
your eyes just like my Dad.

Robert glances at Nigel as the Redhead pulls a Hellbroth CD
from her purse.

REDHEAD

They're not on the picture here,
though.

ROBERT

(wearily)
Must be the lighting in here. You
know.

REDHEAD

Oh.

She giggles as she hands the joint to the Blonde, and nuzzles
into Robert a little closer.

NIGEL

(to himself)
Blimey.

INT. - LIMOUSINE FRONT SEAT -- DAY

Martin is screaming into his cell phone.

MARTIN

I don't care if we're early or not.
Fuck the bloody orchestra! When the
trucks get there, we start the set-
up and sound check. Understand?
Read your contract!

He punches off his cell phone.

MARTIN

Idiots. God, I miss Bill Graham.

INT. - CONCERT HALL -- MAIN STAGE -- DAY

The impressive sound fills the hall. Sergei teases and
cajoles the orchestra, his eyes closed, his head tilted back.

But Sergei suddenly deflates, cracking the baton on the
podium with fury.

SERGEI

NO! NO! NO! Where is your
substance!? For God's sake, this is
Mozart. Not a chorus for boat horns
at an Eagles game!

Sergei pauses a moment, contemplating, then looks up.

SERGEI

All right. Again. And James, do me the favor of taking First Chair on this pass. Thank you.

Susan stiffens, looks from Sergei to James, then back to Sergei. But Sergei avoids her gaze. James stares straight ahead, eyes on Sergei.

Sergei raises his hands.

SERGEI

From the *allegro* once again.

Sergei dances time with the baton, and sweeps the orchestra into life again. This time, they play it with more vigor, more animation, none more so than James.

Sergei, eyes closed again, smiles.

SERGEI

Yes! Yes! That's it! Celli...

The cellos kick in.

SERGEI

Yes! By God, that's my orchestra!

EXT. CONCERT HALL -- STAGE DOOR -- DAY

The Mozart plays under. Two tractor-trailers, flaming cauldrons painted down their sides, pull to the curb.

As SHAMUS, a huge roadie, climbs from the cab, the crowd sees the logo on the truck door, "Robert Cross and Hellbroth," and cheers.

Shamus hands papers to one of the Uniformed Policemen.

SHAMUS

(Scot accent)

We're with Robert Cross, Constable. Playin' 'ere tonight. All the permits are there. Mind if we get started?

POLICEMAN

Be my guest.

Shamus turns to LIAM, his overly-large brother, who has come up with several other ROADIES.

SHAMUS

All right, boys. We got eight hours.

EXT. - CONCERT HALL MAIN ENTRANCE -- DAY

The limo stops at the curb. Robert and Martin emerge.

MARTIN

(to Nigel in car)

Go 'round the stage entrance, make sure they're loading in. We'll go in here.

(to Robert)

Last thing I want to deal with is a pack of your rabid fans.

Robert holds a bottle of champagne, smiles.

ROBERT

(buzzed)

Ah, they're not so bad...

He turns and points at the two Groupies in the limo.

ROBERT

You two, however...I'll be back in a sec, and I expect you to be *very* bad.

The girls giggle as Robert winks at them, then closes the limo door. He falls into step with Martin. As he does so, he sighs wearily.

Robert and Martin enter the Hall.

INT. -- CONCERT HALL -- MAIN STAGE -- DAY

Sergei stands at the podium.

SERGEI

Very nice. V-e-r-y nice. You were alive on that one. Excellent.

(beat)

Before we move on, a brief reminder that you're all expected here on the 19th at 10 AM to assist with the Board Evaluations. We'll be deciding our First Chair violin that morning...

(motioning to Susan and James)

...Susan and James are preparing an assigned piece. The rest of you will find the charts on your stands.

Susan stiffens. She looks quickly at James, who cracks the subtlest of smiles. Susan drills Sergei with a look, but he doesn't make eye contact.

SERGEI

I expect quite a display of virtuosity. Should be exciting. All right. The Vivaldi, please. Third movement, from the top.

Susan turns to look at Arthur, who shrugs his shoulders.

INT. CONCERT HALL -- HALL ENTRANCE DOORS-- DAY

Robert and Martin enter the back of the hall and stroll down toward the stage, unnoticed. Martin sees the orchestra.

MARTIN

(under his breath)
Wonderful...

On the

MAIN STAGE,

Sergei brings the orchestra to full roar on the Vivaldi. Robert stops in his tracks at the edge of the stage. But it's not the music; his eyes have fallen on Susan.

EXT. CONCERT HALL -- STAGE DOOR -- DAY

The Vivaldi plays under. Roadies roll stacks of Marshall amplifiers out of the trucks, and up to the load-in doors of the Hall. Others walk behind them, coils of lighting cable over their shoulders.

INT. -- CONCERT HALL -- MAIN STAGE -- DAY

Robert's eyes are locked on Susan. She's working hard, eyes flitting between her score and Sergei on the podium, though a quick glance at Robert acknowledges her notice of him.

Suddenly,

CRASH!

The loading doors of the main stage burst open and an army of Roadies with amplifiers, cables, and lighting rigs roll onto the main stage. Nigel follows them in, clipboard in hand.

Shock jolts through the orchestra. Some swivel in their seats, startled, others stand and look.

SERGEI

What the hell!?

He leaps from the podium.

SERGEI

Stop! What do you think you're doing? Get out! Get out of here!

Arthur leans to Susan.

ARTHUR

The Neanderthals have entered the cave.

Susan watches Sergei confront a Roadie pushing a Marshall amp. They get into a shoving match, the amp between them.

SERGEI

Get this monstrosity out of here.

Nigel approaches Sergei.

NIGEL

He's only doin' his job, mate.
Let's let 'im do it, whattaya say?

SERGEI

And who the hell are you?

MARTIN (O.C.)

He's only doing his job...

Sergei spins to face Martin, standing with CHARLES BURBURY, manager of the Hall.

MARTIN

...which is working for me.

SERGEI

And who are...?
(noticing Charles)
Charles. What is this?

CHARLES

(delicately)
Sergei...um...We have a bit of a situation here. Can we talk?

SERGEI

I'm running a rehearsal, Charles.

CHARLES

That's what we need to talk about.
Please. Let's not have a scene.

SERGEI

Scene? You've already got a scene.
What the hell is...

CHARLES

Sergei. Please.

SERGEI
 (exasperated)
 Yes. Yes...

Charles, Sergei, and Martin move off. Robert hops onto the stage, champagne in hand, and approaches Susan.

ROBERT
 (to Susan)
 Hey, there, sweetheart.

Susan tries to ignore him, her eyes on Sergei.

ROBERT
 Was watchin' you play. Not bad.

This gets her. She turns to him.

SUSAN
 Not...Bad? And you are...?

ROBERT
 Robert Cross. Playin' 'ere tonight.

He takes a swallow of champagne, waiting for an anticipated reaction. He doesn't get it. He tries another tack.

ROBERT
 Couldn't help but notice you were just sittin' there during your solo. Ever try to stand up while you're doin' it?

SUSAN
 Excuse me?

ROBERT
 You know...get up, move a little? Can't get any balls into the music if you're stuck in a chair.

SUSAN
 Balls...

ROBERT
 Yeah. Bringin' it up from deep down, you know? Wailin'. Lettin' loose.
 (grabs his crotch)
 Balls. 'Sides, you got a nice shape, there...shake it 'round a little, might wake up these old sots.

He laughs. Still nothing.

ROBERT

Look, why don't you stick around
for my show? Afterward, we could...

SUSAN

Mr. Cross. I don't know who you
are. And frankly, I don't care. I
certainly have no interest in what
you think about how I approach my
instrument. Because anyone who uses
the word "balls" in the same
sentence as the word "music"
doesn't understand the first thing
about what it is I do. Now if
you'll excuse me.

Susan gathers her sheet music and leaves the stage. Robert
stands wondering...What happened? It didn't work that time.
And did she just insult him?

As Susan gets to the edge of

BACKSTAGE

she sees Michael standing in a near state of shock. He points
at Robert.

MICHAEL

Mom, that's...

Susan turns him and begins to guide him back.

SUSAN

That's nobody, Michael.

Michael looks over his shoulder as he's steered away.

MICHAEL

No, Mom! That's Robert Cross! He's
only the biggest...

SUSAN

We don't use the words it would
take to describe what the biggest
he is, Michael.

Michael twists from her hand, turns back toward the stage.

MICHAEL

But it's Robert Cross, Mom! Can I
meet him, please?

SUSAN

Michael!

Michael sets his jaw, casts a glance at Robert, then turns
and marches backstage with Susan behind him.

She, too, casts a glance back, but her glance says something completely different.

ON THE MAIN STAGE

Robert is left looking at Arthur.

ARTHUR
Balls, eh?

Robert shrugs.

EXT. - CONCERT HALL STAGE DOOR -- DAY

Sergei bursts out of the door and strides up the street, obviously upset. Two seconds later, Susan runs out after him.

SUSAN
Sergei!

He stops, sees it's Susan, then continues up the street as she falls into step with him.

SUSAN
Sergei, what...?

SERGEI
Can you believe the gall of that British bastard? To threaten *me* with legal action? *And* the Hall? How could Charles allow such a travesty? I don't care if he *does* have a fucking contract, Charles should have...

Susan grabs Sergei's arm, stopping him.

SUSAN
Sergei, what is this with James?

SERGEI
James? I...Oh, the Evaluations. You're angry, yes?

SUSAN
I'm upset. Yes. You're evaluating James now?

SERGEI
He's an excellent violinist, Susan. I feel we need to hear him.

SUSAN
I've worked hard for this, Sergei. For years. I expected to have a clear shot at First Chair.

SERGEI

Everyone else in the orchestra
thought you would too.

SUSAN

What's *that* supposed to mean?

SERGEI

They've seen us together, Susan.
They would say you were given the
Chair just because of our
relationship. That your playing--

SUSAN

What *about* my playing? You've told
me I play beautifully.

SERGEI

And you do. You are a magnificent
technical violinist.

SUSAN

Technical!?

SERGEI

Look, Susan. This isn't the time or
place. Why don't we have dinner
toni--

SUSAN

You bastard. How could you do this?

SERGEI

Susan, please. Try to see it--

SUSAN

How? See it how?

Sergei pulls her closer to the building, lowers his voice.

SERGEI

All right. If you insist. A First
Chair must have many things, Susan.
Commitment. Focus. Technique. And
you have those primary qualities.
But above that, a First Chair must
be able to bring the music from a
deeply personal place and share it
with passion and abandon. Without
that, one cannot touch the souls of
others. This is what I have yet to
see from you.

SUSAN

(stunned)

You don't think I can play that
way?

SERGEI

I didn't say that. I said I need to see it.

They stare at each other. Then Susan abruptly turns and walks away.

SERGEI

Susan. Susan, please. Let's talk about this.

Sergei watches her disappear back through the stage door.

INT. - MARTHA AND SUSAN'S CENTER-CITY APARTMENT -- NIGHT

Susan, Martha, and Michael sit at the dining room table, the remnants of dinner left sitting. Susan's draped on the table, head on hand. Martha's knitting. Michael tosses his napkin on the table.

MICHAEL

I'm gonna go practice my guitar.

SUSAN

Your homework done?

MICHAEL

Did it at school.

SUSAN

Okay then. Don't stay up late.

Michael turns to leave.

SUSAN

Michael?

Michael turns back.

SUSAN

I'm sorry about today. I know you like his music, but...

MICHAEL

You ever hear it, Mom?

SUSAN

No. I haven't.

MICHAEL

Didn't think so.

Michael turns and leaves the room.

Martha notices the tension, tries to fill the void.

MARTHA
 (cheerfully)
 So how was your day, dear?

Susan pours herself some more wine.

SUSAN
 Lousy. You wouldn't believe the
 jerk who came up to me today.

MARTHA
 What jerk, dear?

INT. - CONCERT HALL -- NIGHT

The stage is dark. The murmur of a crowd.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
 Ladies and Gentlemen! Get ready for
 one of rock and roll's greatest
 bands! Give it up for Hall of Fame
 guitarist Robert Cross and H-e-l-l-
 b-r-o-t-h!

The stage flashes into fire and lights. A wall of rock and
 roll explodes and spotlights hit Robert at centerstage as he
 strikes his first chord. The audience erupts.

INT. - MARTHA AND SUSAN'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

Martha stops her knitting.

MARTHA
 Balls? He said "balls"?

SUSAN
 Yes. Can you believe it? *Him*,
 telling *me* how to play?

MARTHA
 Maybe he was talking about
 baseball, honey. Or tennis.

SUSAN
 No, Gran. He was talking about my
 music, and how I play. And on top
 of that, right after, Sergei
 basically said the same thing.

MARTHA
 Sergei? He's a nice man. How are
 you two getting along, by the way?
 He ever going to ask you to...?

SUSAN
 Granny, haven't you been listening?

MARTHA

Why, yes, dear. You're telling me about your balls, and Sergei. And some new fella you met this afternoon. Is he nice too?

SUSAN

Oh, please. He's an arrogant son of a bitch.

MARTHA

Does he have balls?

Susan drops her head on her arm, exasperated.

INT. - CONCERT HALL -- NIGHT

Robert Cross and HellBroth are in full flight. Robert's in front of six thousand screaming fans, totally lost in his playing, which is transcendent.

This is the encore finale, and the band has killed all night. Robert brings them to a crescendo and drops explosively to the close. The house erupts as the band leaves the stage.

INT. - DRESSING ROOM BACKSTAGE -- NIGHT

Robert, Mitch, Bryan, and Ronny run into the room, soaked with sweat, but exuberant, high on adrenaline. Nigel tosses them towels as they enter.

NIGEL

Amazin' night, blokes. Amazin'. Not a sod out there with an eardrum that ain't bleedin'. You tore 'em up, Bobby. Simply tore 'em up. Best you been all tour. Maybe ever.

Robert throws his arm around Nigel, who hands him a beer.

ROBERT

Can't let the young turks catch me, now, can I?

They laugh heartily at that.

Martin Preston enters, followed by a crowd of HANGERS-ON, BABES, and others.

MARTIN

Exceptional effort, gentlemen. Oversold house at our best price, merch sales will top last week. You are still a money machine, HellBroth. A money machine.

Mitch leans into Robert.

MITCH
(quietly)
Good to hear he liked the music,
ain't it?

ROBERT
(smiling)
He's talkin' about *his* music, mate.

They laugh and clink beer bottles. Nigel nods toward the dressing room door.

NIGEL
Over at the door, Bobby. The blonde
and her friend.

At the

DRESSING ROOM DOOR

are the Blonde and the Redhead, their passes being checked by security. Nigel calls to them.

NIGEL
Girls. Girls. So nice to see ya
again. Come right on in. Robert's
right over here.

As the Blonde and Redhead move into the room, a MAN standing behind them comes into view. He's dressed impeccably corporate, his eyes searching the room until he finds who he's looking for -- Martin Preston.

The Man catches Martin's eye amid the clamor of the party. Martin nods at him in acknowledgment, but then turns away. The man disappears from the door without entering.

INT. - MARTHA AND SUSAN'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

Susan's clearing the dishes. Martha's putting away her knitting.

SUSAN
So what time do we have to get up
tomorrow?

MARTHA
The movers will be here at 7 AM
sharp.

SUSAN
I don't know why you bought a house
for us, Gran. We're perfectly happy
here.

MARTHA

What else am I going to do with your grandfather's money? Let me indulge the only family I have left.

SUSAN

But Gran, it's...

A siren suddenly wails down the street, a second one following right after. Martha points at the window.

MARTHA

And *that's* why. I don't want my grandson growing up in this city any longer. It's too dangerous. For him *and* for you. I have the money now, and I want to do it. And besides, you need some peace and quiet if you're going to find those balls you need.

Susan just watches Martha exit the room.

INT. - DRESSING ROOMS BACKSTAGE -- NIGHT

Robert and Nigel are standing in a corner, the Blonde and the Redhead draped on them. Martin approaches them.

MARTIN

I need to get back to the hotel. You ready to go or should I take the limo?

ROBERT

Go ahead. Nigh and I are leavin' this insanity, going out to the new house. We got a few days off, right?

MARTIN

New York concert's next week. European tour starts the 19th.

ROBERT

So we'll stay here, then, settle in. Call ya tomorrow.

MARTIN

Make sure you do. We have that new contract to sign.

ROBERT

Yeah, right. We'll get to that.

MARTIN

(sternly)

We've got to get to it before that new tour starts, Bobby.

ROBERT

We will, Martin. Don't push it.

MARTIN

It's important, Bobby. I'll call you tomorrow.

Robert just nods. Martin exits. Robert looks at Nigel. Nothing is said, but there's communication.

ROBERT

Let's head over to the house, see what we've bought.

NIGEL

Now you're talkin'. Ladies, would you do us the pleasure of accompanying us to our new abode?

The Blonde and the Redhead squeal with delight. Nigel winks at Robert, who just smiles and shakes his head.

EXT. - MCLAREN HOUSE -- MAIN DRIVE -- DAY

A taxi pulls into the large turnaround in front of the main entrance. It passes a long limo that sits at an odd angle on the lawn at the end of the far wing of the house, a back door open.

SUSAN

(pointing to the limo)
That come with it?

MARTHA

Don't know, dear. Maybe. Supposed to be fully furnished.

Susan, Martha, and Michael climb out and look around at the expanse of the house.

SUSAN

My God. What did you buy?

MICHAEL

Holy cow...

MARTHA

It is a bit large, but the kitchen is wonderful.

SUSAN

The kitchen...? This must have cost
a fortune, Gran.

MARTHA

Actually, it wasn't that bad.
Bankruptcy sale or something.

MICHAEL

Mom, look! A swimming pool!

Michael runs off into the center quad between the two wings
toward a swimming pool area surrounded by head-high
evergreens.

SUSAN

Be careful, Michael. Stay close...

MARTHA

Oh, let him run, dear. It's why we
came here. Let's go see the inside.

Susan and Martha walk to the entrance on the West wing of the
house and enter.

INT. - EAST SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- DAY

Robert is sprawled on a huge, oversized bed, naked but for a
pair of Speedo underwear. Empty bottles of champagne lay on
the sheets.

Robert slowly wakes, raises his head, then rises to his
elbows. He looks around the room, then across the bed. A
shock of red hair protrudes from the sheets. He flops back
and groans, then slides carefully from the bed.

INT. - WEST SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- DAY

Susan and Martha walk through a

SITTING ROOM

and into a large

LIVING ROOM

They look around like tourists.

SUSAN

And it came with all this
furniture?

MARTHA

A package deal, dear. Wonderful,
isn't it?

SUSAN
How many bedrooms?

MARTHA
Four on this side, two on the
other, I believe.

SUSAN
God, Gran. What are we going to do
with all of them?

MARTHA
You never know dear. Perhaps you'll
meet a nice man and settle down
again, fill them up.

SUSAN
(cooly)
I'm dating a nice man, Gran. Sergei
is...nice.

MARTHA
I'm sure he is, dear.

INT. - EAST SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- DAY

Robert, still in only the Speedo, sleepily walks across the
second floor landing to the stairway. He moves tentatively,
like he could disintegrate at any moment.

A door opens nearby and Nigel quietly backs out, pulling the
door to. He's wrapped in a sheet.

ROBERT
Mornin', Nigh.

Nigel jumps, startled.

NIGEL
Jesus, Bobby. Don't do that.

ROBERT
Blonde in there?

Nigel nods. He falls into step with Robert as they head
downstairs.

ROBERT
She buckle your knees?

NIGEL
Knees, hips, ankles. Woman nearly
broke me in half, Bobby.

INT. - WEST SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- DAY

Susan and Martha are in a Dining Room. They stop to look at the table settings.

SUSAN

Where's this wonderful kitchen?

Martha points to a door at the end of the Dining Room.

MARTHA

Through there, I believe. Shall we have a cup of tea?

SUSAN

That would be nice.

Susan and Martha move to the door.

INT. - EAST SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- DAY

Robert and Nigel move through a small Library, walls lined with books. Two large leather chairs bracket a fireplace.

NIGEL

I could use some tea.

ROBERT

Kitchen through here?

NIGEL

Far's I know.

Robert and Nigel move to the door at the end of the room.

INT. - KITCHEN -- MCLAREN HOUSE -- DAY

At the same instant, two doors on opposite sides of the room open. Through the west door, Susan and Martha enter. Through the east door, Robert and Nigel enter. Neither pair sees the other until they're one or two steps into the room.

Everyone screams.

SUSAN

Oh, my God!

MARTHA

Oh, dear!

ROBERT

What the hell...?

NIGEL

Blimey!

Susan and Robert instantly recognize each other.

ROBERT
(to Susan)
You're the violinist.

SUSAN
You're the...the...

Susan sees the Speedo, tries to avert her eyes.

SUSAN
What are you doing here?

Martha picks up a teapot from the island stove.

MARTHA
Tea, anyone?

Robert is totally unshaken by the fact that he's basically naked.

ROBERT
(proudly)
I live here. Just bought the place.

Nigel moves toward Martha.

NIGEL
(to Martha)
Did you say tea?

Susan looks right at Robert after his last statement.

SUSAN
Live here...? No, you don't. This
is *our* house.

ROBERT
'Fraid not, darlin'. Nigh signed
the papers yesterday with that
fella Mc...Mc...what was his name,
Nigh?

NIGEL AND MARTHA
McLaren.

NIGEL
Vernon McLaren.

MARTHA
That's right. Vernon.
(to Nigel)
Earl Grey all right?

NIGEL
(to Martha)
Perfect.

ROBERT

Yeah. That's the fella. Vernon McLaren. Signed the papers yesterday, we did.

SUSAN

We signed the papers yesterday. I have them in the car...

ROBERT

Papers or no, this is *my* house. But you're welcome to stay a few days if you need a place to...

The door from the East Section of McLaren House opens, and the Redhead enters, hair disheveled, wearing only a very tight lace teddy, a thong, and high heels. She immediately drapes herself on Robert, nibbles on his ear.

REDHEAD

Mornin', stud.

The Redhead notices the others in the room.

REDHEAD

New party startin'? Goody! Hi, Nigel!

SUSAN

There's no party here...

Michael enters the room, looking at a wet lace bra in one hand and an empty bottle of Jack Daniels in the other.

MICHAEL

Hey, mom, look what I found in the pool...

He looks up and sees none other than Robert Cross.

MICHAEL

Oh, my God!

The Blonde appears in the doorway from Robert's section of McLaren House, wearing tiny, tight, short-shorts and a tank top that fails miserably at holding her breasts in.

BLONDE

Has anyone seen my...Oh, there it is.

The Blonde moves to Michael and takes the bra from his hand as he stares from her to Robert and back, mouth agape.

BLONDE

(to Michael)

Thanks, honey...couldn't remember where I'd lost it.

(MORE)

BLONDE (CONT'D)
 (touches his nose)
 You're cute...

Susan grabs Michael's arm, pulls him to her.

SUSAN
 That's it! This is outrageous.
 I insist you leave immediately.

ROBERT
 'Fraid that's not gonna happen,
 sweetheart. Got houseguests.

He indicates the Blonde and the Redhead.

SUSAN
 Don't call me sweetheart...stud.
 We'll see who's going to stay and
 who's going to leave.

Susan turns and stomps from the room, a stunned Michael in tow.

ROBERT
 Guess we'll have to call the
 solicitors about this.

Nigel is leaning against the counter, wrapped in his sheet.

NIGEL
 Think I'll stay for ...
 (to Martha)
 What's yur name, dear?

MARTHA
 Martha.

NIGEL
 Right. Martha.
 (to Robert)
 Gonna stay for some 'a Martha's
 tea, you don't mind.

ROBERT
 Suit yourself.
 (to the Redhead)
 Comin'?

REDHEAD
 Sure, honey.

BLONDE
 Me too.

Robert and the girls leave. Martha pours water into cups.

MARTHA

He's going to catch his death,
dressed like that.

Nigel rattles a laugh as he pulls his sheet a little tighter.

INT. -- JUDGE HAROLD BARKLEY'S CHAMBERS -- DAY

JUDGE HAROLD BARKLEY sits at the head of a conference table. Robert and Nigel stare across the table at Susan and Martha.

BARKLEY

On the surface of it, each sale was handled properly. Legitimate paperwork, correct filing procedure. He even ran your checks through the Bankruptcy Court so he could issue unencumbered deeds to each of you. Problem is, they're not worth the paper they're printed on.

SUSAN

Then where's our money, Your Honor?

BARKLEY

The proceeds were paid to Carsen McLaren. And his accounts were all closed the afternoon of the sale. Sales.

NIGEL

And where's *he* now, mate?

BARKLEY

No idea. Both the McLarens have disappeared.

ROBERT

So the ladies here are out over two million dollars?

SUSAN

(to Robert)

We're out two million?

ROBERT

Well, yeah. We were in the house first.

SUSAN

No you weren't. We'd already...

ROBERT

Oh, no. Huh-uh, sweetheart. We were there the night before you arrived...

Susan jumps up, angry.

SUSAN
Don't call me sweetheart--

MARTHA
(to Susan)
Susan, dear, it's not his fault...

Robert rises.

ROBERT
(to Susan)
Maybe you *need* someone to call you
sweetheart...loosen you up a
little.

SUSAN
How dare you? Get out of our house
or I'll sue you for everyth--

ROBERT
Oh, will you? Well, bring it
on...sweetheart.

BARKLEY
Hey! Both of you. You're still in
my chambers.

Susan and Robert glare at each other, then drop into their
chairs.

BARKLEY
Thank you. Now. This is going to
take some time to sort out. I don't
know of any precedents, but we'll
see what we can find.

SUSAN
So what do we do in the meantime?

BARKLEY
Perhaps one of you would be willing
to leave the property?

SUSAN
No way.

ROBERT
Not a chance.

BARKLEY
Well, then, how you two survive the
next few weeks is up to you. Just
make sure you keep it civil. Right
now you're victims. Don't become
defendants.

Barkley closes the file in front of him and stands.

BARKLEY

We're adjourned. You'll be contacted.

INT. - HALLWAY OUTSIDE JUDGE'S CHAMBERS -- DAY

Susan and Martha enter an elevator and turn to face Nigel and Robert, who are just leaving the judge's chambers.

NIGEL

Sorry about this, Bobby. I really mucked it up...

ROBERT

Forget it. Not your fault.

Robert looks at Susan, who glares at him as the elevator doors close.

ROBERT

Not her fault either, really. Angry bird, that one. Wonder why.

Nigel looks up at Robert who continues to gaze at the elevator. Nigel's eyebrows go up.

INT. - MARTIN PRESTON'S HOTEL SUITE -- NIGHT

Martin's on the phone, his feet up on the desk. He has a drink in his hand.

MARTIN

So tell me, Bobby -- where is this little *chateau*?

(he sips as he listens)

Uh-huh. Nice, is it?

(loosens his tie)

Of course I'd like to see it. I've got some business about the next tour in the morning, but I can be there after noon. Fine. See you then.

Martin drops the phone and walks to the window.

MARTIN

Amazing. The one time I let someone else handle something, they end up in shit up to their necks.

Martin turns to face CARMINE D'ARGENIO, the thin, swarthy type from the dressing room, dressed impeccably corporate.

MARTIN

I tell you now, Carmine...never give up control. Of any kind.

CARMINE
Does he have a clue?

MARTIN
(smirking)
He's a bloody rock star.

CARMINE
How will he take your selling him
out?

MARTIN
What does it matter? Once he signs
the new contract, he's mine. And
then he's yours.

CARMINE
He's already ours. There's thirty-
five million in your Caymans
account that says so.

MARTIN
He's worth it.

CARMINE
He better be. Just make sure he
signs that extension before you
leave. Mr. Cross needs to get to
work. He has a big investment to
cover for us.

Martin looks back to the city skyline.

MARTIN
(detached)
Not my problem anymore.

INT. - ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- NIGHT

Robert tosses the phone onto the couch.

ROBERT
Martin's comin' over tomorrow.

NIGEL
Oh, wonderful. Place needs to be
darkened up. It's too bright and
cheery in here.

ROBERT
Give 'im a break, Nigh.

NIGEL
He's changed, Bobby. No fun
anymore. Always pushin'. Next
record, next tour. Don't stop.

ROBERT

'At's his job, mate. He's made us rich.

NIGEL

'Ow much more you need, Bobby? I don't know 'bout you, but I'm gettin' tired. Time to slow down, don'tcha think?

ROBERT

I hear ya, mate, but if we pack it in, I keep wonderin'...what the hell would I do?

NIGEL

Yeah, but...Just sayin', you know?

INT. - SUSAN'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- MICHAEL'S BEDROOM -
- NIGHT

Susan enters. Michael's asleep with headphones on, plugged into his phone beside him. She gently pulls the headphones off, glances at the phone's screen. It shows a picture of Robert Cross and Hellbroth.

SUSAN

(sarcastically, to herself)
Great.

Susan tentatively puts the headphones on, listens a moment. Her face twists with disgust, she pulls the headphones off, clicks off the phone, and sighs.

She tucks Michael in, turns off his light and exits into the

HALLWAY

and moves across the hall to Martha's bedroom and peeks in. Martha's sound asleep.

INT. -- MASTER BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Susan enters, closes the door and pulls the band from her hair, letting it fall. She moves into the

INT. -- MASTER BATHROOM -- NIGHT

where she looks at herself in the mirror, pushes her hair back and grimaces at the tired features she sees. Then she bends into the sink to wash her face.

INT. - ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- NIGHT

Robert sits on the couch noodling on his unplugged electric guitar. Nigel puffs a joint nearby. He hands it to Robert.

NIGEL

'Ere.

ROBERT

Nah. Not tonight. Just wanna lay back and...

The front door is suddenly thrown open. Mitch and Bryan Echo, charge into the room.

A crowd of PARTIERS -- a wild assortment of broads, dandies, stoners, and babes -- follows them in, carrying cases of liquor and bags of food.

NIGEL

Whoa, now. What's this, then?

MITCH

Housewarmin' party, boys. Time to break in the new digs.

BRYAN

Where's the bar?

Robert looks at Nigel, who raises his eyebrows and smiles.

INT. - SUSAN'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- MASTER BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Susan sits in her bed, sunk into fluffy pillows. She looks over the musical folio of her Evaluation piece, humming it to herself, fingering an imaginary violin.

She hears crickets chirping, looks over at the open window. A bright moon hangs over the trees, a slight breeze touches the curtains.

Susan smiles, yawns. She puts the folio aside, turns out the light, and falls back into her pillow. She sighs wearily.

INT. - ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- NIGHT

The party is revving up. People still pour through the door. Robert laughs at the bar with Mitch and Bryan, beer in hand.

MITCH

So how're the acoustics in here, Bobby?

ROBERT

Don't know, really. Haven't tried 'em.

BRYAN

Place's 'bout the size of that club in Munich we played back in the day. Great sound that, remember?

They all nod. Mitch smiles mischievously.

MITCH

Whattaya say we find out how she sounds?

MONTAGE -- CLOSE SHOTS OF BAND EQUIPMENT BEING SET UP

- A snare drum set into a stand
- A huge amplifier head set onto a mammoth speaker cabinet
- A wire being jacked into a sound mixing board
- A cymbal set on a stand, the thumbscrew tightened
- A wire being jacked into the belly of a bass guitar
- A hand, holding a guitar pick, cranks a volume knob
- Two drum sticks crack out time -- 1, 2....

INT. - SUSAN'S MASTER BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Susan's asleep, a peaceful look on her face. The crickets chirp, the wind moves the curtains...

...3, 4...BLAM! A snare cracks like a bolt of lightning.

THWANNNNNGGGGG! Intensely loud guitar chords, followed by a thunderous drum roll across the toms into a wicked backbeat. The bass kicks in, a fabric of sound explodes.

Susan bolts upright and screams, though it's hardly heard amid the sound of the band from across the quad.

INT. - ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- NIGHT

Robert and his bandmates are having a raucous good time jamming, all smiles and laughing. The groupies and hangers-on dance and whoop it up.

INT. - SUSAN'S MASTER BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Susan looks out the window across the quad.

SUSAN
For God's sake!

Michael runs into the room, totally excited.

MICHAEL
Awesome! That's Hellbroth, Mom!
We're getting a totally private
Hellbroth concert!

Michael runs out onto the bedroom balcony as Susan picks up her phone from the nightstand. She hits "911".

OPERATOR
(on the phone)
Nine-one-one. What's the nature of
your emergency?

SUSAN
Township police, please.

MICHAEL
(at the balcony doors)
Mom! What are you doing?

OPERATOR
(on phone)
Is there an emergency, Ma'am? Where
are you?

SUSAN
McLaren House, north of the
township line.

MICHAEL
MOM! You can't! I'll die!

OPERATOR
(on phone)
What exactly is the nature of the
emerg...

MICHAEL
MOM!

Susan looks at Michael's shocked face, then...

SUSAN
Never mind, operator.

Susan clicks off the phone, tosses it on the bed and goes to the balcony and looks across the quad.

SUSAN
I can handle this.

MICHAEL
I want to go over there.

SUSAN
Not a chance, Michael.

MICHAEL
Come on, Mom...

Susan turns, grabs her robe and puts it on as she heads into the hallway, Michael trailing behind.

INT. - ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- NIGHT

The party's getting wild. Robert's guitar screams at 160 decibels against the driving beat of the band. He's totally engrossed in the fretboard. Partiers dance everywhere, cans, bottles, joints, and each other in their hands.

INT. - SUSAN'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- NIGHT

Susan moves down the hall, Michael bouncing along behind her.

SUSAN
He doesn't know who he's dealing with.

MICHAEL
Cool! I'm gonna jam with Robert Cross! Wait'll I get my guitar, Mom.

Michael runs into his room. Susan's unaware that he's not behind her anymore.

SUSAN
You're staying right here, young man. You're not going anywhere near that degenerate.

Susan opens Martha's bedroom door.

SUSAN
Gran, I'm going...

Susan looks at Martha, angelically sound asleep, her hearing aids sitting on the nightstand.

SUSAN
(sarcastically to herself)
Terrific.

Susan closes Martha's door, and exits down the stairs.

EXT. - MCLAREN HOUSE QUAD -- NIGHT

Susan stomps across the quad in her silk pajamas and robe, an angry determination on her face.

She's unaware that twenty feet behind her, Michael runs, carrying his guitar. The music thunders on.

As Susan passes by the pool, she is shocked by the sight of a totally naked young woman bounding off the diving board, followed closely by a naked young man with a bottle of Jack Daniels. Susan's face tightens and her pace quickens.

Michael sees the pool frolics.

MICHAEL

Cool...

EXT. - QUAD DOOR -- ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- NIGHT

Susan reaches the door, looks for a doorbell. Finding none, she reaches up to hit the door with her fist when it swings open. The music gets 50 decibels louder.

Shamus and Liam stand looking at Susan, beer steins in hand. Shock hits her face, broad smiles hit theirs.

SHAMUS

(Scot accent)

Well, hey, there, lassy! Just gettin' here?

LIAM

(Scot accent)

Better late than never, eh, Shamus?

SHAMUS

Absofuckinlutely! Come on, sweetheart. We'll escort ya.

They grab Susan, one under each arm. She yelps, but it's lost in the din. The Roadies carry her across the

FOYER

and up the main staircase, weaving their way through a sea of partiers.

Michael runs into the house and follows them upstairs.

INT. - ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- UPSTAIRS -- NIGHT

Shamus and Liam drop Susan into the maelstrom of a wide-open rock party.

SHAMUS

There ya go, Missy. Catch ya later.

Susan is immediately swallowed up by the crowd.

She's moved along as if in a river. Various types come up to her -- one throws his arm around her, another offers her a slug from a bottle, another takes a sniff from a coke bullet and offers it to her.

Across the room, Robert and Hellbroth are at full-throttle. Robert's wailing on his guitar with intense passion and focus, physically and mentally lost in the music.

Susan emerges into a space in front of the band. She's drawn in by the power of Robert's playing, the way he's deeply lost in himself but still the driving engine of the band.

Michael comes up beside Susan, guitar in hand, obviously in heaven. He takes Susan's hand. She looks down at him.

MICHAEL
(yelling to Susan)
He's awesome, isn't he?

Susan smiles weakly, and looks back up at Robert. His focus, his passion, his good looks...he's different somehow.

Robert brings the band to the conclusion of the jam they're playing and the band slams it to the close. The room erupts in applause, cheers, whistles, and screams.

Michael leaves Susan's side and rushes to Robert.

SUSAN
Michael!

But he doesn't hear her. Robert turns to find Michael standing in front of him.

ROBERT
Hey, little dude. Who might you be?

Michael extends his free hand. Robert takes it.

MICHAEL
Michael Marshall.

ROBERT
Robert Cross.

MICHAEL
Yeah. I know. Man, this is great.

ROBERT
Sound good, did it?

MICHAEL
Awesome, man. Unreal. Listen...you don't give lessons, do you?

ROBERT
(laughing)
What, teach guitar?

MICHAEL
Yeah. I live right here. It'd be
easy for you to...

ROBERT
Wait a minute, mate. You live
where?

As Michael points across the quad...

MICHAEL
Right over there...

...a quizzical look crosses Robert's face, then he looks up
into the eyes of Susan. His face brightens.

ROBERT
Well, hello.

Susan begrudgingly smiles slightly.

SUSAN
Hello.

ROBERT
I didn't know you liked...

SUSAN
I don't, really.

It dawns on Robert why she's here.

ROBERT
Guess it was a bit loud, eh?

Susan recovers, pulls her mission together.

SUSAN
Yes. Yes, it was *a bit loud*. I'll
thank you to keep it down when any
normal people would be trying to
sleep. I have a grandmother who
needs her rest, and my son...

ROBERT
Nice kid. Didn't know you had a
boy. Didn't know you were married.

SUSAN
I'm not. And that has nothing to do
with...

MICHAEL
She called the cops.

ROBERT
 (surprised)
 The cops? You called the coppers?

Several of the partiers hear the word and freak.

PARTIERS
 (a mix of)
 Cops? Where? The cops are coming?

Many head directly for the door.

SUSAN
 Yes, well...not exactly...I
 started...

ROBERT
 Well, that's a hell of a thing to
 do. All you had to do was ask.

SUSAN
 And how was I supposed to do that?
 Signal flares?

ROBERT
 We're neighbors. You could just
 walk over...

SUSAN
 We are NOT neighbors. You are
 living in my house illegally...

ROBERT
 YOUR house?

SUSAN
 Yes, MY house. And the sooner you
 accept that...

ROBERT
 Not a chance. At the very least,
 it's *our* house, and at the moment,
 you're standing in my part of it.
 So grab a beer and enjoy the fun,
 or feel free to fuck off.

SUSAN
 Just what I expected to hear from a
 Neanderthal.

ROBERT
 A *what*?

SUSAN
 Come on, Michael, we're leaving.

MICHAEL
 Mom! I don't want...

SUSAN

Michael!

Michael glares sullenly at Susan, then acquiesces.

SUSAN

(to Robert)

Next time, I *will* let the police handle it.

Susan grabs Michael's arm and pulls him toward the stairs.

ROBERT

You do that ... sweetheart.

Susan glares at Robert, then disappears down the stairs, Michael in tow. Nigel sidles up to Robert.

NIGEL

Quite a bird, there, Bobby. But wrapped a bit tight, eh?

ROBERT

Somethin' about her, though, Nigh...Can't put my finger on it.

Robert turns to power down his amps.

EXT. - MCLAREN HOUSE QUAD -- NIGHT

Susan marches across the quad, Michael in tow.

MICHAEL

Why can't I stay. Mom? I want him to teach me...

SUSAN

There's not ONE THING I want that man to teach you Michael. You're not to go near him.

MICHAEL

MOM! He's Robert Cross! He's only the biggest...

Susan stops and turns to Michael.

SUSAN

Michael, he's a degen...

(composing herself)

...He's just not the type of person I think you should be interacting with. Now, if you want some lessons, I'm sure Sergei can find someone...

MICHAEL

The Russian? Come on, Mom. What does he know about rock and roll? And when are you gonna wake up about him anyway? When are you gonna wake up, period?

Michael turns and stomps off.

SUSAN

Michael. I'll not have you speak to me that way. You're not to go anywhere near that man, do you understand?

Michael turns.

MICHAEL

Yeah. I understand. More than you do, Mom.

Michael runs off toward Susan's section of McLaren House, as Susan follows.

EXT. - ROBERT'S MAIN ROOM BALCONY -- NIGHT

Robert stands on the balcony, watches Susan enter her section of the house. He's heard everything.

INT. - REHEARSAL AREA -- CONCERT HALL -- DAY

Susan sits rigidly in a small rehearsal room, playing her Evaluation piece to the "click-click-click" of a metronome.

Arthur Bilinski sits nearby, listening.

Susan finishes the piece, turns to Arthur. The metronome clicks on.

SUSAN

So. What do you think? I think I can impress the Board with that, don't you?

ARTHUR

I think you need to stop that metronome.

Susan reaches over and stops it.

SUSAN

Sorry.

ARTHUR

I didn't mean that one.

Susan looks at him, puzzled.

ARTHUR

I meant the one inside yourself.

(beat)

Susie, you need to let go. You're playing with your head and your arms. It's all up here.

(indicates his head)

It's got to come from down here...

(indicates his gut)

...you need...

SUSAN

Balls.

ARTHUR

What?

SUSAN

You're saying I need balls.

ARTHUR

(remembering)

Oh. Yes. The Neanderthal. Well, not my choice of words, but the sense of it's the same.

SUSAN

Arthur, I'm putting everything I have into it.

ARTHUR

Susie...

SUSAN

First that guitar player. Then Sergei. Now you. I'm starting to question if I've ever played well at all. No wonder James got into the Evaluations. He saw an easy shot.

ARTHUR

Susie, you're ten times the player James Winston is.

SUSAN

Yeah, but he's got the balls, doesn't he, Arthur?

Susan smiles sadly at Arthur, then rises and walks out the door.

ARTHUR

Susie...

INT. - SUSAN'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- MICHAEL'S BEDROOM -
- DAY

Michael practices his guitar. He tries to use a steel slide to play a riff, but it's awkward and rattles instead of sings. He stops in frustration, then straightens up and tries it again.

He fumbles the slide, which bounces on the floor. He sighs deeply. His eyes suddenly focus and he turns sharply and looks out the window, across the quad.

Michael picks up his slide and guitar and runs from the room.

INT. - ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- DAY

Robert reads a newspaper. A door knocker sounds.

ROBERT
Nigel? Nigel, you here? Someone at
the door, mate.

No answer from Nigel.

ROBERT
Nigel!

Nothing. Robert rises.

INT. - ROBERT'S QUAD ENTRANCEWAY -- DAY

Robert opens the door to find Michael standing with his guitar.

EXT. - SUSAN'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- HER QUAD ENTRANCE -
-- DAY

Susan's car pulls to a stop in front of the entranceway. She exits the car, violin case in hand, and enters.

INT. - SUSAN'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- QUAD ENTRANCEWAY --
DAY

Susan enters, tosses her keys on a side table.

SUSAN
Gran? Michael?

No answer. Susan walks through to the

DINING ROOM

and sets her violin on the table.

SUSAN

Hello? Gran? Michael? I'm home.

No one answers. A bunch of flower seed packets spread across the table catch Susan's eye. She looks them over, then goes to the windows at the back of the room and looks out.

THROUGH THE WINDOW

Martha sits on a garden stool in a frilly garden dress, a large-brimmed bonnet on her head and a glass of iced tea in her hand. Kneeling in front of her in a pair of oversized rubber waders, Nigel digs in a garden with a hand trowel.

EXT. - SUSAN'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- BACK GARDENS -- DAY

Susan emerges, shades her eyes from the sun.

SUSAN

Gran?

MARTHA

Oh, hello, dear. Didn't know you were home.

SUSAN

Just got back.

Nigel sits back on his haunches, smiles at Susan.

NIGEL

'Allo, Miss.

SUSAN

(to Nigel)

Hello. Nigel, isn't it?

NIGEL

Right. Nigh if you want.

MARTHA

How was your rehearsal, dear?

SUSAN

Good. I suppose. Doing some gardening, uh?

MARTHA

Why, yes dear. Turns out Nigel and I share a love of flowers. Isn't that nice? He offered to help me plant.

NIGEL

Been a while since I've had a chance to get me hands dirty. Good earth here. Perfect for mums.

MARTHA

Won't that be wonderful? Fresh flowers every morning with tea.

Martha and Nigel smile at each other.

MARTHA

(to Susan)

Would you like some iced tea, dear? Just made it.

SUSAN

Not right now, thanks. Listen, have you seen Michael?

MARTHA

No, dear. He's not in his room?

SUSAN

No...

NIGEL

Passed him on the quad not long ago on my way over, Miss. Had his guitar. Asked if Bobby was home.

Susan stares at Nigel a moment, then smiles mechanically, turns, and goes back inside.

EXT. - ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- DAY

Susan walks up to Robert's quad entrance. The door is open. She's about to knock when she hears the wail of a slide on an amplified electric guitar coming from upstairs.

Susan steps quietly into the house and moves to the stairs.

INT. - ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- MAIN ROOM -- DAY

Robert and Michael stand facing each other in front of the band's equipment. Each holds a guitar and a slide.

Robert reaches over to Michael's hand and positions his fingers around the slide.

ROBERT

Set her right in there like that, Mike. Yeah, that's it. Cradlin' her in the fingers is how you control her. Feel better that way?

MICHAEL

Yeah. Much better. But how do you get it to scream like you do?

ROBERT

Don't get ahead a' yourself, mate. First things first. Know your keys, do ya? Know the fretboard?

MICHAEL

Think so.

INT. - STAIRWAY -- DAY

Susan quietly climbs just far enough up to peek through the railing near the floor. She sees Robert and Michael, stops and listens.

INT. - ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- MAIN ROOM -- DAY

Robert reaches over and starts a tape deck that plays through the sound system.

ROBERT

All right. This here's an eight-bar blues we recorded a while back. I haven't put the lead on it yet, so we can play with it, okay?

Michael nods. He's totally in heaven.

The blues tune starts, but Robert just stands there, nodding his head in time.

ROBERT

Feel it?

Michael nods once but is otherwise motionless.

ROBERT

No, mate. Move. Gotta move with it. Feel the bottom of it, down where it lives. Start with your head.

Michael starts to nod his head in time.

ROBERT

Now drop your shoulders. Loosen 'em up. More. Like this.

Michael follows Robert's example.

ROBERT

Now let your whole body feel it.

They both sway a bit with the beat.

ROBERT
That's it. Got the groove? Then you
just let 'er fly.

Robert's hand moves silkily to the strings, and a plaintive wail comes from the amp. He plays a short riff and stops.

ROBERT
Your turn.

Michael moves his hand stiffly. The slide hits the strings too hard, pushing an angular, rattled sound from the amp.

MICHAEL
Oh, man...!

ROBERT
It's okay, Mike. Nobody here but
us. Let's try it again.

INT. - STAIRWAY -- DAY

Susan winces as Michael stumbles through another attempt.

INT. - ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- MAIN ROOM -- DAY

Robert takes the slide from Michael's hand.

ROBERT
Here. Try this. Just throw your
hand. Like you're tossin' it away.
Like this.

Robert tosses his hand loosely several times in front of his body. Michael follows suit, but he's still a bit stiff.

ROBERT
Looser, mate. Just toss it. Don't
try to control it. Just let 'er fly
on 'er own in time with the beat.
See? Don't think about it at all.

Robert and Michael stand tossing their hands in front of their bodies. It looks very suggestive.

INT. - STAIRWAY -- DAY

Susan's eyes widen. This is beginning to look a little perverted. She takes a step upward, but Robert's voice stops her.

INT. - ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- MAIN ROOM -- DAY

Robert puts the slide back in Michael's hand.

ROBERT

Now, Mike. Toss 'er onto the guitar. Feel that groove and just throw 'er away...

Michael's in the rhythm. He loosely throws his hand at his fretboard. The slide hits the strings perfectly, and a beautiful wail comes from the amp. His face lights up like Paris.

ROBERT

Whoa! Beautiful! Just keep it loose like that. Bring it from your gut. Feel it, don't think it.

Michael slings his hand into another riff. Robert joins in with him, and the two stand face to face, guitar to guitar, wailing. Michael lets out a shout, a huge smile on his face. He's jamming with his idol.

INT. - STAIRWAY -- DAY

Susan backs off the step she took. She smiles at Michael's fun and success. Then, as Robert and Michael continue to wail away, she turns and quietly goes down the stairs, out the door, and back across the quad.

INT. - SUSAN'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- DAY

Martha and Nigel are sitting at the table having a cup of tea. Susan enters and gets a glass of water at the sink.

MARTHA

Did you find Michael, dear?

SUSAN

Yes. He was over there.

MARTHA

Oh, good.

(to Nigel)

We were so hoping he could make new friends here.

(to Susan)

From what Nigel tells me, Robert's quite a nice fellow. Maybe you should invite...

Susan abruptly turns to leave the room.

SUSAN

I need to practice, Gran. I'll be in my room. Mind handling dinner tonight?

MARTHA
No, dear, I'd...

But Susan's already gone.

INT. - ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- MAIN ROOM -- DAY

Robert sets his guitar in a stand. Michael stuffs his slide in his pocket.

ROBERT
Sounded great, Mike. You're gonna be a player.

Michael beams.

MICHAEL
Can we do it again?

Robert considers this a moment.

ROBERT
Sure. Why not?

MICHAEL
Tomorrow okay?

ROBERT
Don't make it too early.

Robert winks. Michael smiles and nods.

ROBERT
Say, Michael...um...Mind if I ask ya a question?

MICHAEL
No. What?

ROBERT
Your mum. She always been, you know...

MICHAEL
Uptight?

Robert shrugs and nods.

MICHAEL
No. Only since my dad left. She doesn't laugh as much anymore.

ROBERT
Uh-huh...

MICHAEL
She cried a lot. But she doesn't do
that anymore either.

ROBERT
She, uh...have any men friends now?

Michael smiles.

MICHAEL
Like a boyfriend or something?

ROBERT
Yeah. Like that.

MICHAEL
You're interested, huh.

ROBERT
Just wonderin', mate.

Michael starts down the steps to the door.

MICHAEL
Well, she's gone out with this
Russian guy from her orchestra for
a while. But I don't think she
likes him like she liked my dad,
you know?

ROBERT
Yeah. Well, see ya tomorrow, then.

Robert watches Michael leave. Then he smiles to himself.

INT. - RESTAURANT IN CENTER CITY -- DAY

Susan and Sergei sit at a window table. Susan picks at a
salad, Sergei cuts into a steak.

SERGEI
...it's a terrific opportunity. To
lead the Heidelberg...

SUSAN
(hesitant)
Yes. It's wonderful.
(beat)
When do you leave?

SERGEI
It's not decided. But soon. I said
I'd stay until after the
Evaluations. Which leads me...

He puts down his knife and fork, wipes his mouth on his
napkin.

SERGEI

Susan, I've been giving this a lot of thought. We've been seeing each other for a while now. It's a good match. We both live in the same world, understand the same realities.

Susan stops chewing, stares at Sergei. He stares back.

SERGEI

I want you to come with me, Susan. I want you to consider marriage.

SUSAN

You're proposing? Here?

SERGEI

What does it matter where? Yes. I'm proposing.

SUSAN

Oh, Sergei, I don't...

SERGEI

It's the best thing for you. And for Michael.

SUSAN

I have a career here, Sergei. I have goals...

SERGEI

The First Chair.

SUSAN

Yes. The First Chair.

SERGEI

What if First Chair were not a possibility?

SUSAN

Of course it's a possibility. I'm playing for it next week.

SERGEI

Susan. Let's be realistic. The Board is looking for a name. James Winston has been prominent in two great orchestras. This is his third. You have played only here.

SUSAN

You bastard.

SERGEI

Susan. Please. We've talked about this. There's a dimension to your playing that needs...development. If you come with me, I can get you into the Heidelberg...

SUSAN

This is the second time you've said you don't believe in me, Sergei.

SERGEI

Susan, the odds are against you, sweetheart...

SUSAN

"Sweetheart". Jesus.

She stands, tosses her napkin on the table.

SERGEI

Susan, please. I'm only thinking of you.

SUSAN

No. You're not.

She turns to leave, then stops, turns back.

SUSAN

You and the Board want a name. Well, I have a name, Sergei. It's Susan Marshall. You'll remember it after the 19th.

Susan turns and leaves.

EXT. - ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- MAIN ROOM BALCONY
-- NIGHT

Robert sits on a cocked-back dining room chair, his feet on the concrete balcony rail. He's noodling on his guitar, which is plugged into a Marshall amp at low volume sitting nearby.

Lights going on in the second-floor main room of Susan's section of McLaren House catch his eye. He continues to play quietly, watching.

INT. - SUSAN'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- MAIN ROOM -- NIGHT

Susan holds her violin and bow. She puts a CD into a player, then sits on a chair in front of a music stand.

The orchestral accompaniment to Susan's evaluation piece begins to play on the stereo. She plays with it.

EXT. - ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- MAIN ROOM BALCONY
-- NIGHT

Robert's still noodling. He hears the music wafting across the quad. He stops playing for a moment and listens.

Very quietly, he begins to pick out the melody of the orchestral piece -- not exactly the notes Susan is playing, but he's got the sense of it.

He reaches over to the amp, and raises the volume a bit.

INT. - SUSAN'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- MAIN ROOM -- NIGHT

Susan is methodically working through the music. But something catches her ear. A note. A phrase. What is that? She stops playing and listens.

Susan rises and goes to the open balcony doors. She sees Robert across the quad on his balcony, realizes what she hears is him playing.

SUSAN
(sarcastically)
Terrific. Just what I need.

Susan raises the volume on the stereo, begins to play again.

EXT. - ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- MAIN ROOM BALCONY
-- NIGHT

Robert hears the volume go up. He reaches over to his amp and pumps his volume a bit more. He starts to play along with more focus -- very melodic and intense.

INT. - SUSAN'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- MAIN ROOM -- NIGHT

Susan hears Robert's guitar again, and stops playing. She glares through the doors. She goes to the stereo and cranks the volume, then walks out onto the balcony.

Susan raises her violin and begins to play the piece.

EXT. - ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- MAIN ROOM BALCONY
-- NIGHT

Robert sees Susan emerge from her room onto the balcony, hears her playing. He smiles, stands, and touches the amp volume another notch. Then he starts to play.

Robert mingles his melody lines into and around Susan's, sometimes with her note for note, sometimes contrapuntally around her, but always in perfect synchronicity with the sense of the music.

Susan sticks to her Evaluation piece, playing it as she's memorized it. Her eyes reveal she hears everything Robert is doing. She bears down, continuing to play meticulously.

For every phrase that Susan plays, Robert sends it back with a raw passion. She plays another, he sends it back with a heightened emotion. He's moving as if in concert, she's standing stiffly.

They face one another, playing across the quad. It's a swirling, powerful, almost sexual intermingling of musical lines, with Robert's passion crying out against Susan's technical brilliance.

They reach the climax of the piece with mutual intensity, and it ends abruptly -- the stereo shuts off, Robert silences his guitar with his hand, Susan holds her bow above the strings of her violin.

They are left in dead silence in the last moments of light in the dusk, staring across the quad at one another.

INT. - SUSAN'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- HALLWAY -- NIGHT

Susan walks down the hall. She stops at Michael's bedroom door, which is slightly ajar. She looks in.

INT. - SUSAN'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- MICHAEL'S BEDROOM -
- NIGHT

Michael stands facing the mirror, guitar slung over his shoulder. The guitar is plugged into a small amp. Michael has on headphones, eyes closed, lost in his own playing -- he's using the slide, and doing it quite well.

Susan enters the room and sits on the bed, watches and listens a while.

Michael eventually opens his eyes, catches sight of Susan in the mirror. He smiles and turns to her.

MICHAEL

Hey.

SUSAN

Hey, there, guitar man. How you doing?

MICHAEL

Not bad.

SUSAN

Sounds pretty good.

MICHAEL

You think?

Susan nods.

MICHAEL
I've been practicing.

Michael turns back to the mirror, noodles a bit.

SUSAN
Robert Cross helped, uh?

Michael's shoulders slump. He turns to look at Susan.

MICHAEL
You know?

Susan nods.

SUSAN
I saw you working with him.

MICHAEL
You did?

SUSAN
Mm-hmm.

MICHAEL
Guess you're gonna ground me now,
huh?

Susan shakes her head.

SUSAN
No.
(beat)
Seems like you two got along pretty
well.

Michael releases his enthusiasm.

MICHAEL
He's awesome, Mom! He taught me so
much in one lesson. He showed me
how to hold the slide...

Michael holds out the slide, wrapped in his fingers like Robert showed him.

MICHAEL
See?

Susan nods, takes his hand.

SUSAN
You think he's a good teacher?

MICHAEL

He's the best. He showed me how to feel the music, you know? He's a great musician.

Susan looks out Michael's bedroom window, across the quad.

SUSAN

Seems like it, doesn't it?

INT. - ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- NIGHT

Nigel and Robert sit at the bar, several empty beer bottles in front of them.

NIGEL

(slurring a bit)

Martha's a hoot, Bobby. Makes a good cup'a tea, too. Somethin' to be said for older women. They make sense when they talk.

Robert considers this a moment, then brings his beer bottle to his lips.

ROBERT

But they don't usually buckle your knees.

NIGEL

Well...it's a trade-off, I'll give ya that. But you know, I'm wonderin' if it might not be worth it.

ROBERT

(disbelieving)

You're not thinkin' of gettin' domestic, are ya?

NIGEL

Tell me you're not tired a' all a' this shit, Bobby. Tell me you aren't ready to puke at the thought of another six months in a bus, not sleepin', not eatin', smokin' pack after pack just for somethin' to do; night after night of some pissant stoner shovin' a coke spoon in your face just so he can say he dusted up with ya to his pissant friends, usin' ya;

(MORE)

NIGEL (CONT'D)
of painted children young enough to
be your daughter offerin' to do all
manner a' things to ya, not even
lookin' at ya while they're doin'
it, then runnin' off in the mornin'
after the next guy with a hot rep
and a guitar. Tell me you're not
weary a' all a' that, and I'll
leave it go.

Robert stares at his image reflected in the mirror behind the bar. He doesn't like what he sees, turns away, slugs the beer.

Nigel sighs, pulls at the label on his beer bottle.

NIGEL
It's been a long run, Bobby, that's
all I'm sayin'.
(beat)
And I know you're thinkin' 'bout it
too. I seen the way you look at the
missy across the way.

Robert snorts a laugh.

ROBERT
Whattaya mean? I ain't lookin' at
'er.

Nigel turns to his friend, raises his eyebrows. Robert stares at him a moment.

ROBERT
Bloody hell.

The door knocker on the quad door sounds.

NIGEL
You expectin' anyone?

ROBERT
No.

INT. ENTRANCEWAY -- NIGHT

Robert opens the door. Susan stands there, a bottle of wine in her hands. Robert straightens a bit.

ROBERT
Oh. Hello.

SUSAN
Um. Hi. I, uh...I hope I'm not
disturbing anything...

She glances quickly around him and up the stairs, waves at Nigel who's looking over the railing. Nigel smiles at her.

Robert throws a glance at Nigel.

ROBERT
(to Susan)
Don't worry. It's quiet tonight.

SUSAN
Look, I...I thought I should thank you for what you did with Michael.

ROBERT
No thanks needed. Kid's okay.

SUSAN
Yeah, he is. And he's thrilled. You made his day. His year.

ROBERT
Yeah. Well. He reminds me a' me way back.

An awkward moment.

ROBERT
Look, uh...

Another glance back at Nigel.

ROBERT
(to Susan)
...you wanta come in? Maybe open that?

Susan hesitates, glances over her shoulder across the quad.

ROBERT
But...if you have to get back...

She answers quickly.

SUSAN
No. No, I can come in for a minute.

ROBERT
Great. I could use a change a' liquids.

Susan enters, Robert closes the door.

INT. MAIN ROOM -- ROBERT'S SIDE OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- NIGHT

Nigel waits by the bar.

NIGEL
'Allo, Miss.

SUSAN
Hello, Nigel.

Susan takes a look around the room. As she does so, Nigel throws Robert an impish look and a grin.

NIGEL
Uh...Look, Bobby, I promised Martha I'd play a little cribbage with 'er tonight. Think I'll wander over if it's all the same to you.

ROBERT
Yeah, uh...fine, Nigh. Catch ya later.

NIGEL
G'nite, miss. Nice to see you.

SUSAN
Be careful, Nigel. She'll try to talk you into putting money on it.

NIGEL
My kind 'a woman.

Susan smiles. Nigel gulps the last swig of his beer, exits.

ROBERT
Here. Let me open that.

Robert takes the bottle from Susan. They move to the bar, where Robert opens the wine and pours them each a glass.

ROBERT
Look, about the other night...

SUSAN
It's not important. It's this situation we're in. Makes for raw nerves.

ROBERT
Maybe so. Sorry nonetheless.

Susan nods and smiles. She picks up her wine glass, walks out into the main room, toward the band's equipment, then stops and turns.

SUSAN
Actually, I'm more interested in what happened tonight.

Robert follows her to the equipment.

ROBERT
What's that?

Susan touches the top of Robert's guitar in its stand, looks toward the balcony doors.

SUSAN
Our little duet.

ROBERT
Oh, yeah. Not bad. Nice piece a' music, that. Quite enjoyed it.

Susan's quiet. Robert sits on a stool, waits. Susan finally looks up at him.

SUSAN
How did you...do you...do that?

ROBERT
Do what?

SUSAN
Do you know the piece? I mean, have you played it before?

ROBERT
Nah. Just heard it then, first time. What was it?

SUSAN
Berlioz. An obscure piece. But that...doesn't matter. If you didn't even know it, how could...?

Emotion overcomes Susan. She bites her lip, turns from Robert, holds it in. Robert stands, concerned.

ROBERT
What is it? What's the matter?

SUSAN
I'm sorry. I'd better go.

She sets the wine down, moves toward the stairs. Robert moves to her.

ROBERT
Please. Don't go. Please. Tell me what I did to upset you.

SUSAN
It wasn't you. You were fine. Perfect, in fact. It's just that...

ROBERT
Here. Sit down here.

Robert guides her to the couch, hands the glass of wine back to her.

ROBERT

Finish your wine. Tell me what's on.

Susan is quiet a moment. She studies Robert's face. Decision crosses her own.

SUSAN

As you know, I play with the Philadelphia Orchestra. I've been there twelve years. Second violin. Last month, Philip Martin, the First Chair, died, and...

INT. - SUSAN'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Nigel and Martha play cribbage, cups of tea next to them. Martha is pegging on the cribbage board.

MARTHA

Twenty, twenty-five, thirty. And out.

NIGEL

Blimey. Not again.

Nigel tosses in his cards. Martha adds up the score.

MARTHA

That's...let's see...twenty-three-fifty you owe me so far.

NIGEL

You're a shark's what you are.

MARTHA

(shuffling)

My late husband and I used to play cribbage every night. I've missed it.

NIGEL

What'd he do, if I can ask?

MARTHA

Bee sperm.

NIGEL

Bee sperm!?

MARTHA

Made a fortune in it.
Singlehandedly saved the honey
industry back in 1973, when a virus
killed nearly every bee in America.
He was on the cover of *Time*.

NIGEL

Bobby and me was on the cover of
Time, nine, ten years ago.

MARTHA

He's a nice man, your Bobby?

NIGEL

The best, Martha. The best.

MARTHA

He have a girl?

NIGEL

Girls, yeah. Thousands. A girl?
Nah. Never met the "one", you know
what I mean.

MARTHA

My husband used to say it's hard to
find a single bee in the hive. But
the drone finds the queen
eventually.

NIGEL

Think so?

Martha pauses in her dealing, smiles at Nigel.

MARTHA

Oh, yes, dear. Absolutely.

INT. - ROBERT'S MAIN ROOM BALCONY -- NIGHT

Robert and Susan lean on the railing, wine in hand.

SUSAN

...and here you were, playing it so
beautifully, so passionately, and
you didn't even know the piece...I
don't know...It made me think that
what everyone is saying might be
true.

ROBERT

That you're too technical.

SUSAN

Yes. That I can't play with...you
know...

Susan smiles, slightly embarrassed. Robert smiles back.

ROBERT

With uh....

Robert grabs his crotch.

They laugh together. It's an easy laugh.

SUSAN

Yes. With those. Maybe I don't have them.

ROBERT

Oh, everybody has 'em. Just gotta find 'em.

Susan smiles, turns to look out across the quad. Robert studies her a moment, breathes deeply. Then he reaches out and takes her wine glass.

ROBERT

Tell you what. Why don't we find yours for ya?

SUSAN

What?

ROBERT

Your balls. You have your violin handy?

SUSAN

It's across the way. Why?

ROBERT

Go get it.

SUSAN

Oh, I don't think this...

ROBERT

Trust me, Susan. Go get your fiddle.

INT. - SUSAN'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- NIGHT

Susan puts her violin and bow in its case, snaps it closed. She quickly leaves the room with it.

INT. MICHAEL'S ROOM -- MCLAREN HOUSE -- NIGHT

Michael watches Susan going across the quad and into Robert's section. He jumps from the window seat and runs from the room.

INT. - ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- MAIN ROOM --
NIGHT

Robert stands in front of his wall of amps as Susan returns.
He holds his guitar. He turns when he hears her, and smiles.

ROBERT
Before I hook your fiddle up, come
put this on.

He holds out his Stratocaster guitar.

SUSAN
I don't know how to...

ROBERT
Doesn't matter. You're not gonna
play it. You're just gonna feel it.

Susan does as he asks, slipping the guitar strap over her
head. Robert adjusts it to her body.

ROBERT
Good fit. Now grab the neck.
Fingerin's not much different from
a violin. This's an E-chord.

He puts her fingers on the strings. Then he puts a guitar
pick in her other hand.

ROBERT
How's it feel?

SUSAN
Okay, but I ...

ROBERT
All right. I'm gonna turn up the
amp now. And when I tell ya to, I
want ya to strum the strings with
the pick. Just push it across 'em.
All right?

Susan nods. She's smiling a bit, caught up in it.

INT. ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- STAIRWAY -- NIGHT

Just between the railing and the floor, Michael's head peeks
up. His eyes widen as he sees his mother with a Stratocaster
on.

INT. MAIN ROOM -- ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- NIGHT

Robert cranks the amp's volume all the way.

ROBERT
Okay. Let 'er rip.

Susan smiles, then pushes the pick across the strings. A one-hundred-fifty-decibel E-chord nearly knocks her off her feet. She screams, surprise on her face.

SUSAN
Oh, my God!

ROBERT
Nice. Hit 'er again.

Susan hits it again. Another deafening E-chord. She screams again, but now she's laughing.

ROBERT
Again.

Susan hits it again. Twice. Three times. She's laughing out loud now.

SUSAN
Oh, my God...that's amazing!

ROBERT
Feel it in your chest?

Susan nods.

ROBERT
Feel it down here?

Robert grabs his crotch. Susan's eyes widen, but she laughs and nods vigorously, hits the chord again. And again. She loves it.

INT. ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- STAIRWAY -- NIGHT

Michael puts his hand over his mouth to keep himself from laughing out loud. This is the greatest thing ever.

INT. MAIN ROOM -- ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- NIGHT

Robert turns down the amp and takes the guitar from Susan, slings it over his shoulder.

SUSAN
That was incredible! Oh, my God! I could feel it everywhere in my body.

ROBERT
Right. That was the point. Let's do it with your violin now.

Robert attaches a contact mic to the body of Susan's violin, and plugs the line into a second amp.

SUSAN

I've never felt music in my body like that. I was vibrating all over.

ROBERT

Almost sexual, ain't it?

Susan smiles at Robert as he hands the violin to her. Their eyes lock a moment.

SUSAN

Yeah. Kind of.

ROBERT

I want you to play that piece we played tonight. But before you start, close your eyes, find the beat in your head.

Susan closes her eyes, does nothing.

ROBERT

Got it?

Susan nods.

ROBERT

Then show me. Nod your head to the tempo you hear.

Susan's head begins to nod.

ROBERT

More. Good. Drop your shoulders now. Move a little. Like you're dancin' with it. Put it where ya felt those chords hit ya.

Susan's body seems to melt a little, her hips start to move a bit. She opens her eyes, looks at Robert. He smiles at her.

ROBERT

Close your eyes, keep 'em closed. Good. Now...play.

As Susan brings her bow to the strings, Robert cranks the volume on her amp. When the bow hits the strings, it's incredibly loud. It startles her, she stiffens a moment, but she doesn't open her eyes. She begins to play the piece.

The power of the volume as she plays makes her move more. She twists and turns with different phrases, almost like they hurt. She keeps her eyes closed. She smiles.

She hits a particular passage, and the power of the volume makes her dip her body, turn from it. Another phrase brings her back. The sound of her violin fills the room.

Robert just watches. He starts to smile. With each passage Susan plays, she seems to get lost further in the physicality of it. She starts playing with the dynamics of the piece, using the volume to do so. She's really starting to feel it.

INSERT -- THE CONTROL PANEL OF THE AMP

Robert's finger touches the volume knob, pushing the volume down very slowly.

BACK TO SCENE

Susan continues to play, getting lost in the piece, alive with the emotion of it, moving with it.

INSERT -- THE CONTROL PANEL OF THE AMP

Robert's finger continues to drop the volume very slowly, notch by notch.

BACK TO SCENE

Susan is unaware of the volume dropping. She's completely caught up in the passion of the piece.

INT. ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- STAIRWAY -- NIGHT

Michael is transfixed, his eyes locked on his mother.

INSERT -- THE CONTROL PANEL OF THE AMP

Robert's finger now has the volume at less than a third, a quarter, off.

INT. MAIN ROOM -- ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- NIGHT

Susan is unaware that the volume's changed. She's playing magnificently, eyes closed, body moving sensually with the music.

The sound from her violin is markedly different than it was two hours before, a musical voice with power, passion, emotion.

She soars into the climax of the piece and ends it emphatically. She doesn't move a muscle. Her breathing is hard and fast through her mouth, like she's just had great sex. She slowly opens her eyes.

Robert stands in front of her, a simple smile on his face.

ROBERT
 (almost a whisper)
 That was incredible.

Robert reaches up and gently takes the violin. Susan still looks shocked, amazed at what she'd just done.

ROBERT
 How did it feel?

Susan looks hard at Robert, then steps to him.

SUSAN
 Like this.

She reaches up and pulls Robert's face to hers, kissing him gently at first, then harder as he kisses her back.

INT. ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- STAIRWAY -- NIGHT

Michael's eyes are as big as saucers. He ducks down and pumps his fist.

MICHAEL
 (whispered to himself)
 YES!

Michael then quietly moves down the stairs and out the door, leaving Susan and Robert alone in their embrace.

INT. - ROBERT'S BEDROOM -- DAY

Robert stirs from sleep, rolls over to see Susan sitting on the edge of the bed, buttoning up her blouse. She turns and smiles at him.

SUSAN
 Morning.

Robert smiles and reaches out for her.

ROBERT
 You're not goin' home, are ya?

Susan finishes buttoning the blouse, leans across the bed and kisses Robert tenderly.

SUSAN
 Not really. I AM home, remember?

Susan stands.

SUSAN
 But it might be better if I'm on my side when Michael wakes up.

Robert swings out of bed, slides on his pants as Susan walks around the bed. They embrace.

ROBERT
What are ya doin' later?

SUSAN
Practicing.
(she smiles)
I have some new techniques I want
to master.

ROBERT
Like some company?

Susan pauses a moment, looks Robert directly in the eye.

SUSAN
Yes. I would.

ROBERT
All right then.

EXT. - SUSAN'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- QUAD DOOR -- DAY

Nigel exits the house, pulling the door closed behind him. He breathes the dawn air deeply, rubs his hands together, smiles to himself, starts the walk across the quad.

EXT. - ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- MAIN ROOM BALCONY -- DAY

Robert comes out onto the balcony, watches Susan leave his section of the house below him and begin her walk across the quad. She turns and smiles up at him. He waves.

ON THE QUAD

as she turns to continue walking, Susan almost runs into Nigel. Nigel smiles at her.

NIGEL
Mornin', miss! Beautiful time a'
day, eh?

Susan smiles as Nigel passes. Realization crosses her face.

SUSAN
Yes it is, Nigel. It surely is.

Susan continues to her side, and enters her quad door.

As Nigel approaches Robert's side, he looks up to see Robert smiling down at him and shaking his head. Nigel raises his hands to the sky and shrugs, a big, sheepish grin on his face.

Robert claps his hands together, throws his head back and laughs joyously out loud to the sky.

MONTAGE: ROBERT AND SUSAN SPENDING TIME TOGETHER

-- Playing music together in bed, she on violin, he on acoustic guitar;

-- Picnicing on a large bedspread beneath a tree on the quad with Martha and Nigel, all of them laughing;

-- In a music store...Robert helps Michael choose a new guitar...Michael beams as other kids recognize Robert;

-- Robert and Susan hurry hand-in-hand down the stairs in bathing suits, towels slung over their shoulders. Martin is coming in the front door, briefcase in hand.

MARTIN

There you are.

Robert goes behind the bar, grabs a bottle of wine and some glasses.

ROBERT

Hey, Marty...

MARTIN

Glad I caught you.
(to Susan, formally)
Hello, Ms. Marshall.

Susan smiles. Martin slings his briefcase onto the bar, pulls out a thick pack of papers.

MARTIN

I've got those contracts we need to sign....

ROBERT

Not now, mate, okay? Busy...

Robert takes Susan's hand and pulls her to the stairway and down.

MARTIN

This's *important* Robert...

ROBERT (O.S.)

So's this...Call me later.

Martin throws the contracts back into the briefcase and slams the lid.

-- Horsing around and laughing in the pool, with Michael doing a cannonball off the diving board;

-- Susan rehearses in a rehearsal room, with Arthur and Robert watching. She plays animatedly, with passion. Arthur looks over at Robert, smiles, raises his eyebrows, and nods.

-- A romantic, candlelit dinner on Robert's Main Room Balcony; Robert kisses Susan's hand;

-- Robert, Susan, Martha, and Nigel play cards...Martha lays down a hand, the others throw theirs on the table, disgusted;

-- Martin, in his office, ear to a phone, listening as the ring goes unanswered...he finally slams the receiver down.

MARTIN

Damn it!

-- The phone sits on a table, unanswered. Robert and Susan, both under headphones, listen to music, trace time in the air with their fingers, which become entangled, and they roll over together in an embrace;

END OF MONTAGE

INT. - ROBERT'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Susan's head lies on Robert's shoulder, his hand holding hers.

ROBERT

Tuppence for your thoughts.

SUSAN

It's "penny."

ROBERT

Not here. This's the British side.

Susan laughs, kisses his hand.

SUSAN

I was just thinking how I never expected to feel this way about someone again.

ROBERT

Why not?

SUSAN

Trust and confidence are hard things to get back once they've been taken from you.

ROBERT

Mm-hmm.

SUSAN

I'd lost them in myself too.

ROBERT

And now?

Susan rolls into Robert, looks up at his face.

SUSAN

Someone gave me a gift.

Robert smiles and kisses her.

ROBERT

It went both ways, luv.

INT. -MARTIN PRESTON'S HOTEL SUITE -- NIGHT

Martin stands at the window, looking out at the city skyline, a drink in his hand, a phone receiver tucked between his shoulder and ear.

MARTIN

(on phone)

Don't worry about it, Carmine. The contracts will be in your hands in the next few days...Yes...I know I did. It's just that it's taking a little longer than...Look...I'll get him to sign them when we're in New York for the shows...Yes...then he's all yours from the Europe tour on...I'll be out of the picture...Yes. I promise. Stop worrying, all right? Good. Yes. Goodnight, Carmine.

Martin tosses the phone on the desk.

MARTIN

Fuck.

Martin stares at the city lights, takes a sip of his drink. Then he moves to the desk, pulls out his personal phone book, looks up a number. He picks up his phone and punches in the number, listens to it ring.

MARTIN

(on phone)

Jesse? Yes. Martin Preston. I'm fine, yes. Listen. I have something I need you to do for me. Could work out for you too. Can you be in New York day after tomorrow?

INT. - REHEARSAL AREA -- CONCERT HALL -- DAY

Susan stands in front of a music stand, closes a music folio, violin and bow in hand. She's just finished rehearsing.

As she places her instrument in its case, she turns to Arthur Bilinski, who sits in the corner of the room.

SUSAN

So?

A questioning look crosses Arthur's face.

ARTHUR

So...?

SUSAN

Come on, Arthur. What do you think?

Arthur smiles.

ARTHUR

I've never heard you play that well, Susie. It's wonderful. Technique, a dimensional sense of the piece...

SUSAN

Balls?

Arthur laughs out loud.

ARTHUR

Yes, my dear. Balls. Your Neanderthal, no?

Susan snaps her case closed and smiles up at Arthur.

SUSAN

He makes me feel...heard, Arthur. He's thrown a switch in me I thought I'd disconnected.

ARTHUR

You don't *love* him...?

Susan hesitates a moment, thinking.

SUSAN

I trust him, Arthur, I know that. More than I've trusted any man in two years...

As Susan says this last, she turns to see Sergei standing in the rehearsal room door.

SUSAN

Sergei.

An awkward moment. It's obvious Sergei has heard. Arthur stands, buttons his coat.

ARTHUR
Good afternoon, Maestro.

SERGEI
Bilinski.

ARTHUR
Well. I must be off. Thank you for
allowing me to sit with you, Susan.
I enjoyed it.

SUSAN
Certainly. Good to see you too,
Arthur.

Susan leans over and brushes Arthur's cheek with a kiss as he
moves through the door and is gone.

Sergei watches Arthur go down the hall, then turns to Susan.

SERGEI
I think we need to talk.

INT. - COFFEESHOP -- DAY

Susan and Sergei sit across from each other in a booth.
Sergei sips his coffee, looking right at Susan. She looks
down into her cup, stirring it continuously with a spoon.

SERGEI
You love him, then,
this...guitarist?

SUSAN
I've lost track of what love is. I
just go by feel now.

SERGEI
What can you possibly have in
common? He's a barbarian.

Susan looks up at Sergei.

SUSAN
He's raw, yes. He's flamboyant. He
lives his life by his own rules.
That doesn't make him a barbarian.

SERGEI
And what of us?

Susan looks back down into her cup.

SUSAN
I'm not sure there ever was an us,
Sergei.

Sergei absorbs this.

SERGEI

You're staying here then. With him.

SUSAN

I thought I made that clear the last time we discussed this. Yes. I'm staying. And he has nothing to do with why. I'm going to get that First Chair.

Sergei sets his cup down, then wipes his mouth with a napkin.

SERGEI

I wouldn't count on it.

Susan looks up sharply as Sergei rises.

SERGEI

Let me know when you've come to your senses.

Sergei turns and walks away.

EXT. - SHRINE AUDITORIUM -- LOS ANGELES -- NIGHT

A long line of animated fans strings from the main doors down the block and around the corner. The marquee blazes "Tonight! In Concert! Robert Cross and Hellbroth!" in bold red letters.

INT. -- DRESSING ROOM -- SHRINE AUDITORIUM -- NIGHT

Robert and Susan sit on a couch. He's drinking a beer, she a bottle of water. Martin Preston paces, glances at his watch.

ROBERT

Relax, mate. You're actin' like you're the one's gonna go out there in front of twenty thousand people.

Martin smiles wearily, glances at his watch.

A knock on the door. Martin moves to it, opens it. JESSE RESTON, still pimply at 38, stands there in a denim jacket and jeans, knapsack over his shoulder.

MARTIN

Jesse. Terrific. Come in, come in. You're late.

JESSE

Tried comin' down Jefferson Ave lately?

Martin sits a folding chair in front of Robert and Susan, indicates to Jesse it's for him.

MARTIN

No matter. Jesse Martin, Robert Cross. And uh...Susan...

SUSAN

Marshall.

MARTIN

Marshall. Yes. Robert, this is Jesse Martin, from *Rolling Stone*.

Robert tips his beer to Jesse as he sits on the folding chair in front of them and pulls a notebook and pen from his coat.

MARTIN

I'll leave you to it then...I need to check the house.

Jesse smiles at Martin as he leaves, then turns to Robert.

JESSE

Thanks for seeing me, Mr. Cross. It's a real honor.

ROBERT

No problem, mate. Don't mind if Susan here stays, do ya?

JESSE

(smiling at Susan)

No. Not at all. Any friend of Robert Cross's...I know you've only got a few minutes before the show, so...

Jesse folds open his notebook.

JESSE

How many times have you played the Shrine?

ROBERT

Dozen, maybe. First time was back in '85. The "Blistered" tour.

JESSE

Great album. Your first, right?

ROBERT

Yeah. Released it in Britain first, but American radio went nuts over it.

JESSE

Sure did. Four singles from it went
Top 10. Five Grammys.

ROBERT

Went quintuple platinum, it did.
Launched Hellbroth right proper.

JESSE

Most of your albums are platinum,
aren't they?

ROBERT

All but one. "Heartbreak" didn't
make it that far...

JESSE

(looking down, writing)
That's the one dedicated to your
first wife, right?

Robert casts a glance toward Susan, who smiles gently at him.

ROBERT

Uh, yeah. It was.

JESSE

You have a couple other albums
dedicated to women, right?
"Translation" was to that German
model you dated in the 90's, right?
And "Playtime" was for that New
York actress who ended up a big
porn star? Wow, she was something,
huh? What was it like bein' married
to her?

Robert shifts uncomfortably on the couch, casts another
glance at Susan. She's taking a swig of water, trying to find
anything else in the room to look at.

ROBERT

Maybe we should talk about...

JESSE

(forging ahead)
Guess that's part of a career in
rock, isn't it? The women come and
go pretty fast, huh? You been
married, what? Four, five times?

Robert's really uncomfortable now. He leans forward, prepares
to stand.

ROBERT

Yeah. Somethin' like that. Look,
uh...Jesse, is it?...

JESSE
 (to Susan, smiling)
 How many times *you* been married,
 miss?

Robert stands abruptly.

ROBERT
 Okay, that's it. Interview over.
 Thanks for comin' 'round, mate...

JESSE
 (again to Susan)
 You the next Mrs. Cross? Think you
 can finally tie down the Legend for
 good?

Robert grabs Jesse under one arm, helps him up.

ROBERT
 ...great talkin' to ya...

JESSE
 (still to Susan)
 Nobody's done it yet, but...

Robert stuffs him out the door.

ROBERT
 ...I'll be lookin' for the article.

Robert slams the dressing room door, turns and looks at Susan. She's looking at the floor. An awkward silence.

INT. -- SHRINE BACKSTAGE HALLWAY -- NIGHT

Jesse walks toward the exit. Martin is waiting by the door.

MARTIN
 Get what you wanted?

JESSE
 Got what *you* wanted.

Martin pulls an envelope from his jacket pocket, slaps it into Jesse's hand.

MARTIN
 Nice seein' ya.

Jesse exits. Martin smiles.

INT. -- DRESSING ROOM -- NIGHT

Robert stands in front of Susan, who remains on the couch.

ROBERT

Look, Suse...I, uh...I guess I shoulda told you about...you know...

Susan caps her bottle of water, sits back on the couch and looks up at Robert.

SUSAN

Yeah. Maybe you should have.

A knock on the door. Nigel sticks his head into the room. The crowd stamping it's feet in unison is suddenly obvious.

NIGEL

Time to rock and roll, Bobby. They're restless.

ROBERT

(to Nigel)

On my way...give me a second.

Nigel senses the tension.

NIGEL

Everything all right?

ROBERT

Yeah. Rough interview, that's all.

Nigel holds Robert's eyes a second, then nods and closes the door.

Robert drapes a scarf around his neck, adjusts it in the mirror as he talks.

ROBERT

Don't worry about all that stuff that guy was sayin'. He's just lookin' for a headline.

SUSAN

But you've been married five times?

Robert looks at Susan.

ROBERT

Six, actually. He missed one.

Back to the mirror. Fluffs the hair, adds bracelets and rings.

ROBERT

It's different with you.

SUSAN

Is it?

ROBERT
 (turning to her)
 Yes. It is.

SUSAN
 Robert, I can't go through that
 again...I can't hurt like that
 again. Maybe we should...

He moves to her on the couch.

ROBERT
 Susan. The past is what it was. I
 can't change it. But it doesn't
 have to influence the present. Or
 the future.

SUSAN
 I just don't--

Another knock on the door. Nigel's head again. The crowd
 stamping and chanting "Ro-bert! Ro-bert!" is now at a fever
 pitch.

NIGEL
 Now, Bobby. They're gonna tear the
 place apart.

ROBERT
 Right. Right.

Robert checks himself one last time in the mirror.

ROBERT
 (to Susan)
 Can we talk about this later?

Susan smiles tentatively, then nods.

SUSAN
 Go make 'em bleed, mate.

Robert laughs and winks at Susan.

Robert and Nigel leave. Susan drops back on the couch and
 sighs deeply, shaking her head side to side.

INT. -- BACKSTAGE -- A FEW MINUTES LATER -- NIGHT

Susan leaves the dressing room and walks through the
 backstage area toward the stage doors. She stops and watches
 Robert playing full throttle to the cheering house. She
 smiles sadly, then turns. She bumps into Nigel.

NIGEL
 Hey, there. Wanna go out front?

SUSAN

No. Thanks. I'm going to leave.

NIGEL

You not waitin' for Bobby? Big party later.

SUSAN

No. I can't. I just don't think it's going to...

Susan looks back at Robert on stage, then back.

NIGEL

(concerned)

What's up, Missy?

Susan considers a moment.

SUSAN

How long have you known Robert, Nigel?

NIGEL

Oh...forty years maybe. We was in nappies together in London.

SUSAN

He's a pretty distinctive personality.

NIGEL

Can't make it in this business 'less ya are.

SUSAN

Lives his life the way he likes it, I guess.

NIGEL

Oh, yeah. Always has. Hasn't changed much in all the years we been together.

Susan nods her head.

SUSAN

(resigned)

That's what I figured. Look, Nigel...would you give Robert a message for me?

NIGEL

Sure.

SUSAN

Tell him I'm sorry. Tell him that it takes more than balls. He'll understand.

NIGEL

He's expectin' you to join him at the party later.

SUSAN

I know. But I can't...I don't think it's for me. You know?

Nigel nods.

NIGEL

When you gonna...?

SUSAN

See you, Nigel.

NIGEL

Bye.

Susan smiles weakly, then exits through the stage doors into the night. Nigel watches the door swing closed, then turns and looks out at Robert on stage.

NIGEL

(to himself)
Bloody Hell.

INT. - SHRINE AUDITORIUM -- BACKSTAGE -- NIGHT

Robert and his bandmates come running off stage. The applause and cheering is thunderous. They make their way through the stage doors and out toward a line of limousines.

EXT. STREET -- NIGHT

Martin stands near the lead limo in a line of limos. With him are the Redhead and the Blonde.

MARTIN

This one, Bobby.

REDHEAD

(gigglingly excited)
Yeah, this one, Bobby.

The Blonde literally jumps with excitement, nodding her head in agreement, holding Martin's arm tight. He's not enjoying the jostling.

MARTIN

Watch the suit, honey.

ROBERT
 (to Nigel)
 Oh, Christ. Not these two...

NIGEL
 Not my doin' this time, Bobby.

As Robert approaches the limo, the Redhead and the Blonde are immediately on him. Robert awkwardly bends down and looks into the limo, then looks to Martin.

ROBERT
 Where's Susan?

MARTIN
 Don't know, but we don't have time to find out.

Martin nods toward the stage doors. Several hundred rabid Hellbroth fans are running toward the line of limos, screaming.

ROBERT
 Bloody Christ.

NIGEL
 Blimey.

Robert dives into the limo, followed by Nigel, Martin, and the Groupies. The limo takes off just as the crowd of fans gets to it.

INT. - LIMOUSINE -- NIGHT

Robert is uncomfortably squeezed between the Redhead and the Blonde, who are pasted to him. He's trying to ignore them.

ROBERT
 (to Nigel)
 Where's Susan? She was supposed to be waiting...

Nigel hands Robert a lit joint and a glass of champagne.

NIGEL
 She left earlier, Bobby.

Robert waves away the joint and champagne.

ROBERT
 She left?

NIGEL
 Ten minutes after you started.

MARTIN

What does it matter, Robert?
There'll be plenty of girls at the
party--

ROBERT

(to Martin)
It matters, Martin, all right?
(to Nigel)
Where'd she go? She meetin' us at
home or what?

NIGEL

Don't think so.

ROBERT

What happened, Nigel?

Nigel offers the joint and champagne again.

NIGEL

Here. You're gonna want these.

EXT. - ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- NIGHT

The limo pulls up to the entrance. Martin, the Redhead and
the Blonde exit and walk toward the entrance.

Robert climbs out after them, followed by Nigel. Robert turns
and looks over the limo roof toward Susan's side. The Redhead
reaches back for him.

REDHEAD

(tipsy)
C'mon, honey. Let's get some more
champagne.

NIGEL

Give 'im a minute, sweets.

Martin grabs both girls.

MARTIN

Come on, girls. Let's find that
champagne.
(to Robert)
Don't be long, Bobby.

ROBERT

In a sec.

Martin and the girls head into the house.

Robert looks across the quad. He holds a half-empty bottle of
champagne. Nigel sucks on a roach, hands it to Robert.

NIGEL
 (holding in the smoke)
 Give 'er some space, mate. She'll
 come 'round tomorrow.

ROBERT
 Maybe. But it's doesn't look like
 she can handle what we're about,
 Nigh.

Robert takes a hit from the roach, drops it into the bottle
 of champagne, then takes a long pull from the bottle.

NIGEL
 And what's that?

ROBERT
 Not sure about that anymore.

NIGEL
 Personally, I thought we was livin'
 the rock 'n' roll life.

ROBERT
 Whatever the fuck that is.

INT. - SUSAN'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Susan and Martha sit at the kitchen table. Susan has a glass
 of wine in front of her. Martha, a cup of tea.

MARTHA
 I just don't think Heidelberg is
 the right answer, honey.

SUSAN
 There is no *right* answer, Gran.
 Maybe just a better one. For me.
 For Michael.

MARTHA
 Settling for something is never a
 better answer.

SUSAN
 You think I'm settling?

MARTHA
 I think you're looking and not
 seeing, honey.

SUSAN
 Really.

MARTHA
 You know, your grandfather and I
 were from two different worlds.

(MORE)

MARTHA (CONT'D)

When I first met Archie, he was bringing honey to our house. He was kind of cute, but he was such a nuge...all he wanted to talk about was his bees. And I hated those little bastards. Scared the bejesus out of me, with their buzzing and their stings and all.

Susan smiles at this.

SUSAN

He was such a nice man, though.

MARTHA

Yes. He was. But I wasn't looking at that then. I couldn't see myself with anyone who lived a life toiling in a field with those creatures. See, I was just starting out in my teaching. A higher calling, I thought. I was looking for another intellectual type...someone I had something in common with, you know? I dated a Biology professor for quite a while -- Frederick, I believe his name was. Always had his nose in a book, and his eyes on my bosom. Nice enough man. And I figured, being a biologist, he knew more about...well, you know...

SUSAN

Gran!

MARTHA

But Archie kept coming around. Every week, he'd be on the porch with another jar of honey. He'd ask me to sit on the swing with him. And he'd talk and talk and talk about his bees. I was probably a bit rude to him. I just sat there not saying anything. But one day...why, I'll never know...I listened.

INT. - ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- NIGHT

A raucous party, populated with the typical Hangers-on, Babes, Rockers, etc. Robert sits at the bar with Nigel and Martin.

Robert's had a few. He's a little slurry.

MARTIN

Cheer up, Bobby. We had a great show tonight. Perfect warm-up for the tour.

Robert snorts a laugh.

ROBERT

Oh, yeah. The tour. Been meanin' to talk to you about that, mate.

MARTIN

Right. The contracts. Got 'em right here for you.

ROBERT

Nah. Not that. I mean, I'm thinkin' maybe of taking a rest for awhile.
(looks at Nigel)
Maybe permanent.

MARTIN

(concerned now)
That's not possible, Bobby. We have obligations. Dates have been set.

ROBERT

I got obligations, too. To myself.

MARTIN

What are you talking about?

NIGEL

Nothin' you'd understand.

MARTIN

What?
(realization)
The woman? Is that what this's about? They're a dime a dozen, Bobby. Look around the room.

Robert stands, but it's difficult. He sways.

ROBERT

The woman has a name, Marty. It's Susan. And you best remember it. 'Cause if I have my way, you're gonna be seein' a lot more of her. Maybe make that permanent too. Gonna have a go at it tomorrow morning, anyway.

MARTIN

Oh, God. You're not gettin' sappy over this one, are you?

Nigel takes Robert's arm.

NIGEL
 (to Martin)
 Shut up, Marty.
 (to Robert)
 Time for a little shut-eye, Bobby.
 (back to Martin)
 Be a good manager, will ya, Marty?
 Clear this hoard out of here, let
 us get some rest?

MARTIN
 Bobby....

But Nigel already has Robert moving up the stairs. Martin turns back to the bar, slams his fist on it.

MARTIN
 Damn it!

The Redhead and the Blonde sidle up to Martin.

REDHEAD
 Hey, Honey. Where's Bobby and
 Nigel? We want to party!

Martin turns to yell at the Redhead, but when he sees her, an idea blossoms in his mind. He looks at the two women, then puts his arms around them, pulls them to the bar.

MARTIN
 Ladies. Ladies. Let me buy you a
 drink. I have a little business
 proposition I'd like to talk over
 with you.

INT. - SUSAN'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- NIGHT

The conversation continues.

MARTHA
 ...and watching him among the hives
 that afternoon, listening to him
 talk about breeding and genetic
 lines, and purities...I realized
 that he was more a pure scientist
 than that book-read Biology
 professor I had chasing me. I
 realized I was judging your
 grandfather based on what he *did*,
 not on who he *was*. And when I
 stopped listening to my head, and
 started listening to my heart,
 well...all it took was that one
 moment.

SUSAN
 This is different, Gran.

MARTHA

It's exactly the same, dear heart.
I've seen how you are with Sergei,
and with Robert. You need to trust
your heart and turn off your head.

SUSAN

I did that once before, Gran. I'm
afraid to do it again. And it's not
just me anymore. It's Michael too.

MARTHA

Then maybe you should trust
Michael's heart, dear.

Susan looks up at her grandmother, who just smiles and sips
her tea.

INT. - ROBERT'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Robert is stretched out across his bed, snoring loudly. He's
wearing only a Speedo.

The bedroom door cracks open. The Redhead pokes her head in
and looks around, then quietly opens the door wider and
enters. The Blonde follows her into the room, closes the
door.

The two groupies tiptoe to the bed, dropping what little
clothes they have on as they do. They carefully slide onto
the bed with Robert, one on each side of him, arms draped
over his chest.

They look at each other across the snoring rock star and
giggle, then lay their heads on the pillows and close their
eyes.

INT. - SUSAN'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Susan sits at the table alone, her wine glass empty. She
twirls the glass by the stem, staring at it. But she doesn't
see it. Her mind is working elsewhere.

Almost imperceptibly at first, then becoming broader, a smile
appears on her face.

She looks up at the clock. Three-ten AM.

SUSAN

(to herself)
What the hell.

Susan rises from the table and exits the room.

EXT. - SUSAN'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- HER QUAD ENTRANCE -
- NIGHT

Susan exits onto the quad. It's quiet, except for the crickets. She walks toward Robert's quad entrance.

When she reaches Robert's side, she tries the door. It's unlocked. Susan enters.

INT. - ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- MAIN ROOM --
NIGHT

Susan enters the room from the stairway, looks around. The room appears empty, but as she turns to head up the stairs to the next level, she sees Martin at the bar, nursing a drink.

SUSAN

Oh. Hello.

MARTIN

Miss Marshall.

SUSAN

I'm sorry. I wanted to see...talk
to...Robert.

MARTIN

Oh. Yes. Well, Bobby's upstairs.
Everyone left a while back.

Martin smiles and raises his drink.

MARTIN

Most everyone, anyway. I think he
was expecting you tomorrow, wasn't
he?

SUSAN

Yes. But this shouldn't wait.

MARTIN

Mm-hmm. Well, I'll leave you to it.
A bit late for me, actually.

Martin stands, pours the last of his drink down his throat, and takes his case.

MARTIN

See you tomorrow, I suppose.

SUSAN

Yes. Perhaps so.

Martin moves toward the front entranceway, but looks back over his shoulder at Susan climbing the stairs. A crooked smile crosses his face.

INT. - ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- BEDROOM HALLWAY -- NIGHT

Susan approaches Robert's bedroom door. It's closed. She knocks quietly. No response. She knocks a little harder.

ROBERT (O.S.)
Hello...what...God, what are
you...?!

Susan smiles at hearing his voice, opens the door and strides into the room

INT. ROBERT'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Susan looks into the dimness.

SUSAN
Anyone in here looking for a lost
woman who's just found her way...

Susan stops dead in her tracks as her eyes adjust, and the light from the hallway illuminates the bed.

Robert sits propped up on his elbows, the Redhead straddling him and the Blonde wrapped around him from behind. He looks bewildered and surprised, but shock covers his face as he recognizes Susan in the doorway.

SUSAN
Oh, my God...

ROBERT
Susie!

REDHEAD
Hey, honey. Come on in and play. We
have room for one more, don't we
Bobby?

Robert tries to throw the Redhead from him and get up from the bed, but the Blonde hangs on.

ROBERT
(to the Redhead)
Shut up.

SUSAN
Is this what you meant by "things
are different" with me? You wanted
me to bat cleanup? You son of a
bitch.

Susan turns and runs from the room.

ROBERT
Susan!

Robert pushes the Redhead from him, and tears himself from the Blonde.

ROBERT
Get the fuck off of me! Susan!

Robert runs to the hallway.

ROBERT
Susan, wait! I don't know what...I didn't...! Susan!

But she's already down the stairs and gone.

Robert turns back into the room.

ROBERT
(to the Groupies)
What the hell are you two doing here?

REDHEAD
Don't be mad, Bobby. It was just a little joke. Martin said...

ROBERT
Preston? He put you up to this?

BLONDE
He said you'd like...

ROBERT
That bastard.

Robert falls back into an overstuffed chair, grabs his head, which is obviously throbbing.

ROBERT
That bloody bastard.

INT. - SUSAN'S MASTER BEDROOM -- DAY

Susan sits at her dressing table, trying to put on makeup, but tears run through whatever she's applying. She tosses the eyeliner pencil in frustration, drops her head in her hands.

SUSAN
Damn it. Goddamn it.

INT. - SUSAN'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- DAY

Susan sits at the table, taking gulps of coffee as she looks over her charts for the Evaluation. As she turns the pages, she shakes her head and sighs deeply.

Susan looks up as Martha enters, wearing her robe and a cheery smile.

MARTHA

Good morning, dear heart. Beautiful day starting, isn't it? Perfect day to win a...

Martha can see the trouble on Susan's face.

MARTHA

Why, dear, what's the matter?

Susan closes her music folio, smiles weakly.

SUSAN

This beautiful day is probably going to be a waste of time, that's all.

MARTHA

Now, dear...

Susan stands, drains her coffee cup.

SUSAN

I should have listened to Sergei right from the start. I've just been fooling myself...about a lot of things.

MARTHA

Susan...

SUSAN

I've got to go, Gran.

Susan smiles at Martha, turns to go, then stops and looks back.

SUSAN

About that story you told me last night, Gran...I'm glad the fairy tale came true for you. But you were right to be wary. Because sometimes the sting can kill you. You never know until it's too late.

Susan turns and exits.

EXT. - SUSAN'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- HER QUAD ENTRANCE -
- DAY

Robert stands at the door as Martha opens it.

MARTHA

Hello, Robert.

ROBERT

Martha.

MARTHA

Would you like to come in?

ROBERT

I'd like to see Susan, actually.

MARTHA

Not here. She and Michael are at the Academy. She has her Evaluation this morning.

ROBERT

Damn. When is it?

MARTHA

Ten o'clock.

Robert checks his watch. It's eight-oh-five.

MARTHA

Why don't you come in for some tea?

ROBERT

No, thanks. I think I should...

MARTHA

You have time. Come in for some tea.

Robert wants to leave, but...

MARTHA

We need to chat.

...he hears the tone in Martha's voice, nods and follows her into the house.

INT. - DRESSING ROOM -- CONCERT HALL -- DAY

Susan looks at herself in the mirror, her violin and bow on the dressing table in front of her. She sighs and drops her head.

A knock on the door precedes its opening. A young PAGE sticks his head into the room.

PAGE

They'll be ready for you in a few minutes, Ms. Marshall. You should probably come to the stage.

SUSAN

Thank you. How are they sounding this morning?

PAGE

Oh, very nice. Mr. Winston's
playing beautifully.

SUSAN

I have no doubt.

Susan manages a small smile as the Page backs out the door. She picks up her violin and bow, and turns to Michael, who sits in the corner, noodling on his electric guitar.

SUSAN

Gonna come be my good luck charm?

Michael smiles, sets his guitar down and stands.

MICHAEL

Sure. But didn't you always tell me
luck has nothing to do with
anything?

SUSAN

I'm beginning to realize that I may
not know everything about
everything, Michael.

MICHAEL

I'll remember that.

Susan puts her arm around Michael's shoulder, gives him a hug. They exit the room.

INT. - ROBERT'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- MAIN ROOM -- DAY

Robert bounds up the stairs two at a time, grabs his jacket from the back of the couch. He passes Nigel at the bar on his way to the front door.

NIGEL

What's the hurry? Where you...?

ROBERT

Driver in the limo?

NIGEL

Yeah. But Martin's on his way over.

Nigel holds up a thick packet of papers.

NIGEL

He says you got to sign these
contracts today. Says it's a matter
'a life or...

ROBERT

Fuck Martin Preston.

And he's out the door.

INT. - CONCERT HALL -- BACKSTAGE AREA -- DAY

Susan and Michael walk to the edge of the main stage, stand and wait at the scrim curtains, listening.

INT. CONCERT HALL -- MAIN STAGE -- DAY

The Orchestra plays energetically behind James Winston, who stands before them near the podium where Sergei conducts.

Winston's violin is dynamic over the Orchestra's musical fabric, its voice powerful and resonant. Winston's eyes are closed, his body loose but caught up in the passion of the piece. He *is* playing beautifully and with great confidence.

The piece ends triumphantly, with Winston making the most of his final pull across the strings. The Orchestra responds with bows tapping music stands, and a couple of "Bravos" ring out.

Winston bows, reaches up to shake Sergei's hand.

SERGEI
(to Winston)
Magnificent.

Winston then turns and bows to the house.

INT. CONCERT HALL -- BACKSTAGE AREA -- DAY

Susan looks to where Winston bowed, notices for the first time the ten or so BOARD MEMBERS sitting in the first row, applauding, nodding their heads at one another.

Susan sighs deeply.

INT. CONCERT HALL -- MAIN STAGE -- DAY

Sergei addresses the Board Members from his podium.

SERGEI
Our next and final candidate this morning is well-known to you, I'm sure, Ladies and Gentlemen. She will be playing Berlioz' Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in B-Minor. I give you Susan Marshall.

Sergei leads polite applause as he turns to Susan.

Susan sets her jaw, walks out onto the main stage and to the music stand next to Sergei's podium.

Susan sets her music on the stand. Her hands shake as she opens the folio. She looks up and finds Arthur in the viola section. Arthur smiles and winks.

Susan turns and bows her head to the Board Members, then looks to Sergei. He stands waiting, expressionless.

Susan raises her violin to her chin, brings her bow to the strings. She almost imperceptibly nods her head.

Sergei raises his baton, the Orchestra its instruments. Sergei dances time with the baton, and sweeps the Orchestra to the opening note.

Susan brings her bow powerfully to the top string for her opening note and

SPROING!!

The top string of her violin breaks with a terrible, almost comical sound. Susan stands stunned as the Orchestra dribbles to silence.

AT THE STAGE EDGE

Michael's mouth drops.

MICHAEL

Oh, shit.

ON THE MAIN STAGE

Susan looks quickly to Sergei, then to the Board, drops her violin from her chin.

SUSAN

I'm...I'm sorry...I...

SERGEI

Do you wish a moment, Miss Marshall?

SUSAN

Yes. Yes, please.

Susan, obviously shaken, moves to Michael at the edge of the main stage.

SUSAN

(to Michael)

Get me an A-string from my case, Michael. Hurry.

Michael runs off. Susan turns and looks back toward the orchestra, where she sees Sergei looking to the Board Members. Sergei smiles weakly, shrugs his shoulders.

SUSAN
 (under her breath)
 You son of a bitch.

Michael runs up.

MICHAEL
 Here, Mom.

Susan sits in a nearby chair, begins to change the string.

INT. - LIMOUSINE -- MOVING -- DAY

Robert sits in the front seat with the DRIVER. The traffic's heavy.

ROBERT
 How much further?

DRIVER
 Three blocks, give or take. But
 with this traffic...

ROBERT
 Which way is it?

DRIVER
 Straight ahead. You can't miss it.

Robert bails out of the limo, starts running up the street through the crowds.

INT. - CONCERT HALL -- MAIN STAGE AREA -- DAY

Susan tunes the new string on her violin, then walks back out onto the stage, assumes her position near the podium.

SERGEI
 Are we prepared now, Miss Marshall?
 May we proceed?

Susan drills Sergei with a stare, then emphatically nods once.

Sergei raises his baton, counts the time, and the orchestra begins.

Susan, standing rigidly now, hits her first note without incident, but it's more timid than her first attempt. She plays technically right on, but the fire isn't there as it has been -- the passion is dampened.

IN THE VIOLA SECTION

Arthur plays, casting a glance up at Susan.

ARTHUR
(softly to himself)
Come on, Susie. Let it go. Let it
go.

AT THE EDGE OF THE MAIN STAGE

Michael stands and listens.

Robert comes up behind him, puts his hands on Michael's
shoulders. Michael turns.

ROBERT
How's she doin'?

Michael shakes his head.

MICHAEL
Something's wrong. She's not
rockin', you know?

ROBERT
Yeah. I was afraid of that.

Robert listens a moment. While Susan's piece is dynamic,
she's just not powering the orchestra like she needs to.

ROBERT
Listen, Michael. You have your
guitar with you?

Michael nods.

ROBERT
Got that little portable amp I gave
ya?

Michael nods again.

ROBERT
Go get 'em, mate.

Michael runs off backstage.

On stage, Susan comes to the end of the first section of her
Evaluation piece. She's about to begin the signature section
she's been working on at McLaren House.

The orchestra drops to an *adagio* pace, setting the stage for
the highly emotional violin line to emerge above it. Susan
readies her bow over the strings.

IN THE VIOLA SECTION

Arthur looks hard at Susan.

ARTHUR
(softly to himself)
If you're going to do it, Susie,
now's the time.

ON THE MAIN STAGE

Susan drops her bow on the strings and begins the first passionate line of the section. But as she plays through it, the line is suddenly mirrored by the full-throated wail of an electric guitar.

Susan's eyes turn immediately to the sound, and she sees Robert standing at the edge of the stage, playing Michael's guitar. But she doesn't stop playing, and because she doesn't, neither does the orchestra.

Sergei turns too.

SERGEI
What the....?

Susan raises her bow at Sergei, throws a quick look at him.

SUSAN
No!

Susan turns back, sets her jaw and plays into the second line. Robert plays it with her, pushing it harder at her than he did the first line. She answers with the third line, this time angrily spitting it back at him.

Robert responds with even more passion, and Susan shoots the next line at him, raising the emotional stakes even more.

And suddenly they're into it, locked again into the swirling, powerful, almost sexual intermingling of musical lines, back and forth, like they did across the quad that night. But this time Susan isn't just technically brilliant -- she's on fire.

The orchestra senses it, and they ratchet up the intensity of their playing as Robert and Susan push each other to higher and higher levels.

Susan begins to walk to Robert, who takes a few steps toward her, but as his fingers scream a particularly passionate phrase, he drops to his knees, playing for all he's worth.

Susan plays magnificently, her body dipping and swinging as she delivers line after line in concert with Robert. As she reaches Robert, she drops to her knees before him, and they play in unison and passion, face to face.

The orchestra is thundering behind them. Sergei is exultant at their playing, arms flailing, head back, eyes closed...he's completely lost in the piece as well.

Susan and Robert reach the climax at full power, staring directly at each other. The piece ends abruptly and emphatically. There is dead silence in the hall, then...

The members of the orchestra explode, standing and cheering. "Bravos" cascade from them. The Board Members are on their feet, applauding. Even Sergei acknowledges Susan's performance, tapping his baton on his podium.

Susan falls into Robert's arms and they kneel motionless on the stage, hugging each other tightly as the orchestra's acclamation resounds around them.

EXT. - SUSAN'S SECTION OF MCLAREN HOUSE -- HER QUAD ENTRANCE -
- DAY

Robert's limousine pulls to a stop in front. Robert, Susan, and Michael emerge. They laugh as they move to the door.

SUSAN

...and I've never seen Sergei like that. He was actually begging.

ROBERT

You think they'll let him stay?

SUSAN

They wanted to ask their new First Chair what she thought about it before making a decision.

Robert laughs.

ROBERT

And what does she think about it?

SUSAN

No comment at the moment.

They laugh.

ROBERT

So Mike...whattaya say you come over for a lesson? The other guys are here. We could jam.

MICHAEL

Maybe later. I was thinking about asking my Mom to show me some stuff on the violin.

(to Susan)

If you want to, I mean.

Susan looks at Michael. A smile breaks.

SUSAN

Of course I would, honey. I'd love to.

MICHAEL

Great. I'll go get ready.

Michael runs into the house. Susan turns to Robert.

ROBERT

And what about you? You think you can handle playing with me?

Susan contemplates this, looking into Robert's eyes. She reaches down and takes his hand.

SUSAN

Come sit with me a moment.

Susan guides Robert to a metal bench near the entrance. They sit. She holds his hand a moment longer.

SUSAN

When I came over last night, it was to tell you that I was willing to give things a go with us, despite the fact that we live in such different worlds. You've touched me, Robert, in ways that I so much needed to be touched. You've showed me where I'd buried my passion, and taught me how to display it without fear. And today, well...that was the greatest gift anyone's ever given me.

ROBERT

Then why don't we...

Susan tenderly touches Robert's lips.

SUSAN

Hear me out. Please.

(beat)

But the love of music we share won't overcome the fact that we're from two different tribes, Robert. I realized that last night when I saw you with those...

ROBERT

That was a set-up, Susie. I had nothin' to do--

SUSAN

It wasn't the women, Robert. It's what they clarified for me.

(MORE)

SUSAN (CONT'D)

The life you lead is exhilarating, free, and you answer only to the rules you set for yourself. It's you, and there's nothing wrong with it. For you. But it's not *me*. And no matter how much I want to make it so, I will never be comfortable in it. My tribe can't join your tribe. Do you understand? Please tell me you understand, because I don't know how else to say it, and I'm going to lose it if I keep trying.

Robert is silent. He sits back against the bench, looks out over the quad, chewing his lower lip.

SUSAN

Robert?

Robert studies his hands a moment, looks at Susan and smiles slightly. He stands.

ROBERT

Court tomorrow, eh? Gonna settle this bloody house thing once and for all? Good thing. Can't go on like this another day, far as I'm concerned.

Robert turns toward his section of McLaren House. Susan stands, as if to call after him, but stops when Robert turns back to her.

ROBERT

You played great today. Balls on.

He turns and walks to his side of the house. Susan watches him, then walks to hers, her head bowed, her hand wiping something from her eye.

INT. - SUPERIOR COURT -- DAY

A typical courtroom. A BAILIFF stands by the Judge's Chamber door. A STENOGRAPHER sits in front of the bench.

Susan sits at a large wooden table. With her is an attorney, WILLIAM GLADWYN, 60s, gray-haired and distinguished.

At a similar table nearby sits another attorney, STEPHEN JASPERS, 40s, slick and dressed straight out of *Esquire*.

Martha, Michael and Nigel sit on a spectator's bench behind a bar that separates the court area and the spectator area.

Jaspers rises, walks to Nigel, bends down.

JASPERS
(quietly, to Nigel)
Where's our boy?

NIGEL
(quietly, to Jaspers)
Don't know, Mate. Said he had
somethin' he had to do, and he'd
see me here. That was three hours
ago.

JASPERS
He'd better get here in the next
two minutes, or we're gonna lose
this thing by default.

Jaspers returns to his table as the door to the Judge's
Chamber opens and Judge Harold Barkley emerges.

BAILIFF
All rise!

Everyone stands as Barkley climbs to the seat at the bench.
He smacks the gavel and sits. Everyone else follows suit.

BARKLEY
We all here?

Gladwyn and Jaspers stand.

GLADWYNE
William Gladwyn, your honor,
representing Susan Marshall.

BARKLEY
Good morning, counselor. Miss
Marshall.

JASPERS
Stephen Jaspers, your honor. I
represent the interests of Robert
Cross.

BARKLEY
Counselor. And, uh...Your client,
Mr. Jaspers?

JASPERS
I, uh...I'm sure he'll be here
momentarily, Your Honor, if the
court will bear with us...

BARKLEY
You made him aware of the time for
this hearing?

JASPERS
Yes, Your Honor, but...

BARKLEY

Then he should be here, should he not?

JASPERS

Yes, sir. But uh...he's a rock and roll star, Your Honor.

BARKLEY

And that effects me how...?

Susan turns and looks at Martha and Nigel. Nigel shrugs. Martha sees him do it, shrugs too.

Gladwyn stands.

GLADWYNE

Since Mr. Jaspers' client doesn't seem to be as interested in the outcome of this proceeding as Miss Marshall, perhaps Your Honor will take into consideration...

JASPERS

Oh, no, you don't. Your Honor, this case should be adjudicated on the basis of the due diligence we presented in our brief to Your Honor, whether Mr. Cross is present or not...

GLADWYNE

But the fact that Mr. Cross is NOT here...

ROBERT (O.S.)

Mr. Cross IS here, Your Honor.

Everyone turns and looks to the rear of the courtroom to see...who? It sounded like Robert but...

The man at the back of the courtroom is dressed in a stylish Armani suit and tie. He's clean-shaven. His hair is stylishly cut above the ears and collar.

NIGEL

Blimey! Bobby?

Martha turns to Susan, who's eyes are as wide as saucers.

MARTHA

Doesn't he look wonderful, dear?
Reminds me a bit of Archie.

Robert walks to the railing.

ROBERT
(to Barkley)
Sorry I'm late, Your Honor.

Robert takes his seat next to Jaspers, who can't take his eyes off of him.

BARKLEY
All right. Let's begin. As it turns out, it's a fairly straightforward decision, coming down to possession. And by possession, I mean "first" possession.

Gladwyn stands. He knows what's about to come.

GLADWYNE
Your Honor!

BARKLEY
Sit down, Mr. Gladwyn. As I said, it's a straightforward matter. Simply put, the perpetrators of this fraud, Vernon and Stuart McLaren, were the last surviving members of the McLaren family that had any claim to the property. Selling the property was within their rights as owners. In essence, when they signed the sale papers with Mr. Cross's representative, and accepted his payment, they completed a legitimate sale. It's when they sold it the *second* time that the picture got muddied. Because at that point, it became a felony, and the property became, in essence, evidence, and both buyers victims. There are no precedents on this kind of thing, unfortunately, but in my view, because both buyers are basically equal, as victims, then it doesn't matter who bought it first. It becomes a matter of who *possessed* the property first. And that would be Mr. Cross, who occupied McLaren House approximately twelve hours before Ms. Marshall and her family arrived on the premises. Therefore, it is my ruling that McLaren House is the property of Mr. Robert Cross, to do with as he pleases.

(to Susan)
Ms. Marshall, it is my sad duty to inform you that you are left holding the bag.

(MORE)

BARKLEY (CONT'D)

Your only recourse would come if and when the McLarens are ever caught and prosecuted. All I can say is I'm sorry. I'm afraid you'll have to vacate the premises, if that's what Mr. Cross wishes you to do.

Barkley picks up the gavel to smack it.

BARKLEY

This case is hereby clo...

Robert stands.

ROBERT

Your Honor. May I address the court?

BARKLEY

Certainly, Mr. Cross.

Robert thinks a moment, looks to Barkley, then to Susan.

ROBERT

You know -- I've been living on a Lear jet and in hotels for more years now than I care to remember. Oh, I got houses...

(to Nigel)

How many we got now, Nigh? Four? Five?

Nigel shrugs.

ROBERT

Right. Disgustin', ain't it? And last night, I sat over there in that big house, all by myself, listenin' to the sound of emptiness. Just me. And that house. Both of us empty. And I was thinkin' -- what the hell do I want with another empty house? What's here in this one that isn't in the others? Why am I fightin' so hard to hold onto it? 'Cause when it comes right down to it, I really don't want McLaren House.

BARKLEY

Are you saying you don't want the property, Mr. Cross?

ROBERT

I'm sayin' I don't want it *empty*, Your Honor. I'm sayin' I don't want *anything* empty in my life anymore.

Robert turns to look directly at Susan.

ROBERT

I've realized that I don't want my
life empty anymore.

Robert walks over to the table where Susan sits.

ROBERT

Susie, the last few weeks have made me feel like I was suddenly coming out of a twenty-year sleep. From the moment I met you -- and Michael -- I haven't felt whatever it is that's been pushin' me to keep movin', lookin' for the next hyped-up moment to make me feel fulfilled and complete. I realized last night, standing in that empty house, that I hadn't felt empty until that very moment. And I realized that it was you that had filled me up, that filled that house. And I realized that I don't want that house unless you're in it, Susan Marshall. Because without you, we're both empty.

Robert kneels beside Susan.

ROBERT

You told me last night that your tribe can't join my tribe. Well, here I am, asking you if *I* can join *your* tribe.

Robert takes Susan's hand.

ROBERT

I love you, Susan. Let me give you McLaren House as a wedding present. Let's fill her and ourselves up so none of us is ever empty again. What do you say?

Susan's eyes are filling with tears. She looks to Martha and Michael. Martha smiles and nods, happiness beaming on her face.

MICHAEL

You better not say no, Mom!

Susan looks back to Robert, smiles, and falls into his arms, kissing him passionately. Michael jumps up and pumps his arm in the air.

MICHAEL

YES!

Martha nudges Nigel in the ribs with her elbow.

MARTHA

See what I told you? The drone eventually finds his queen.

NIGEL

Looks like it, don't it?

MARTHA

There'll be a couple of extra rooms on my side of the house now, I suppose. What do you say you move across the quad and we'll play a little cribbage now and again?

NIGEL

Why Martha Marshall! Are you propositioning me?

Martha smiles and slips her arm into Nigel's as they rise and begin to walk from the courtroom. Robert and Susan follow them out, Susan's arm around Michael's shoulders.

EXT. CITY STREET -- DAY

Robert and Susan walk arm in arm. It's a bright, breezy Fall day. They're talking animatedly, laughing.

SUPER: "ONE YEAR LATER"

Robert and Susan pass a storefront -- it's one of those book and music megastores. Robert points into the window at a display.

ROBERT

Hey! Check it out!

The display is a stack of CDs, with vintage-looking vinyl records nearby. There are large posters of the CD cover hung at angles in the display.

On the poster are Robert and Susan, she with her violin, he with his guitar, standing back-to-back in a classic musician pose.

A banner across the window proclaims: "Just Arrived! Robert Cross and Susan Marshall! Billboard #1 CD!"

SUSAN

God. I look like a punk rocker.

ROBERT

You look cool as hell, is what you look. And you make me look cool too.

Susan hugs him.

SUSAN
You are cool.

ROBERT
I didn't think it was supposed to
be released until next week.

SUSAN
It's all over the radio already.

ROBERT
How's THAT feel, sweetheart?

SUSAN
Like this.

Susan reaches up and grabs Robert's face with her hands,
pulls him to her and kisses him deeply. He looks her deep in
the eyes.

ROBERT
That's how it should feel.

They smile at each other, and continue walking. As they near

THE END OF THE BLOCK

a group of YOUNG GIRLS in school uniforms is about to cross
the street. One of them points toward Robert and Susan.

YOUNG GIRL #1
Oh, my God! Look who it is!

The other girls turn and focus where Young Girl #1 is
pointing. They all scream in recognition.

GIRLS
Oh, my God! I can't believe it!
Come on! Let's get an autograph!

The group of Young Girls runs toward Robert and Susan,
pulling out paper and pens for autographs.

ROBERT
(to Susan)
Uh-oh. Hellbroth fans. I can spot
'em a mile away.

SUSAN
What do you want to do? I can go
inside for a--

ROBERT
Nothin' to do but meet and sign for
'em. You don't mind do you?

SUSAN

Of course not. It's all part of the price of being married to a music God, I guess.

Robert smiles at Susan as the Young Girls stop in front of them. He reaches out for the first piece of paper, but the Girl thrusts it at Susan.

YOUNG GIRL #2

Miss Marshall! We can't believe it's you! We LOVE your new CD! Would you mind giving us your autograph?

Susan is at first taken aback, then looks at Robert. They both burst out laughing.

ROBERT

Part of the price of being a music Goddess, my love. Guess you'd better get used to it.

Susan and Robert are surrounded by the Young Girls, as she signs. Robert keeps his hand on her shoulder as he animatedly engages the Girls in conversation.

FADE OUT

THE END