

T H E F I G H T E R

b. b. brown

FADE IN

INT LOCAL PROFESSIONAL FIGHT MID-1970'S NIGHT

PAUL BARTON is fighting. His trainer, ELIJAH FIELDSTONE, works his corner. Paul's wife, DIANE BARTON, sits and cheers him on amid a group of local FANS in the audience.

Paul dominates his OPPONENT easily, playing with him for the first round. In the second round, Paul opens up with everything, moving with the terrible grace of a predator, nailing the opponent with blows to the head and body.

In an instant the opponent is on the ropes trying to hang on, but his hands begin to drop under the rain of blows. Paul drives in a hook to the head and the hands drop completely.

Paul snaps in a straight blow to the face. The man's knees buckle, giving way. Before he can fall, Paul catches him with an explosive blow to the head which straightens the opponent's knees.

Paul backs away. The opponent continues standing for a moment, swaying and unconscious, then falls to the floor as stiffly as a piece of lumber, his face hitting flat.

As the opponent's CORNERMEN attempt to revive their man, Paul walks about the ring with his arms in the air, estatic with his win. Elijah takes off his gloves as Diane makes her way to the edge of the ring along with the troupe of excited fans.

Paul shouts to his fans from the ring, while Elijah goes to the other corner to see if he can help. Standing quietly beside the ring, Diane watches the men trying to revive the stunned opponent. She winces at the swollen face.

Slowly, the man comes around and, with help, stands. He doesn't quite realize where he is, or what has happened, but still tries to reassure everyone that he is okay.

Paul comes over, congratulating him on a good fight, and gives him a pat on the shoulder. As the man is

helped out of the ring, Paul jumps through the ropes and runs to Diane.

Paul
Good fight, huh?

His fans give a little cheer of approval with ad-libbed remarks. Paul, too excited to stand still, laughs without taking his eyes off Diane.

Paul
(continuing)
Hunh?

Diane, to hold him still, intertwines her arms around his.

Diane
Best damn fight I ever saw.

EXT HOSPITAL PARKING LOT, LATE EVENING

Paul and Diane walk back to their car. Paul plays with a bandage over one eye, as he unlocks the passenger door for her, then goes to the driver's side. Their discussion is an old one.

Paul
It's a rough sport.

Diane
Does it mean anything?

Paul
Look, I told you, Diane. I fight with that side forward. So, it's just naturally gonna take more punishment.

Diane
But does it mean anything?

Paul frowns at her and gets in the car. Diane follows.

Diane
You can't fight forever. What if somethin' bad happens to you?

Paul
Me?

He laughs and kisses her.

Paul
Now, buckle up.

They fasten their seatbelts, Paul carefully checking his to see that it is secured firmly. Then, prudently obeying all the traffic signs, he drives out of an almost empty lot.

INT PAUL AND DIANE'S BEDROOM LATE NIGHT

Wearing only pajama bottoms, Paul preps in front of the bathroom mirror. Diane is reading in bed. Paul slinks onto the bed and fondles her in anticipation of a night of passionate love.

Paul
Let's make a baby.

Carefully marking her place despite Paul's ministrations, Diane puts the book down and turns to him.

Diane
We tried that.

Paul
Let's try again.

Diane
We'll see.

They begin to make love. In their tussling, Diane touches the bandage on Paul's head. He growls and bites her. She smacks him hard on the buttocks, hurting her hand.

Diane
Damn! You've got a hard butt.

Paul
Goes with my head.

INT CHURCH CORRIDOR LATE MORNING

It is a long, empty, dimly lit corridor. We see Diane's outline against the brilliant light of the sun as she walks down the corridor. Her footsteps are hollow echoes. She walks to a door, knocks, and enters.

INT CHURCH OFFICE LATE MORNING

PASTOR JOHNSON sits after Diane nervously takes a chair. Surrounding his desk are certificates and groups of photographs neatly hung on white walls.

Johnson
And how are you and Paul? I haven't seen much of you since the wedding.

Diane
Paul's doin' great. He's ranked number eight!

Johnson
Wonderful!
(clearing his throat)
I was very sorry to hear of your loss.

Diane
Yes. Thank you.

Johnson
God's will is hard to fathom sometimes.

Diane shrugs nervously.

Diane
That's what the doctor said.

Johnson
And how can I help you today?

Diane
I thought you might...
(finishing in a rush)
have something where I can help people or you know something like that.

Johnson
You want to volunteer for Church work?

Diane
Sure.

Johnson smiles.

Johnson
I've got just the thing.

Diane
Great!

INT PAUL AND DIANE'S LIVING ROOM EVENING

Worn and dingy from years of renters, the living room of their small house doubles as the dining room. The furniture is secondhand. By contrast, there are some shiny new posters stuck on the walls (Bruce Lee, a space movie type, etc.).

There are also tasteful, lively curtains on the windows and some flowers in pots around the room. Lastly, there is an expensive TV-stereo console. Paul and Diane finish a meal. Diane's hair is pinned up.

Paul
I like your hair loose and long.

He reaches over and unpins her hair.

Diane
Paul, there's...

Paul
Yeah?

Diane
I want to go to school.

Paul pulls away his hands.

Diane
Paul, I want to go to college.

Paul
School. School, school, school. I thought you'd forgotten that.

Diane
No.

Paul
Why d'you need school? What're you gonna do with it?

Diane
I like to learn things. Why do I

have to do anything with it?

Paul says nothing. She waits a moment.

Diane

Well?

Paul

Well? I gotta train and I work full-time. I ain't got time to cook and clean house. Who's gonna do that? You work part-time, you do volunteer work. What about that?

Diane

I can always drop some of it.

Paul

(quickly)

The job?

Diane

No, the volunteer work.

Diane takes his hand.

Diane

I can use my own money. Please, Paul. I could try it for a semester. Just to see how it goes.

Paul pulls his hand away and picks up his fork.

Paul

I ain't gonna clean house.

INT CHURCH BACKROOM LATE MORNING

Several tables stacked with papers, envelopes, and boxes are in the center of the floor. At one end of the room, several elderly HOUSEWIVES gossip while stuffing envelopes and folding circulars.

To the side of the room sits a television set, on which a TV game show host blares mindlessly.

At the other end of the room, Diane mechanically wets and seals the envelopes.

INT FIGHT ARENA EVENING

Paul, Diane, and Elijah enter the arena. Eliminations are in progress for a regional title, and some young fighters are in the ring beating on each other.

Impatiently, Paul leads Diane and Elijah to some good seats among many empty ones. Elijah sits on one side of Paul, Diane on the other.

The fight in the ring ends, and a winner is named. The atmosphere excites Paul. Diane sits quietly and studies the people in the audience.

Paul
When's Marty fight?

Elijah
Tomorrow.

A new fight begins. It's between two teenagers, one taller than the other. NATHANIEL is the tall one, FLOYD is the other.

Paul
There's Nathaniel.

Diane
Who'd you say it was?

Paul turns to Diane.

Paul
It's Nathaniel.

Paul turns back to Elijah.

Paul
This is Nathaniel's last fight as an amateur.

Elijah
Yeah, and he'll be a good pro.

Diane
What'd you say?

Paul speaks over his shoulder.

Paul
Nathaniel's gonna turn pro.

Paul turns back to Elijah.

Paul
Who's the other kid?

Elijah
I don't know. Looks like Ben
Pulver's the coach, though.

In the ring, Nathaniel continually pounds Floyd, knocking him down twice in the first round. Floyd tries to move, his eyes wide and confused, but he can't escape.

Elijah
Ben always did rush his kids.

Nathaniel lands a solid blow and Floyd falls. The referee stops the match. Elijah shakes his head.

The announcer calls out the results, then announces an intermission. Paul stands quickly, Elijah following.

Diane
Where you goin'?

Elijah
Thought we'd go talk to Ben.

Paul
We'll be right back. Save the
seats. You want a coke?

Diane shakes her head.

Elijah
We won't be long.

They leave Diane sitting amid a crowd of empty chairs.

INT FIGHTER'S WAITING AREA EARLY EVENING

BEN PULVER and Floyd are at an equipment table. The coach is putting some equipment in a bag. Floyd sits quietly on the table. Pulver reaches over and grips Floyd's arm.

Pulver
Your dream will come through, just
wait and see.

Floyd

I had the chances. He's not that good. I shoulda beat him.

Pulver

He's a good fighter.

Floyd

I shoulda beat him.

Paul and Elijah are approaching them from the stands when they meet a short, stocky man, BULLDOG, who has a TALL LADY pulling at his arm.

Bulldog

(to Paul)

Hope you been trainin', man, cuz I ain't gonna lay down for you like your last opponent.

Paul

Don't bother changin' the way you fight just for me.

Bulldog moves toward Paul, but his Lady tugs on his arm.

Lady

In the ring, Bulldog, in the ring.

Bulldog

I'll see you, man. In the ring.

Paul

You got me shakin'.

Bulldog and his Lady move on, while Paul and Elijah approach Ben and Floyd.

Elijah

Hi, Ben.

Pulver

(nodding)

Elijah, Paul. Floyd Buttermen.

Floyd

Paul Barton: everybody knows you, man.

Paul feints and slips, putting a right to Floyd's shoulder.

Floyd grins.

Paul
Nathaniel's got a tough right hand.

Floyd
Yeah, I noticed.

Elijah
Listen, Ben, why don't you bring
Floyd by the gym sometime?

Paul
Yeah. Come on, and we'll work the
bag, go a few rounds.

Floyd
Yeah?

Pulver
Yeah, okay.

They pause with nothing further to say.

Paul
Well, told the wife I'd get her a
coke.

Pulver
Sounds like a good idea. Want a
coke, Floyd?

Floyd
Yeah.

Pulver
Be right back.

As they exit in the direction of the concession stand,
FLOYD'S FATHER walks up to Floyd. When Floyd sees him, his
eyes grow large and he cowers away slightly.

Floyd
Dad...

Floyd's Father
My friends put money on you.

He slaps Floyd hard.

INT PROFESSIONAL FIGHT EVENING

Paul is fighting Bulldog, a short and powerful opponent, who has fast counters, deceptive movement, and no aversion to butting whenever he can.

As usual, Diane watches from the audience. A cut has opened up over Paul's eye. Diane can't keep from focusing on the blood. Paul controls the fight but takes punishing shots.

Diane looks around her. In the ring, another blow slams into Paul's face. Diane stands up. Blood is smeared across Paul's face. Diane walks quickly away from the seats. In a dark corner, she vomits into a trash can.

INT PAUL AND DIANE'S BEDROOM LATE NIGHT

Paul and Diane, subdued and exhausted, are in bed. Paul has another, larger bandage on his brow, and his lips are bruised and cut. When they try to kiss, Paul jerks back from Diane's touch.

Diane

Are you sure you want to make love tonight?

Paul

Of course I can make love! Just don't kiss me.

INT ELIJAH'S GYM EARLY AFTERNOON

The gym's windows, as is the rest of the gym, are a remnant of World War II blackouts. They are painted black. An automatic buzzer/bell sounds periodically, but no one pays any attention to the deafening roar. They simply pause in conversation until it ends.

Paul is jumping rope when Diane enters. She waves. He misses a step and, without stopping, immediately begins again, snapping the rope a little faster.

From a distance, leaning against a practice ring, Elijah watches Paul. Sitting on the ring edge while he wraps his hands is a middleaged, scarred professional boxer. His name is CHARLES.

In the ring, Charles' little boy, CHAR-LIE, is playing. A woman, SIDNEY, Charles' live-in, hovers nearby, simultaneously watching the boy and trying to anticipate the

pro's wants. She is nervous.

Diane crosses to Elijah.

Diane
Afternoon, Elijah. Hi, Charles.

Charles nods as he continues wrapping his hands.

Elijah
You're a little early, Diane.
Paul's not through yet.

Diane
What's left?

Elijah
Bag rounds.

Diane glances toward Sidney, who stays close to the boy, and smiles. Sidney gives a quick smile and a little wave to Diane.

Charlie runs around the ring.

Diane
(to Charles)
That's quite a kid you've got
there, Charles. What's he going to
be, a sprinter?

Charles
He can be any damn thing he wants.
He just ain't gonna be no fighter.

Diane looks at Sidney, who stands to one side, looking a bit lost. As Diane moves toward her, Sidney meets her halfway.

Sidney
Hi, Diane.

Diane
Hi, Sid.

Sidney
Paul told Charles about what
happened. I'm real sorry about you
losing your baby, Diane, real
sorry.

Diane
Yeah, thanks. So am I.

A young black man, wearing a gold crucifix on a gold chain, enters. This is MARTY. He carries a box full of worn bag gloves.

Marty
Where d'you want these, Elijah?

Diane
Hey, Marty! Congratulations on the fight.

Marty
Thanks, Diane, I appreciate that.

Diane
How many years in a row is that?

Marty
Three.

Diane
Goin' to the Nationals?

Elijah
You're damn right he is.

Marty
(embarrassed)
Where d'you want these?

Elijah motions and Marty exits.

Elijah
That's a fine boy. He deserves that title.

Charles
(interrupting)
You know you've got a hell of a husband there, don't you?

Diane turns to him.

Diane
Yeah, I know.

Charles

Just want ya to realize. Not all fighters are as lucky as he is. You know, fast, smart, well-trained, hits hard and can take a punch. He's got heart and he's flashy. Promoters and TV people like flashy fighters.

He shakes his head.

Charles

Look at me: Think I'm pretty? I been fightin' since I's a kid in the street. Hell, I boxed in over a hundred matches. Even fought the champ once. That was a hell of a fight. But I could of been a lot worse off. I mean, what else was a poor kid like me gonna do? But I don't think anybody outta go into it as a career. Unless...

He holds up a finger and pauses dramatically.

Charles (continuing)

Unless they got an edge. And Paul's got it. He's gonna be champ.

Charlie suddenly runs from out of nowhere and jumps onto his father's back. Sidney is too late to catch him.

Charlie

Daddy!

Charles

What'cha doin', short stuff? Ain't your auntie watchin' you like she's supposed to?

Woman

I looked away for a moment and the little squirt took off. I tried--

Charles

(interrupting)

Keep your eyes open!

While Charles talks to the boy, Elijah motions for Diane to move to one side with him. Paul can be seen jumping rope

while they talk.

Elijah
I don't like to pry.

Diane
Spit it out.

Elijah
Paul's not concentrating. He works
hard but his mind's not there.

Diane frowns.

Elijah
Whatever's wrong is hurting him.

Diane
We've been arguing.

Elijah
Isn't it personal?

Diane
I want to go to college.

Elijah
And?

Diane
That's it.

Elijah considers her.

Diane (continuing)
It's true! He won't even talk about
it.

Elijah
I don't understand.

Diane
You like to read. That's all I want
to do. I feel so...

She can't complete the thought.

Diane
I want to learn new things. Don't
you see? That's all I want.

Elijah
(surprised)
Well, maybe he thinks you can't
afford it.

Diane
I've got a job of my own. You don't
see anything wrong with it, do you?

Elijah
I dunno.

Diane
Can't you talk to him? Listen, come
to supper tonight and we'll talk
about it. Okay? Just come and get
him to explain why he's against it.

The rest bell rings. Paul stops jumping rope and yells from
the other side of the gym.

Paul
Hey! Bagwork!

Elijah
Well, start bangin'!

Elijah frowns.

Elijah (continuing)
Okay, I'll come. But I'm not gonna
take sides. Alright?

Diane nods, and they walk over to Paul. The start buzzer
sounds. Paul toys with the heavy bag like some great cat.

INT PAUL AND DIANE'S LIVING ROOM EVENING

There is a bit of disorder in the living room. Diane angrily
clears away the dishes from the dinner table. Paul wavers
between the table and the front door. Elijah stands to one
side, watching, and saying nothing.

Paul
Dammit! A guy can't even rest on
his day off!

Diane
Well, dammit, go rest!

Diane carries an armload of dishes into the kitchen.

Paul
What the fuck's wrong with
everybody?

Diane reenters, gathers another armload, and disappears back into the kitchen. Paul stamps over to the front door, looks back at the supper table, then kicks the door jamb, cursing with every kick.

Paul
Shit! Shit! Shit!

After this dissertation, he stamps out the front door.

Diane, ignoring Paul, reenters and cleans the table with a wet cloth. Elijah, as if seeing someone he has never seen before, studies her closely.

Surreptitiously wiping her eyes, she goes back into the kitchen. Elijah follows Paul outside.

EXT FRONT YARD EVENING

The front yard isn't large, but there are trees and a driveway. Three cars sit in the driveway: a sports coupe, a luxury car, and an older model family car.

In the yard, Paul kicks at dead tree limbs which lie on the ground. Elijah enters and waits. Paul eventually settles on the hood of his sports coupe.

Paul
Goddammit!

Elijah
God's last name is not "dammit".

Paul
Yeah, well...sorry.

Elijah leans against a second car and waits.

Paul
My mother never went to college.

Elijah is silent.

Paul
Her mother never went either.

Elijah
Maybe that's one reason why she
wants it so much.

Paul hurls a stick into the darkness.

Paul
Now she's got you turning against
me.

Elijah
I'm not against anyone and you know
it. (pauses) Paul, she really has
her heart set on going.

Paul
I know it!

Elijah
You have your career. Don't you
think she deserves the chance?

Paul
What if she decides to be a nuclear
scientist, or somethin'? And I'll
be her idiot husband.

Elijah
Good God, Paul, let her go! Let her
try. Who knows, maybe a few semes-
ters of school will convince her
that she doesn't need it.

After a pause, Paul heaves another stick across the yard.

Paul
I hate losing.

INT PAUL AND DIANE'S LIVING ROOM EVENING

Diane washes the dishes in a stony silence. Paul enters. She ignores him. He approaches her and puts his hands around her waist. She continues washing the dishes.

Paul
Diane, for the life of me, I really
don't know why this means so much

to you.

She stops washing dishes.

Paul

But if it's what you want, what you
really want, then go for it.

Diane turns and searches his face. Paul stoops down, with his arms about her waist, and lifts her off the floor. Her feet dangle in the air as they kiss.

INT A CLASSROOM EARLY MORNING.

PROFESSOR VASHTI LIPMANN-PEIRCE is in the process of collecting index cards from the class. On the board behind her is written her full name. She typically speaks quickly, but her sentences are phrased with precision and clarity.

Diane sits to one side of the room.

Vashti

My name is Vashti Lipmann-Peirce.
That's "purse", as in "handbag".
Either Professor, or Doctor, or
simply Vashti will do.

She quickly sizes up her students as she walks back to the front of the classroom, and then she begins.

Vashti

There is a question that is not usually addressed, and that is, "What is a university?" Is it simply a place where people read a lot of books and get degrees to advance their careers? Or is there more?

Vashti moves almost incessantly back and forth.

Vashti

Isn't there something living about a university? Doesn't it grow as the human race grows? Conversely, does not it wither when humanity destroys a part of itself? Have you ever thought that, perhaps, the idea of the university is actually

an extension of the human mind?

She selects an index card.

Vashti
(Italian pronunciation)
Mister Castelli?

Castelli
Yes? That's me.

Vashti
Mister Castelli, can you define
"college"?

Castelli
Well, not the dictionary definition
but, uh, I guess it's what makes up
a university.

Vashti
In a way. A college is made of
colleagues who study a field. A
university is composed of various
colleges.

She looks at a card.

Vashti
Mrs. Barton.

Diane
Here, uh, yes?

Vashti
Mrs. Barton, what is a "seminar"?

Diane
A....an advanced class?

Vashti
It's a group of colleagues within a
field who meet to exchange ideas
about research in that field. Have
you ever exchanged ideas about the
world with anyone?

Diane considers the question for a moment.

Diane

(embarrassed)
My mother.

There are a few chuckles from the class.

Vashti
Indeed! We aren't all so lucky as
to have someone with whom we can
discuss important matters.

Vashti selects another card.

Vashti
Mister Northrop?

Northrop
Here, Doctor.

Vashti
Why should a person attend a
university? Why are you here?

Northrop
I dunno. I guess cause I like to
read about famous dead people.

Without a flicker in expression, Vashti momentarily con-
siders this prodigy before answering.

Vashti
Well, we've certainly got a
shitload of those in the library,
don't we?

INT PAUL AND DIANE'S LIVING ROOM EVENING.

Some friends, SELDON and CLAIRE, are visiting for the
evening. They are drinking beer while watching a fight on
television. Paul shows bruises on cheek and forehead.

Paul
Busore ain't gonna last.

Seldon
Aww, come off it.

Paul
He ain't gonna last.

Seldon

Hey, Diane, has he taken up reading tea leaves or dog shit or somethin'?

Claire
Better watch it, Seldon. It's two against one around here.

Diane
Paul can take care of himself.

Seldon
Yeah, Claire, you wouldn't stand up for me, would you?

On the screen, the OPPONENT flurries BUSORE. Busore tumbles to the mat. The referee counts him out.

Paul
And he's out.

Seldon
Damn.

Claire
Poor little Seldon. Lose your lunch money?

Seldon
I just don't understand. How'd you know?

Paul
Cause Busore's always moving. You can't slip shots forever.

Seldon
Huh?

Paul
Look, Seldon, if you're a professional--salesman, businessman, a fighter, it doesn't matter what--you gotta like the pressure. You can't punch and run away, punch and run away all the time: you gotta get in there and bang heads sometimes. You either fight your way out, or you cave in.

Seldon
Sombitch bum.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT PAUL AND DIANE'S LIVING ROOM LATE EVENING.

Nearly empty popcorn bowls and beer cans litter the room. Seldon snores in a chair. Paul sketches from the television set, Karloff as the Frankenstein Monster.

Diane and Claire leaf through a scrapbook of drawings by Paul. Claire glances at the sketch Paul is working on.

Claire
God, that guy's ugly. How'd you
like to wake up with him next to
you?

Diane
Sometimes I think I have.

Paul grins to himself.

Diane smiles at the cartoon of a female figure eccentrically posed with a badminton racket over her shoulder and head thrown back. A big sun wearing a top hat leers at her out of the upper corner of the page.

FLASHBACK SEQUENCE

EXT A PUBLIC PARK AFTERNOON.

Diane, as in the drawing, is posed with exaggerated sophistication. Paul sketches, trying not to laugh before he finishes.

END FLASHBACK SEQUENCE

SHOCK CUT TO:

INT ELIJAH'S GYM AFTERNOON.

The gym is empty except for Paul and Elijah. Paul hits the heavy bag. He is fatigued and covered with sweat. Elijah stands near-by with a stopwatch.

Elijah
Last round. Stop playing with the
bag. Four shots.

Paul hits the bag with several strong combinations, each consisting of four techniques, then backs off with some jabs to catch his breath.

Elijah
What're you waiting for?

Paul smacks the bag with a hard right then, circling, alternates between high and low shots.

Elijah
Flurry.

Paul flurries the bag.

Elijah
Now throw a left-right-hook and
come off the bag with a right.

Paul does it, catching his breath as he backs away from the bag.

Elijah
Good: leave him something to think
about.

Paul snaps the bag sporadically with single shots and one-two combinations. Elijah frowns.

Elijah
You keep tippy-toeing around the
bag. Why don't you kiss it?

Paul pounds the bag. Though his arms are leaden, he settles into a steady pounding that shows tremendous effort and pain with every punch.

Elijah
Keep it going. Ten seconds.

In a last excruciating spasm of energy, Paul throws everything he has at the bag for ten seconds. He hurts worse than he ever has in his entire life.

Elijah
Time.

Paul stops, bending over from the pain. He quickly straightens and, as if to let it know who's in charge, hits the bag one last time. Then he pulls off his bag gloves and

starts walking in circles to get his breath.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT ELIJAH'S GYM AFTERNOON.

Paul and Elijah sit side-by-side. Paul has cooled off and looks at the floor as he talks to Elijah, occasionally looking elsewhere.

Paul
I don't know, things are just different. It's kinda like being separated. She's there, and she's not there.

Elijah
Is Diane really that busy?

Paul
Hell, yeah. Always got her face in a book.

Elijah
Is she happy?

Paul
Yeah. I just wish she'd hurry up and get enough of that stuff.

Elijah
Well, I'll tell you, your training's going better since she started school. You're in better shape than you've ever been. Haven't you noticed?

Paul
Sure.

Paul stands and walks to the exit doors, which have clear glass panes. He studies the cold weather for a few moments.

Paul
I hate the cold.

INT A CLASSROOM EARLY MORNING.

Vashti incessantly prowls the classroom as she pushes and

prods her STUDENTS through a discussion. One of Vashti's intentions is to make the students sweat from thinking, so she is unrelenting, though her tone changes by the moment.

This is a survey class of freshmen, so she has to change her tack several times, until someone catches a glimmer of what she is saying, at which point she states the idea explicitly.

Vashti

What would have happened if Medea had not killed her children? What if they had instead been reared by Jason?

Student #1

I don't see your point.

Vashti

Why did Medea destroy her own children?

Student #1

For revenge.

Student #2

I don't see why should Medea kill her children just to get back at Jason?

Vashti

Was revenge her only, or even her primary, motive? Could she have had a more vital reason?

The class is silent.

Vashti

What kind of man was Jason? After she sacrificed everything for him, and despite his formal vows of eternal fidelity, he dumped Medea for a younger, richer, more politically well-connected wife. What if this ruthless and ambitious king had reared his children? What would the children have been like?

Silence. Diane, cautiously looking around the room first, ventures an answer.

Diane
They would've been like their
father, I think.

Vashti
And what was their father?

Diane
I don't understand.

Vashti
He was king!

Diane nods to herself.

Vashti
Was Jason abhorred or honored by
his society?

Diane
Honored. He was king.

Vashti
Yes! The king is an embodiment of
all that a society honors. A
society selects those qualities it
assumes will give stability to the
political entity. Many of these
qualities are mere conventions, for
example, not all kings are great
warriors or handsome as the gods.
Some are ugly. But the crucial
qualities are not conventions. And
Jason has those qualities in
spades--ruthlessness, cleverness,
ambition. So, by this process, one
might say that Jason is a copy of a
copy of a copy.

Vashti pauses, and there is further silence.

Vashti
And the king always wants a loyal
successor, doesn't he? Preferably
someone of his blood, to follow him
in office and continue his glorious
and bloody reign. So, why did Medea
kill her children? To keep them
from being copies of Jason! In

effect, she saved them from a fate worse than death.

INT VASHTI'S OFFICE EARLY MORNING.

It is after the class on Medea. Vashti is not in her office, but the door is open. Diane peers tentatively into Vashti's office from the hallway. She sees two walls covered by bookshelves stuffed with books.

The other walls are covered with black and white photographs, stark prints, paintings which burst with color and feeling, line drawing portraits of Kafka, Hemingway, and Nietzsche, as well as reproductions of works from primitive cultures.

Behind Vashti's desk hangs a color rendition of a strange bird being consumed by an intense flame.

Slipping into a new world, Diane unconsciously steps into the middle of this inner sanctum and pivots in a circle.

Vashti appears, sees Diane, and smiles. Diane starts when she notices her in the doorway and looks at her guiltily.

Diane
I was just waiting--

Vashti
(interrupting)
A pleasure, Mrs. Barton. How may I help you?

Diane
(nervously)
I won't take but a moment. I wanted to ask about some books.

Vashti
Books?

Diane
Yes. You see, I haven't been in school for quite a while and I'd like--

Diane finishes in a rush.

Diane (continuing)
--to catch up by finding the right

books to read and thought maybe you could help me pick them out.

Diane pauses.

Diane
If it's not too much trouble.

Vashti
Is there anything in particular that interests you?

Diane
Well, I'm kind of interested in everything. Maybe something that goes along with what we're doing in class?

Vashti steps to a bookshelf with paperbacks stacked on top of hardbacks and reaches up to disinter a paperback. As she does so, a bluish mark of numbers tattooed into the flesh of one arm is revealed.

Diane sees the tattoo but doesn't make a connection. Vashti hands her the book.

Vashti
You may keep that; it's one of the extra copies I keep for my students. It should go well with what we've been studying.

Diane
Thank you.

Vashti
When you've read it, we'll discuss it.

Diane
I really appreciate it, Doctor Peirce.

Vashti
Not at all, I'm honored that you ask.

Diane turns to leave but her eyes go unconsciously back to the picture of the strange bird.

Diane
Pardon me, but what is that?

Vashti looks at the painting.

Vashti
I see it--

She turns back to Diane.

Vashti (continuing)
--as one of the faces of God.

INT PAUL AND DIANE'S KITCHEN EVENING.

Diane speaks as she finishes the dishes. Paul, getting himself a snack and a beer, listens absentmindedly. Diane rattles excitedly, a gradual feeling of desperation creeping into her voice.

Diane
And Eleanor of Aquitaine, she was something. She was Richard Lionheart's mother.

Paul looks in a cabinet.

Paul
Yeah?

Diane
Her husband was Henry the Second. He was one of England's strongest kings and conquered a big part of Europe.

Paul, searching through various cabinets, speaks without turning.

Paul
Must've been somethin'. Where's the chips?

Diane opens the first cabinet Paul looked in and pulls out a bag, handing it to Paul, then continues.

Diane
You know, Eleanor was the one who started the Courts of Love.

Paul is in the refrigerator now.

Paul
Sounds racy. Where's the beer?

Diane reaches past him into the refrigerator and pulls out a beer, which he takes without comment.

Diane
The Courts of Love were real important in spreading a sense of refinement throughout the courts of Europe. That's what Doctor Peirce says, anyway.

Paul
Hunh, I didn't know that. Anything you wanta see on the boob tube?

He walks into the living room. Diane stands still a moment, then she quietly shuts the refrigerator door.

INT FIGHTER'S WAITING ROOM EVENING.
Paul and Elijah wait for Paul's fight. The sounds of the crowd are muffled but present. Paul is quiet as Elijah tapes his hands.

Elijah
How do you feel?

Paul
Feel strong.

Elijah finishes with the taping.

Elijah
Good? Relaxed?

Paul
Relaxed. Good.

A MAN sticks his head in the door.

Man
Time to go.

Paul stands, works his torso and shoulder muscles, then walks out of the room.

INT CORRIDOR LEADING FROM WAITING ROOM EVENING.

In the corridor, they meet Paul's OPPONENT. Seeing Paul, the man steps in front of him.

Opponent
Man, I'm gonna chew you up and spit
you out. You ain't nuthin' but
show. Nuthin'! I'm gonna pound you
to shit and blood.

The opponent and his cornerman walk away. The barest smile can be seen on Paul's lips.

INT THE RING EVENING.

The bell sounds. Paul and the opponent trade a few probing shots. Paul lets the man flurry some without retaliation.

Then, when the opponent gets cocky, dropping his guard and dancing, Paul explodes with a tremendously hard and fast blow. The man crumples.

INT VASHTI'S OFFICE NOON.

Diane and Vashti are eating brown bag lunches. As always, when she teaches, Vashti's tone varies widely from the dramatic to the gentle

However, in these circumstances of her with a single student, she is consistently intimate, even when she slips into bullying to make a point

Vashti
And so, how did you find Hamlet,
Prince of Denmark?

Diane
The language was beautiful.

Vashti
How did you find the character of
Hamlet? Was he a dunce?

Diane
Oh, no! But he was sort of
confused.

Vashti
What was confusing him?

Diane

Uh...his mother married the man who
killed his father.

Vashti

Corruption! Brother murders
brother.Friends spy on friends for
gain. Men slaughter each other over
a worthless patch of ground. And
Hamlet is expected to murder his
uncle, even though he knows it is
wrong to kill. Corruption.

Diane digests this, nodding to herself, then looks up.

Diane

What about Ophelia?

Vashti

What about her?

Diane

She seemed...

Vashti

Go on.

Diane

Trapped.

Vashti

And what was trapping her?

Diane

I don't...

Vashti

Could she simply run out and do
whatever she wanted? Why didn't she
hop a plane and get the hell out of
there? Leave a message for them to
call her when it's all over.

Diane grins but catches her meaning.

Diane

It wasn't done.

Vashti

It wasn't done! Ophelia was the

dutiful daughter who always did what was expected of her, did what was conventional. Like Gertrude. And look what it got them.

Diane nods to herself and takes a bite out of her sandwich. They both eat for a moment, then Diane speaks suddenly.

Diane
May I call you Vashti?

Vashti
I wish you would.

Diane smiles, then glances up at the strange bird on the wall. Vashti, of course, notices.

Vashti
Did you look it up?

Diane
The Phoenix? Oh, yes! It's an Egyptian myth: the most beautiful bird in the world. It lives for a thousand years, dies in a burst of flame, and then rises new-born from the ashes.

Vashti
It is re-created?

Diane
Yes.

Vashti
Very good.

Vashti speaks casually.

Vashti
Tell me, Diane, what else is reborn out of its own ashes?

Diane
I, uh...

Vashti
What is recreated out of the burning away of what was before?

Diane
I don't know.

Vashti
Think!

Diane mulls it over intensely. Suddenly, it comes to her.

Diane
People! A person.

INT ELIJAH'S GYM OFFICE EARLY AFTERNOON.

The room is neither small nor large, and the single door is open. Against one wall is a regulation weighing machine. Boxing gloves hang by their strings from nails driven in the wall. Heavy bags and boxfuls of equipment sit about the room.

On the walls are photos of family and friends, of athletic events in which a young Elijah is prominent, and of twenty years military service. In addition, there are other medals and some Oriental craft pieces on display.

A single wooden desk occupies the room. On it are papers stacked, keys on strings, various tools, and several equipment catalogs. By the desk, Elijah sits in an old, swivel type of metal chair. He is typing a quick letter with two fingers.

Marty appears at the open door.

Marty
Got my stuff, Elijah.

Elijah
Okay, I'll be right there.

Elijah finishes the letter and stuffs it in an envelope.

Elijah
Give this to Pat when you see him.

Marty
Okay.

Marty takes the letter and stuffs it in a pocket while Elijah grabs a jacket.

Marty

Elijah?

Elijah looks up.

Elijah
What's wrong, Marty?

Marty
Nuthin'. I just...

Elijah
Marty, you train as hard as any professional. You've got as much potential as anyone I've ever met. You can't let what might happen worry you. It'll sap your strength. You've gotta give your best and go from there. Right?

Marty
Right.

Elijah
Okay, get your gear and I'll take you to the airport.

Marty turns, but then hesitates. This is very difficult for him to put into words.

Marty
I always had to scratch on my own. Ain't never had a daddy to speak to and momma can't...she can't...

His expression pleads with Elijah.

Marty (continuing)
You know?

Elijah grips one of his arms.

Elijah
Marty, no matter what, I'm always here for you. Always.

INT PAUL AND DIANE'S LIVING ROOM EVENING.

Diane, with a lamp beside her chair adjusted to prevent eyestrain, is trying to study. She has had her long hair cut short.

Paul, sitting on the floor, watches television. A Fred Astaire movie is playing. At the moment, Astaire runs through some dialog connecting the dance sequences.

Diane tries very hard to concentrate on her book. Her shifting about catches Paul's attention, although he refuses to look directly at her.

Paul
The noise bothering you?

Diane
No, that's alright. It's okay.

Paul
I can turn the volume down.

He reaches out and turns the knob a bare fraction.

Diane
No, no, it's okay. I'm alright.

A commercial comes on. Paul jumps up and goes into the kitchen, where he gets a beer from the refrigerator.

As he comes back into the living room, he unconsciously reaches out to stroke Diane's hair, but jerks back when he remembers that she's had it cut. He sits back down and turns up the volume.

Diane tries to study, but her eyes wander to the screen. She mentally backs off and tries again.

On the screen, Astaire begins to dance.

Diane's eyes wander to the screen again and, this time, stay there. After a few moments, she closes her book and sits on the floor with Paul. They sit quietly, fascinated by the artist in motion.

Paul
God! That man had style.

INT PAUL AND DIANE'S BEDROOM LATE NIGHT.

Paul and Diane are in bed. Paul is asleep. Diane stares into the darkness.

DISSOLVE TO:

MEMORY SEQUENCE

INT A CHURCH WEDDING AFTERNOON.

Paul wears a white tux and looks shell-shocked. The formal service is over. He and Diane, who is resplendent in white gown, pose for pictures. Glowing with happiness, she clings tightly to him.

EXT A YARD AFTERNOON.

A teenaged Diane and her parents are in the yard on a clear, spring day. Diane sits with her mother on a swing, while her father works on an air conditioner which sits on a picnic table. They live in a neighborhood with many trees.

Animals play on the ground and in the branches. A squirrel eats out of a feeder Diane's mother has in the yard. Diane and her parents laugh as a second squirrel charges the first, chasing in in circles.

INT PAUL'S PARENTS' DINING ROOM EVENING.

Paul and Diane sit at the dinner table with his parents.

Paul's father berates his mother in an incessant tirade. No one is eating. Paul plays with the food on his plate. Diane sits with her fists clenched tightly. Paul's mother sits looking embarrassed, whipped, guilty, and helpless.

END MEMORY SEQUENCE

DISSOLVE TO:

INT DIANE'S KITCHEN SUNRISE.

Diane sits at her kitchen table in her housecoat, shivering.

Through the kitchen windows, sunrise can be seen. Diane stares without thought.

INT DIANE'S KITCHEN LATE MORNING.

The washing machine and dryer are running, and dirty clothes are piled on the floor. While the clothes wash, Diane reads one of her school texts. She looks tired.

Starting slightly, she suddenly realizes that someone is knocking at the front door. She puts down the book and goes

complaining. Could it have to do with your going to school?

Diane
How the hell should I know? I'm only his wife.

Elijah waits a moment, then speaks gently.

Elijah
Do you think you should take your studies so seriously?

Diane
All I know is that it feels right.

Elijah
But you're working yourself to death, and it's affecting your marriage.

Diane
We're just tired, that's all.

Elijah pauses a moment or two, then tries to articulate something he feels is very important.

Elijah
Look, Diane, I...my way of looking at life is incredibly positive. I know I'm not going to die till I'm at least ninety. Tomorrow and the next day and the next are going to be good. I'm gonna make them good. Positive thoughts breed positive actions. You've got to truly believe that, or you'll waste your life.

Diane
Yeah, I know. But what I don't understand is why Paul takes fighting so seriously.

Elijah is dumbfounded.

Elijah
What?

Diane

I mean, it's all he ever thinks about. He's not always going to be a professional. He can't go on forever. And with all these injuries, I don't know how he can last much longer.

Elijah

I...

Diane

What's he going to do?

Elijah

The idea always was to get in and out fast.

Diane

And?

Elijah

He's close, Diane, he's close. It's almost in his hands.

Diane looks away. Elijah doesn't know what else to say, so he stands to go.

Diane

Would you like some coffee?

Elijah

No, no, thanks. I guess I'd better go.

(whispering)

I'm supposed to be running errands for the wife!

Diane

How's Beth?

Elijah

Indestructible. She sends her love.

Diane

Give her mine. And thanks for caring, Elijah.

Elijah

You and Paul mean a lot to us. Try

to get some rest, okay?

Diane nods, and Elijah exits. She watches him leave.

Diane

Bye.

INT ELIJAH'S LIVING ROOM EVENING.

Elijah sits in a chair, an open book on his lap. He stares at nothing in particular.

His wife, BETH, comes in. She pokes him not too gently with a finger.

Beth

Bed.

Elijah

Yes, ma'am.

Beth sits on the arm of the chair.

Beth

What is it?

Elijah

You know what they did to Marty at the Nationals last year.

Beth

He'll do okay.

Elijah nods slowly and silently.

Beth

Is that all?

Elijah

No, I got by to see Diane today. She sends her love.

Beth

It's about Paul.

Elijah

Yes.

Beth

You train him. You can't live his

life for him.

Elijah
I encourage him.

He gives a bitter cough of a laugh.

Elijah
I traded him another damn fight.

Beth
(frowning)
You do what you think best.

Elijah sits quietly for a moment.

Elijah
Do I?

INT ART GALLERY: ROOM #1 AFTERNOON.

Diane and Vashti stand by a portrait of a Renaissance scholar. Vashti is more subdued than when she's in her own classroom or office, but she is still fearless and insistent in her probing.

Vashti
What do you see?

Diane
Uh...

Vashti
Look at his eyes. What do you see?

Diane
Looks like he needs glasses.

Vashti
He's a scholar -- he's been reading
his ass off. That's his life.

INT ART GALLERY: ROOM #2 AFTERNOON.

Vashti and Diane stand in front of a bold painting of a dancing girl who is greeting a man. The man's face shows shock and dismay.

Vashti
Who is it?

Diane
I don't know.

Vashti
It's Jephtha and his daughter. Ever
read the Bible?

Diane
(embarrassed)
No.

Vashti
You should read it: it has some
interesting things. In the Old
Testament, Jephtha was the leader
of a tribe. If he won a battle his
men were fighting, he promised the
Lord he would sacrifice the first
person from the village to greet
them on their return. The first
person was his daughter.

Diane studies the painting.

Diane
Like Medea. Killing their children.

Vashti
Maybe.

Diane
I've been thinking. Could Medea
simply have been insane? You know,
not responsible?

Vashti
Perhaps. But, at the least, the
insanity was not only hers, nor
even Jason's, but that of his
society. After all, Jason was
honored for being ruthless and
ambitious, while she became
anathema for keeping her vows.

Vashti moves on. Diane stands there a moment, reflecting on
the painting, then moves on.

INT ART GALLERY: ROOM #3 AFTERNOON.

Diane and Vashti stand in front of a large painting of the Last Supper.

Vashti
They should take this thing out and burn it. It's not only lifeless but ugly.

Diane smiles.

Vashti
Which one is Judas?

It doesn't take Diane but a moment to spot him.

Diane
(laughing)
The one who looks like a villain out of a silent movie.

INT ART GALLERY: ROOM #4 AFTERNOON.

Vashti and Diane stand in front of an etching.

Vashti
Who are they?

Diane
I don't know.

Vashti
It's Cain killing Abel. God marked Cain for all to see.

Vashti stares at the bodies etched in rigid, black lines as one crushes the head of the other with a rock. Diane winces and looks away, but Vashti stares without flinching.

Vashti
I'd like to live with that for a while.

INT ART GALLERY LOBBY AFTERNOON.

As they exit the main exhibit, Diane and Vashti pass a smaller, temporary exhibit of photography which documents the Holocaust. Diane is intensely interested, but Vashti is enigmatic.

Diane

Look, they've got an exhibit on the Holocaust.

Vashti

You go ahead. I'll wait for you in the restaurant.

Diane

(disappointed)

No, I'll come back by myself sometime.

Vashti

No no no, you go in. It's important that you know.

Diane

You're sure?

Vashti

Go.

Diane

Okay.

Vashti exits.

Diane crosses the lobby to the entrance. She receives a portable tape player from an attendant and enters the exhibit of still photographs.

NOTE: INTERCUT SEQUENCE.

INT HOLOCAUST EXHIBIT AFTERNOON.

Diane studies the photographs as she listens to different voices recalling the distant events.

The photographs show mass rallies in the German twilight, Hitler and the ceremony of the blood sacrament, book burnings, anti-Jewish propaganda:

Narration

"Today a new faith is awakening: the myth of blood, the faith to defend, by defending the blood, the divine essence of man. The faith embodied in the radiant knowledge that Nordic blood embodies that very mystery which has supplanted and vanquished the ancient

sacraments."

More personal and terrifying than the first photographs, Diane finds these next ones painful.

There is a picture of a half-naked girl. She squats on the pavement surrounded by adult legs, while a woman, possibly her mother, tries to cover her with the remnants of torn clothing. The girl reaches out to the camera, shrieking.

There is a picture of a beautiful woman who has been stripped and is sitting on the pavement. She weakly holds her arms over her breasts. Her face is a mask of inexpressible grief:

Narration

March 4th, 1933, Hermann Goering:
"My measures will not be hindered by any legal considerations or bureaucracy whatsoever. It is not justice that I have to carry out but annihilation and extermination."

Shifting restlessly, Diane takes deep breaths to calm an unusual anxiety.

The photographs show women and children on sidewalks with their hands in the air, of women and children at train sidings, of a SS officer bullying an old, old woman with his truncheon.

The photographs show naked housewives who are forced to run to the edges of huge pits. They stand precariously on the edges of the pits. Within the pits are mounds of human bodies:

Narration

A report to Berlin from the occupied Dutch territories by Consul-General Otto Bene, March 26th, 1943: "The following case shows how readily the Dutch still commit the offence of aiding and abetting Jews, either out of pity or avarice. Eight Aryans laid themselves open to prosecution on account of one Jew, whom they had supported and hidden among themselves for weeks...Even with

the Dutch police escaping Jews are mainly brought in only by individual officials who have already been working for the German police for some time. The majority of police officials, due to fear of their superiors, comrades and the population, do not intervene."

Diane trembles.

The photographs show the victims of experiments. The main experiments of interest to the Nazis were the effects of starvation. Their victims are living skeletons.

The photographs show a mound of flesh and rotted clothing. The bodies are shrivelled and twisted, a jumble of feet, hands, and skeletal torsos. One sees an adult here and there, but the mass of bodies are much smaller:

Narration

Statement of Zdenka Vanlova: "The corpses lay among the living. It was difficult to tell who was dead and who was still alive. We all looked so alike. Bodies were so emaciated that they were like skeletons, and that inscrutable, shocked expression in our eyes. Nobody buried the dead. Those who still breathed waited for the miracle, and a ray of hope still flickered in their hearts. Many failed to survive, however, in spite of all their efforts, and died only a few days, often a few hours before the liberation."

Suddenly, Diane pulls off the headset and moves toward exit before seeing it all. However, her eyes catch a photograph of camp inmates brandishing the tattoos on their arms.

Diane
(whispering)

Vashti.

END INTERCUT SEQUENCE.

INT MUSEUM RESTAURANT AFTERNOON.

Vashti sits at a table with a cup of tea in front of her. She is very still. From a distance, she looks slight, almost fragile, but the burning life in her eyes dispels all notions of infirmity.

Diane sits at the table. She can't help but stare at Vashti.

Vashti

Yes, it's a terrible experience for the sensitive. But you should have an awareness of these things.

Diane

Vashti. You...

Vashti studies her, then nods.

Vashti

Yes, I was an inmate at a camp. My entire family went into the camps-- that is, the ones not already dead. What was it? My little remembrance? (exposes the tattoo) I call it the mark of Cain.

Diane cries.

Diane

I'm sorry.

Vashti

(gently)

No, I'm the one who should apologize for forgetting how sensitive you are. Why don't you drink some of my tea? And then you can tell me about what you saw.

INT ELIJAH'S GYM AFTERNOON.

Elijah rages while several MEN, whom we do not know, sit or stand about listening.

Elijah

They stole it from him! Again!

Man

It's politics, Elijah. They can't let the favorite lose.

Elijah
You expect that in the pros, not in
amateur competition, dammit!

The man shrugs.

Elijah
Marty worked his ass off gettin'
ready. He earned it: He beat the
guy in the first round. He slammed
four hard rights in his face in the
second round. He damned near
knocked the guy out and the referee
warns Marty for slapping. Slapping!
Then in the third round, Marty's
got the guy on the ropes. He's
slamming in body shots left and
right, and the referee stops the
fight and disqualifies Marty.

Man
It's politics, Elijah.

Elijah
It's not right!

EXT PARKING LOT OF A MOTEL LATE EVENING.

Paul drives up in his sports coupe. He stops in front of the motel office, gets out, and goes into the office. After a pause, he comes back out and drives the car to a room.

Paul gets out of the car again. A WOMAN follows him out of the car. She wears a clinging dress and no undergarments. She hangs onto Paul as he unlocks the door to the room. Then he steps in and pulls her in after him.

INT DIANE'S MOTHER'S LIVING ROOM AFTERNOON.

Diane is visiting her MOTHER, who sits very still. She looks slight, almost fragile. They sit on the sofa and look through an album of family photographs.

Mother
(pointing)
Oh, here's your great Aunt
Isabelle. She loved to dance more
than any person I ever saw. Poor
woman couldn't dance worth a flip.

She turns the page.

Mother

Here's your Father when he was
eight, no, seven. No, eight. He was
kinda scrubby as a kid.

She runs her finger around the edges of the old photo-graph
and speaks with sudden ferocity.

Mother

I thought he was never gonna die.
He just laid there and suffered
while that cancer ate his guts,
robbing him bit by bit, stealing
his life bit by bit. I prayed,
"Dammit, God, please just let this
old man die."

She puts the book down with its pages open.

Mother

How's school goin', Diane?

Diane

Oh, Momma, it's wonderful! Better
than I ever imagined. There's a
professor, Doctor Vashti Lipmann-
Peirce, she's tutoring me. She
speaks I don't know how many
languages and knows things about
art, history, literature, medicine.
I learn so much everytime I talk
with her.

Mother

Sounds like a real smart lady. I'm
glad you're enjoying yourself,
dear.

Diane

Yes, Momma, I'm enjoying myself.

Her Mother picks the album back up.

Mother

You know, it's odd the way things
work out sometimes. Real odd.

Diane looks at her mother, and waits quietly.

EXT VASHTI'S BACKYARD AFTERNOON.

Vashti and Diane sit at a table amid a yard that is a hybrid of the Japanese's lyrical style of garden, without the segregated rows of flowers, but also without the waterfalls and expensive, imported rocks.

In effect, the average person would not know that they were seeing a "garden" except for the scattered blooming plants.

Vashti is reserved though not any the less watchful.

Diane

A father, the king, kills his daughter as a sacrifice to the gods. Her mother and her mother's lover kill the king. The king's son kills both his mother and her lover. The son is then pursued by the avenging Furies, the Eumenides, for his crimes. Finally, Athene appears on the scene and works out a compromise that satisfies everyone.

Vashti

Okay. And what did you make of all this?

Diane

Not much.

Vashti looks around the yard, then points.

Vashti

Do you see the pattern of shade and light made by those tree limbs?

Diane nods.

Vashti

Notice how the light contrasts with the dark?

Diane

Yes.

Vashti

Ever watch anyone draw a picture?

Diane
(wincing slightly)

Yes.

Vashti
And did you notice how they use the
light and dark to bring each other
out?

Diane
Yes!

Vashti indicates some books that lie on the table.

Vashti
This is Greek drama. The Greeks had
a concept which they called "joy".
They didn't mean only happiness.
You know, naked people running
around in green meadows with
flowers in their hair. Their idea
of joy involved tragedy and beauty
in one dynamic concept of
wholeness.

Diane
But I don't --

Vashti
(riding over her)
In the Oresteia, Athene doesn't
merely bargain with the parties
involved, like a glorified lawyer.
She seeks what is right for the
whole. She seeks justice.

Diane
(pausing)
Oh.

Vashti looks around and absorbs her surroundings.

Vashti
You know, I think of this plot of
earth as a memorial to my family.
But it needs something else in
order to be complete. Remember the
Celts from class? They made these
wonderful cities of the dead. Not

merely dirt mounds holding bones.
Trees were planted on the mounds,
and these trees would draw
nourishment from the bodies which,
in turn, had passed through
dissolution to dust. And the circle
was complete: life, fruition,
death, dissolution, life.

Vashti stretches in the sun.

Vashti
It's a beautiful day, isn't it?

INT ELIJAH'S GYM AFTERNOON.

Paul and some other FIGHTERS are cooling off after their workouts.

Paul
What gets me is that she's always
questionin' everything. If I say
somethin', she's got questions
coming back at me.

One of the other men stands suddenly.

Fighter
What the fuck's this shit?

Paul's eyes burn with anger.

Fighter
You're always goin' off about your
woman. Be you the man or be you the
bitch?

INT ELIJAH'S GYM AFTERNOON.

Diane sits on some bleachers waiting for Paul while he works the heavy bag. She holds a towel in one hand and twists it with the other. Elijah stands to one side, working with a group of children who are part of a "training camp".

The rest bell rings. Paul walks to Diane, carelessly takes the towel, and wipes his face and neck. He hands it back. They stare at one another.

The time sounds. Paul goes to bag. He slams it with a tremendous blow. Then he looks at Diane. Turning back, he

pounds the bag over and over again.

INT A CLASSROOM, EARLY MORNING.

Vashti and a LOUD STUDENT are having a disagreement. The student is a pompous little shit who has gotten under Vashti's skin. Without actually losing her temper, she smacks him with some simple.

Diane sits to the side, detached.

Vashti

Ha! So the poor and unemployed are supposed to lift themselves into the air by their own bootstraps. If they have any. And no matter what the conditions of their society may be?

Diane is not listening.

Loud Student

If a person is free, he can do anything.

Vashti

Free! A man without a job isn't free. He can walk the streets! he can say whatever he likes! but what choice does he have about anything significant?

There are tears on Diane's cheeks.

Vashti

How can you even think if you live in fear?

NOTE: INTERCUT SEQUENCE

INT ELIJAH'S GYM, AFTERNOON.

Elijah is storing equipment in a supply room near the men's restroom. He can hear several YOUNG MEN, Marty among them, talking as he works.

Young Man #1

Oh, man, he's somethin' else. Ugly, stupid, it don't matter. If it's female, he's after it.

Young Man #2
What about, uh, that dude? Jones!

Young Man #1
He's messin' around so much, his
bitch stuck him with a barbeque
fork.

They laugh.

Young Man #2
He didn't get out the hospital for
a week.

Elijah really isn't listening.

Marty
Hey, that's funny, man, but I don't
think dudes ought to be doin' that
stuff. It ain't right, 'specially
if they's married.

This catches Elijah's attention.

Young Man #2
Come off it, man. A dude just
naturally wants to spread hisself
around.

Marty
It ain't right.

Young Man#1
"It ain't right." You been
listenin' to that preacher talk.
Shit, you wanta see somebody's been
workin' on his pe-ne-tration, look
at Paul Barton. Bein' married never
slowed him none.

This jolts Elijah. He storms out of the storage room.

END INTERCUT SEQUENCE

INT MEN'S RESTROOM IN ELIJAH'S GYM, AFTERNOON.

Elijah rushes into the restroom.

Elijah

What was that? What'd you say about Paul?

They are silent.

Elijah
What'd you say?

Marty
You were never listenin', Elijah.
Paul could do no wrong.

Elijah stares at him for a moment. Suddenly, he turns and exits.

Young Man #2
Shit.

Marty
That shore ain't good.

EXT OUTSIDE DOOR OF ELIJAH'S GYM AFTERNOON.

The door slams open and Paul comes out with his work-out bag in hand. Elijah's voice bellows out from within the gym.

Elijah (O.S.)
And keep out!

Paul stalks to his car. Elijah appears in the doorway.

Elijah
Get somebody else to train your ass!

Paul
You pious shithead! Who I fuck is my goddamn business. Mine!

Elijah
Don't come back! Don't you ever put your foot inside this door again.

Paul
I'd rather quit fighting than come back here!

Elijah
Go to hell!

INT FIGHTER'S WAITING ROOM EVENING.

The sounds of a fight crowd can be heard in the b.g. A TRAINER with a potbelly hanging over his belt, whom we've never seen, is wrapping and taping Paul's hands.

Trainer
Oh, he's tough. And savvy. There's no doubt about that. But you're gonna take'em. You're gonna pound his ass into raw meat.

He finishes one hand. Paul bangs it into the palm of the other hand, then holds out the unwrapped hand. The man starts wrapping it.

Trainer
I ain't never seen anybody train like you. (shakes his head) After tonight, you're gonna be the number one contender.

He starts taping Paul's hand.

Trainer
Is your wife gonna be out front or waitin' at home?

Paul
Shutup.

INT PAUL & DIANE'S BEDROOM EVENING.

Diane sits in front a mirror having just finished her makeup. She is dressed for dinner. Running her fingers through her hair, she leans against that hand and pauses to look at her cockeyed reflection in the mirror.

MEMORY SEQUENCE

INT PAUL AND DIANE'S LIVING ROOM EVENING.

Paul confronts Diane.

Paul
It'll decide who goes for the title, Diane. The title is the next stop. Will you be there?

END MEMORY SEQUENCE

Cornerman
You gotta fight smart. Don't burn
yourself out. You can pull this out
if you make him come to you. Make
him come to you!

The bell rings and Paul is up immediately. The two fighters
wade into each other. Paul fights almost in a state of
hysteria.

EXT VASHTI'S HOUSE EVENING.

The house is a simple, single-storey suburban home. Diane
has parked on the curb in front of the house, due to the
number of guests's cars, and goes to the door. It opens
almost immediately after she rings. A WOMAN in the doorway,
probably another student, greets her and Diane disappears
within.

INT PROFESSIONAL FIGHT EVENING.

Paul is still the aggressor but is obviously less effective.
The sports commentators are actually impressed.

Commentator #1
This kid is like a piece of iron.
And he has more heart than a dozen
fighters, but he's burning himself
out.

Commentator#2
His fights up till now have been
well managed, but I don't think
he's listened to anything his
corner's said all night.

Commentator #1
No, he hasn't. In fact, he suddenly
switched trainers not long before
this fight--

In the ring, Paul misjudges and steps into something.

Commentator #2
(V.O.)
Oh! A solid right to the face.

Commentator #1
(V.O.)

Barton's dazed but he's covering up
and moving.

INT VASHTI'S DINING ROOM EVENING.

Diane is dining with Vashti's and her other guests, who are FELLOW ACADEMICS and a couple of ADVANCED STUDENTS, as well as her HUSBAND, who is also an academic, and two courteous, stylishly dressed, and very sensitive teenaged SONS.

Diane is preoccupied with not looking awkward or foolish.

INT PROFESSIONAL FIGHT EVENING.

The audience screams.

Paul and his opponent smash one another with everything they have left. Both are tired and bloody.

SLOW DISSOLVE TO:

INT VASHTI'S STUDY EVENING.

Vashti sits like a graven image in half-light amid a room full of books. The door to the study is only partially closed, so that conversation and the tinkling of glassware can be heard. For the first time since we've met Vashti, her face is shaded with pain.

Diane pushes the door open and peeks in. She carries two glasses.

Diane
Vashti? I've brought you something
to drink. May I come in?

Vashti looks at her but says nothing, which Diane takes as assent. She quietly pushes the door shut and sets the glass on a table next to her.

Vashti
For some reason Van Gogh has come
to mind.

Diane, in cheerful spirits and smiling, sits across from her.

Diane
Van Gogh?

Vashti

Van Gogh was a preacher in a mining town. He drove himself into a total physical collapse trying to change the ignorance, pain, and cruelty that he saw. He achieved nothing of permanence. Then he studied painting. The world is different and better than it would have been without Van Gogh's art.

Vashti picks up her glass and takes a sip.

Vashti

(bitterly)

There's just no way of knowing where a choice will lead. Some say that this is the essence of tragedy.

Diane is quiet because she realizes that Vashti is in a very rare, personal mood.

Vashti

I'm sorry, Diane. This is the anniversary of the day they liberated my camp. A dark mood slipped up on me while I was trying to recall the faces of my loved ones. My children, my husband, my father. They are not so vivid as once they were.

Diane

Your husband?

Vashti

My first husband, whom I married when I was very young.

Diane

Oh.

Vashti smiles and takes another drink.

Vashti

Or maybe it merely seems that I was so young.

Diane

You lost your whole family?

Vashti

Yes. So many people lost.

Diane

I'm so sorry. I don't know what to say.

Vashti

Thank you, dear. You're a sweet person.

Diane slips to her knees in front of Vashti, who takes one of her hands.

Diane

(coaxing)

Vashti, I have a very positive way of looking at life. I know that terrible things happen, but you can't let yourself dwell on them. Tomorrow is going to be good, because you can make it good. This will probably be obvious to you, but I think that positive thoughts breed positive actions. Sometimes, hardships can be for the best, because we learn from it and go on.

Vashti slowly stands. She is shaking with rage.

Vashti

Yes! Yes! We go on and on and on, killing and slaughtering with guns and ignorance! And what do we learn? More efficient ways to slaughter, better methods of killing. Well, Madame Pangloss, so all's for the best in the best of all possible worlds!

Vashti exposes the tattoo.

Vashti

How do you think this got here? A loving gift? Oh, no, a little administrative detail so one can kill millions more efficiently! Who do you think put that on my

arm? A single devil, a single person? Hitler himself? No! It took millions to kill millions. There were leaders and instigators and masterminds, but they were nothing without the support of the drifters. All the world's people who said, "That's most unfortunate, but I'm too busy to deal with injustice."

Diane is on her feet by this time.

Diane

Well, goddammit, why're you attacking me! I wasn't even alive when it happened. I hate the horrible things that were done, you know that, you know I hate those horrible atrocities! Why are you saying these things to me?

Vashti has cooled from her first rage. She considers Diane. When she speaks, it's as if she uses a scalpel instead of words.

Vashti

The camp taught me fear, despair, death, and survival. "Going on" as you put it. All the things the children of Cain have learned to glorify. But the one thing I learned more than any other is that truth creates and lies destroy. That is reality.

She pauses, then turns away from Diane, standing with her back to her.

Vashti

Do you know how my children died?

This question frightens Diane.

Diane

No.

Vashti

It's not a story to warm one's heart. When I was deported, I was

able to take my children with me into the same camp. They were two and four years old. For a year we "got on", living amid torture, filth, disease, hatred, and an unending stream of death. Finally, I had to choose: to carry on with the fear that I might die and leave my babies vulnerable to who knows what perversity and torture; or to end the horror.

Diane

End?

Vashti

To end it in the only way I could. One night, while they slept, I smothered my children.

Diane

You killed...

Diane sits in a chair to keep from falling.

Vashti

My own children.

Diane

(a whisper)

You murdered your children.

Vashti faces Diane and sits.

Vashti

(softly)

Yes. I killed them to protect them. But, the ancient Greeks would say that the Fates had already woven my lifeline.

Diane

(weakly)

I don't understand.

Vashti

Because, my dear girl, the camp was liberated the next day.

Diane bows her head.

Vashti

I still feel the cold inside me
when I think of it, especially on
this day. Like a fetus turned to
icy stone.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT PAUL AND DIANE'S LIVING ROOM LATE EVENING.

Paul sits, unmoving in a chair. His face is bandaged.

EXT FRONT YARD LATE EVENING.

Diane's car pulls into the driveway and stops. She sits at
the wheel staring straight ahead.

INT PAUL AND DIANE'S LIVING ROOM LATE EVENING.

Paul still sits without moving. A car door is heard. In a
few moments, Diane opens the front door. Her face pale, she
stands there a moment. Paul does not move.

Diane walks over to Paul. As if drained of every spark of
energy, she sinks to the floor in front of him. She looks at
the floor, measuring her breath in and out. Paul is
unmoving.

Starting to speak, Diane looks up but stops when she sees
his face. There are tears on his cheeks.

Diane

Paul, what is it?

He stares through her. Then he focuses on her slowly, not
fully conscious of who it is.

Paul

I lost.

Diane

No. No.

Paul

You weren't there.

Diane is speechless. She rises and turns from him. Paul
speaks, his voice rising.

Paul
I lost. And you weren't there.

Paul stands as if it takes all of his energy for the movement.

Paul
I lost!

Diane faces him and reaches out. As she touches him, he reacts like a snapped coiled spring, slamming her against a wall. She slides to the floor.

Paul
(screaming)
YOU WEREN'T THERE!

Her back supported by the wall, Diane pushes herself into a sitting position. Dazed, she watches Paul.

Paul stares at her. Suddenly, he seems to recognize her for the first time. He steps forward to help her.

Diane
No!

Her reaction sends him into a fury about the room. He wrecks everything he can lay his hands on, in particular, Diane's books.

After the first spasm, he ends up leaning against a wall gasping. Looking around, he turns and slams out the front door.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT PAUL AND DIANE'S LIVING ROOM DAWN.

Diane, one arm in a crude sling, tugs a suitcase across the floor with the other arm. She stops at the door.

Outside, a cab sitting in the driveway honks. The driver is impatient and tired.

Diane looks around the room to see if she has missed anything. Then she tugs the suitcase outside.

INT DIANE'S MOTHER'S LIVING ROOM AFTERNOON.

The phone rings. Diane's mother answers it. She looks at

Diane, who sits on the sofa, her arm in a doctor's sling.
Diane shakes her head.

Mother
(into the phone)

No.

She hangs up the phone.

EXT ELIJAH'S GYM MORNING.

Elijah arrives to unlock his gym. On the door, someone has taped a poster which advertises Paul's upcoming fight. He takes the poster down and studies it. Then he folds it, opens the gym door, and disappears inside.

INT A BEDROOM EARLY EVENING.

Diane brushes her hair while sitting in front of a dresser mirror. Her mother stands to one side.

Mother
I don't understand.

Diane pauses as she debates what to say.

Diane
Mom, it's like I said. I'm still
legally his wife. If I don't go,
it'll make him look bad.

Mother
So what? After what you went
through? I wouldn't go.

Diane
Yes, you would.

Diane looks at her.

Diane
I don't want to hurt him. I just
can't live with him anymore.

INT PROFESSIONAL FIGHT, LATE EVENING.

Paul fights in the ring, while Diane sits ringside and watches. Paul's OPPONENT is young and tough. It's a brutal fight.

After watching for a time, Diane stands and walks to an

exit. Pausing in front of the exit, she looks over the crowd.

She sees Elijah in the back rows. He watches the fight and doesn't see her. Diane pauses.

Then she turns and walks away.

FADE TO BLACK