

ADAPTATION

by

Charlie Kaufman and Donald Kaufman

adapted from the book

THE ORCHID THIEF

by

Susan Orlean

Revised - November 21, 2000

1 EXT. PLANET - DAY

1

SUBTITLE: THE EARTH

From space the Earth is brown and meteor-scarred. We move in until we are on its endlessly barren and lifeless surface. The atmosphere is hazy, toxic-looking. Volcanoes erupt. Meteors bombard. Lightning strikes, concussing murky pools of water. All this in silence.

*

2 INT. LARGE EMPTY LIVING ROOM - MORNING

2

SUBTITLE: HOLLYWOOD, CA, FOUR BILLION AND FORTY YEARS LATER

Beamed ceiling, ostentatious fireplace. A few birthday cards on the mantel, two of them identical: "To Our Dear Son on His Fortieth Birthday." Charlie Kaufman, a fat, balding man in a purple sweater with tags still attached, paces. His incantational voice-over carpets this and every scene he's in. It is at times barely audible, but always present.

*

*

*

KAUFMAN (V.O.)

I'm old. I'm fat. I'm bald.

*

(reaches for notebook, catches sight of bare feet)

My toenails have turned strange. I am old. I am --

*

*

(flips through notebook, paces)

I have nothing. She'll think I'm an idiot. Why couldn't I stay on that diet? She'll pretend not to be disappointed, but I'll see that look, that look --

*

*

*

(passes mirror, glances quickly at reflection, looks away)

God, I'm repulsive.

(another glance)

*

*

But as repulsive as I think? My Body Dysmorphic Disorder confuses everything. I mean, I *know* people call me Fatty behind my back. Or Fatso. Or, facetiously, Slim. But I also realize this is my own perverted form of self-aggrandizement, that no one talks about me at all. What possible interest is an old, bald, fat man to anyone?

*

*

*

*

*

3 EXT. STATE ROAD 29 - DAWN

3

A lonely two-lane highway cutting through swampland.

(CONTINUED)

3 CONTINUED:

3

BRITISH NARRATOR

As natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection.

Suddenly, a beat-up white van barrels around a curve. It's followed closely by an old green Ford.

SUBTITLE: STATE ROAD 29, FLORIDA, FIVE YEARS EARLIER

4 INT. WHITE VAN - CONTINUOUS

4

John Laroche, a skinny man with no front teeth, drives. The van is piled with bags of potting soil, gardening junk. A Writings of Charles Darwin audio cassette case is on the seat next to Laroche.

*

BRITISH NARRATOR

It is interesting to contemplate an entangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing...

Laroche tries to contemplate the plants and birds whizzing by. Almost too late, he spots the Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve sign and makes a squealing right onto the dirt road turn-off. The cassette case flies from the seat and half-buries itself in an open bag of peat.

5 INT. GREEN FORD - CONTINUOUS

5

Nirvana blasts. Russell, Vinson, and Randy, three young Indian men, pass a joint and watch the erratic van ahead.

RUSSELL

Laroche is asleep at the wheel.

RANDY

Crazy White Man is now Drowsy White Man.

They share a stoned laugh.

6 EXT. NEW YORK OFFICE BUILDING - NIGHT

6

SUBTITLE: NEW YORKER MAGAZINE, TWO YEARS LATER

Late night street. The click-click of typing. We move slowly up the building to the only glowing window.

(CONTINUED)

6 CONTINUED:

6

ORLEAN (O.S.)

(wistful)

John Laroche is a tall guy, skinny as a stick, pale-eyed, slouch-shouldered and sharply handsome despite the fact that he is missing all his front teeth.

*

7 INT. OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

7

We glide over a desk piled with orchid books, past a photo of Laroche tacked to an overwhelmed bulletin board, and come to rest on a woman typing. It's Susan Orlean: pale, delicate and blond. We lose ourselves in her melancholy beauty.

*

ORLEAN (V.O.)

I went to Florida two years ago to write a piece for the New Yorker. It was after reading a small article about a white man and three Seminole men arrested with rare orchids they'd stolen out of a place called...

*

*

*

*

8 INT. RANGER'S TRUCK - MID-MORNING

8

Tony, a ranger, drives past the Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve sign and enters the swamp. He sees the white van and Ford parked ahead, spots a Seminole license plate on the Ford. He pulls over down the road, whispers into his C.B.

*

*

TONY

We got *Seminoles*, in the swamp.

Tony waits for a response. Nothing.

TONY (cont'd)

I repeat, Indians in the swamp.

Tony clears his throat into the radio.

RADIO VOICE

I don't know what you want me to say.

TONY

Barry, Indians do not go on swamp walks. If there are Indians in the swamp, they are in there for a reason.

No response. Tony glowers, gets out of the truck, watches the vehicles through binoculars. Nothing. He straightens his cap. Mosquitoes land on his neck, his nose, his lips.

9 INT. L.A. BUSINESS LUNCH RESTAURANT - MIDDAY

9

Kaufman, wearing his purple sweater sans tags, sits with Valerie, an attractive woman in wire-rim glasses. They pick at salads. Kaufman steals glances at her lips, her hair, her breasts. She looks up at him. He blanches, looks down. *

KAUFMAN

She looked at my hairline. She thinks I'm old. She thinks I'm fat. She -- *

VALERIE

We think you're great. *

KAUFMAN

Oh, thanks, wow. That's nice to hear.

A rivulet of sweat slides down his forehead. Valerie watches it. Kaufman sees her watching it. She sees him seeing her watching it. She looks at her salad. He quickly swabs. *

VALERIE

We all just loved the Malkovich script. *

KAUFMAN

Thank you. That's... I appreciate that. *

VALERIE

(still looking at her salad)
Such a unique voice. Boy, I'd love to find a portal into *your* brain. *

KAUFMAN

(laughing)
Trust me, it's no fun. *

VALERIE

(laughs)
So you're in production, right? *

KAUFMAN

Yeah, it is. They are. We are. *

VALERIE

That must be so exciting. *

KAUFMAN

Yeah *

Uncomfortable silence. Kaufman tries to fill it. *

KAUFMAN (cont'd)

It's exciting to see one's work produced. *

(CONTINUED)

VALERIE
 (looking up)
 I bet.
 (looking up)
 So --

*
 *

Kaufman looks up, too. His brow is dripping again. Valerie pretends not to notice.

*
 *

VALERIE (cont'd)
 Good. So, tell me your thoughts on this crazy little project of ours.

*

In one motion, Kaufman swabs his forehead and pulls a book entitled The Orchid Thief from his bag.

KAUFMAN
 First, I think it's a great book.

VALERIE
 Laroche is a fun character, isn't he?

Kaufman nods, flips through the book, stalling. A photo of author Susan Orlean smiles from the inside back cover.

*
 *

KAUFMAN
 Absolutely. And Orlean makes orchids so fascinating. Plus her musings on Florida, orchid poaching. Indians. Great, sprawling New Yorker stuff. I'd want to remain true to that, let the movie *exist* rather than be artificially plot driven.

VALERIE
 Okay, great, great. I guess I'm not exactly sure what that means.

*

KAUFMAN
 Oh. Well... I like to let my work evolve, so I'd want to go into it with sort of open-ended kind of... and also not force it into a typical movie form.

*
 *
 *
 *

VALERIE
 Oh. That sounds interesting... what you're saying. I mean, I'm intrigued.

*

KAUFMAN
 (blurting)
 It's just, I don't want to ruin it by making it a Hollywood product. Like, an orchid heist movie or something.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

KAUFMAN (cont'd)

Or changing the orchids into poppies and turning it into a movie about drug running. Y'know? Why can't there be a movie simply about flowers? That's all.

VALERIE

That's what we're thinking. Definitely.

*

KAUFMAN

Like, I don't want to cram in sex, or car chases, or guns. Or characters learning profound life lessons. Or growing or coming to like each other or overcoming obstacles to succeed in the end. Y'know? The book isn't like that. Life isn't like that. It just isn't. I feel very strongly about this.

*

*

*

*

Kaufman is sweating like crazy now. Valerie is quiet. We hear Kaufman's self-flagellating voice-over through the silence, but we can't make out the words. Then:

*

*

*

VALERIE

I guess we thought maybe Susan Orlean and Laroche could fall in and --

*

*

KAUFMAN

Okay, but to me -- this alienated journalist writing about a passionate backwoods guy and he teaches her to love-- that's like... fake. I mean, it didn't happen. It wouldn't happen.

*

*

*

SUBTITLE: HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA, THREE WEEKS EARLIER

The office is decorated with potted flowers, Audubon posters, lots of books. Margaret, a soulful development executive, unpack boxes. Kaufman appears in the open doorway. In the hall behind him are framed posters for action movies.

*

*

KAUFMAN

Knock knock.

Margaret turns.

MARGARET

Char-lay Kauf-man!

She hugs him enthusiastically.

MARGARET (cont'd)
What are you doing in this Godforsaken
hell-hole?

KAUFMAN
Meeting upstairs.

*

MARGARET
(mock impressed)
Ooh, with Robert? Ooh.

*

KAUFMAN
(smiles, nods)
So... just wanted to say hello,
congratulate you on the promotion.
Pretty fancy office, Margie!

*

*

MARGARET
Well, thanks. It's all so stupid.

KAUFMAN
It's great. Are you kidding? I saw your
photo in Variety and everything. Very
very cool.

*

MARGARET
Oh, God, such an awful picture.

KAUFMAN
You looked great.

MARGARET
Anyway. So what's with you? Come in,
man. Take a load off.

Kaufman enters, sits on the couch. Margaret closes the door.

MARGARET (cont'd)
(mock whisper)
Lousy with spies.

Kaufman laughs. Margaret sits down next to him. He tenses
at the closeness, covers by talking.

*

KAUFMAN
I'm considering jobs. Mostly crap.
There's one you might like, about
flowers.

MARGARET
Flowers? Really?

*

KAUFMAN

Demme's company wants to adapt this book
The Orchid Thief. About orchids.

*

MARGARET

Cool. You should definitely do it.

*

Kaufman is thrilled; he's scored.

KAUFMAN

I loved the book is all.

*

MARGARET

I'll read it. You're all the
recommendation I need.

(presses button on phone)

Andy, could you get a book called The
Orchid Thief by...

*

KAUFMAN

Susan Orlean.

MARGARET

Susan Orlean. Thanks.

(hangs up, smiles at him)

If anyone could figure out how to do a
movie about flowers, it would be you.

*

KAUFMAN

I dunno. I'd like to try. Y'know?

MARGARET

You should. Jesus, somebody needs to
save us all. And it sounds exciting, to
immerse yourself in a real subject and
learn everything about it. Get paid for
it! Charlie! Not this movie bullshit,
sex and drug deals and violence.

(looks up at ceiling and yells)

God, Robert, I'm so sick of it!

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

KAUFMAN

(looking at ceiling)

Margaret.

*

*

MARGARET

I don't care.

(looking up, yelling)

I don't care, Robert!

(back to Kaufman)

Hey, you know that Blake line about
seeing heaven in a wild flower? That's
the fucking truth, man.

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

(CONTINUED)

KAUFMAN

I know. *

MARGARET

I know you know. *

(conspiratorially) *

After you learn all this flower stuff,
you can teach me. *

KAUFMAN

(thrilled but controlled)

That'd be fun. *

11 EXT. MURKY POOL OF WATER - DAY 11

SUBTITLE: THE EARTH, THREE BILLION YEARS AGO

We move into the pool, closer, closer, until we see a single-cell organism multiplying. Soon there are millions of them. *

12 EXT. SWAMP - MORNING 12

Hot, dirty, miserable. Laroche leads the Indians through waist-high black water. He points out a turtle on a rock.

LAROCHE

Pseudemys floridana. Did you fellas know you fellas believe the world rests on the back of a turtle? Not you fellas specifically. Although, maybe you fellas specifically. That I can't speak to.

The Indians ignore him. They trudge. Laroche spots something else, a dull green root wrapped around a tree. He stops, circles the tree. His eyes widen in reverent awe.

LAROCHE (cont'd)

A ghost. *Polyrrhiza Lindenii*.

The Indians come around. Laroche stares at a single beautiful, glowing white flower hanging from the tree. He tenderly caresses the petals. Then, business-like:

LAROCHE (cont'd)

Cut it down, Russell.

Russell pulls out a hacksaw, begins sawing through the tree.

13 INT. RESTAURANT - MIDDAY 13

Kaufman still sweats as he talks to Valerie.

(CONTINUED)

KAUFMAN

...plus I love the idea of learning all about orchids and trying to do something simple. My stuff tends to be weird.

*
*

VALERIE

But not weird for weird's sake.

*

KAUFMAN

Thanks. That's nice to hear. But I'm ready to challenge myself. I don't want to get by on quiriness. I don't want to fall back on weirdness the way other writers fall back on sex and violence. I want to think differently.

*
*
*
*
*

VALERIE

Adapting someone else's work is certainly an opportunity to think differently.

KAUFMAN

Yeah. I'd like to take something real like orchids and show people how profound they are. It's like, show people heaven in a wildflower. As Blake said.

*
*
*

14 INT. PET STORE (1972) - DAY

14

SUBTITLE: NORTH MIAMI, TWENTY-SIX YEARS EARLIER

A serious ten year old boy walks from cage to aquarium, studying the inhabitants. He turns to his frumpy mother, who is sitting with a frail, listless, anemic-looking little girl. The girl rests her head on the mother's shoulder.

*
*
*

BOY

Any animal at all, ma?

*

She nods sweetly. The boy returns to his search. He stops at a small turtle in an aquarium.

BOY (cont'd)

I want a turtle then. This one.

*

MOTHER

(hugging him)

A wonderful choice!

(to the girl)

Don't you think so, Diane?

*
*

The glassy-eyed girl doesn't respond. The mother strokes the girl's hair as she talks to the boy.

*
*

(CONTINUED)

14 CONTINUED:

14

MOTHER (cont'd)
And spiritually significant. Did you know Native Americans believe the whole world rests on the back of a turtle?

*
*
*

BOY
Cool! I can't wait to tell the guys!

*

15 EXT. SWAMP - MORNING

15

As Laroche supervises, Randy, Russell, and Vinson saw through tree branches supporting lovely flowering orchids. They unceremoniously stuff the flowers into bulging pillowcases.

16 INT. ROMANTIC RESTAURANT - EVENING

16

Kaufman eats with Margaret. Margaret raises a glass.

MARGARET
To a fucking awesome assignment, man. The book is just amazing. I can't thank you enough for telling me about it.

Kaufman, thrilled, clicks glasses.

KAUFMAN
God, I'm just so pleased you liked it. (He takes a breath)
Hey, I'm going to an orchid show in Santa Barbara on Sunday? For research? Maybe you'll come?

*
*

MARGARET
Absolutely.

KAUFMAN
Great! Great! We could have breakfast first or whatever?

MARGARET
That sounds nice. I think David, this guy I'm seeing, would enjoy it, too. He's a naturalist. Okay if he comes?

*

KAUFMAN
(covering heartbreak)
Yeah, of course. Sure.

MARGARET
He wants to meet you anyway. All I do is tell him how great you are. He probably hates you already.

(CONTINUED)

KAUFMAN

Oh, okay. That sounds good.

MARGARET

You'll like him. He's just honest and smart. I'm sure you know, it's impossible to find someone in this town who thinks about things other than the fucking business.

KAUFMAN

He sounds great.

MARGARET

Like the other day we were in bed discussing Hegel. Hegel! In bed! After really hot sex! Like my dream come true. I mean, in this goddamn town?

(marvels at this for a moment, then:)

Have you read much?

KAUFMAN

Y'know, a long time ago. A bit. Y'know.

MARGARET

Well, anyway, David and I were joking about the Philosophy of History. You've read that, right?

KAUFMAN

Um, long time ago, so...

MARGARET

So I was lying there...

*

The entrees arrive.

*

MARGARET (cont'd)

... kind of post-coital dreamy....

(to waiter)

Thanks.

(to Kaufman)

... and I was suddenly struck by how profound the notion is that history is a human construct...

*
*
*
*
*

Kaufman begins the laborious task of getting through his plate of food. He can no longer look up at Margaret.

KAUFMAN

Uh-huh.

(CONTINUED)

16 CONTINUED: (2)

16

MARGARET

... that nature doesn't exist historically, but rather cyclically. So whereas human history spirals forward, building upon itself, nature...

17 EXT. OCEAN - DAY

17 *

SUBTITLE: EARTH, ONE BILLION YEARS EARLIER

Odd, small blind jellyfish collide, recoil, and hover.

*

18 INT. BARNES AND NOBLE - DAY

18

Kaufman grabs some orchid books off the shelf, carries them to the register, along with a book on Hegel which features an engraving of the philosopher on the cover. Kaufman waits in line and watches a tattooed female cashier flirting with the handsome guy ahead of him. With every fiber of his being, he studies their interaction, the way she looks at him, the body language. Her eyes, her lips. The guy finally leaves and the cashier waves Kaufman over. As she rings him up, she expresses no interest in him. He's hurt and fixates on a sexy flower tattoo on her arm. She pulls down her sleeve.

19 EXT. JANES SCENIC DRIVE - MORNING

19

Tony waits, sweaty and mosquito bitten. The radio crackles.

RADIO VOICE

How's that Injun round-up going, Tony?

*

Rustling near the parked cars. Tony tenses. Laroche steps from the swamp with the Indians, who haul the pillowcases.

TONY (cont'd)

(into the radio, pleased)

*

Ha!

*

Tony jumps into the truck and turns it around.

20 INT. ORLEAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

20

Orlean types. Her delicate fingers move with a pianist's grace across the computer keyboard.

ORLEAN (V.O.)

Orchid hunting is a mortal occupation.

21 EXT. TROPICAL RIVER - DAY

21

SUBTITLE: ORINOCO RIVER, ONE HUNDRED YEARS EARLIER

(CONTINUED)

21 CONTINUED:

21

An overturned boat and uprooted orchids float on the river.

ORLEAN (V.O.)

The Victorian-era orchid hunter William Arnold drowned on a collecting expedition.

22 EXT. CLIFF - DAY

22

SUBTITLE: SIERRA LEONE

A man lies at the bottom of a cliff, clutching a flower.

ORLEAN (V.O.)

Schroeder fell to his death.

*

23 OMITTED

23

*

24 EXT. RIVER - DAY

24

SUBTITLE: YANGTZE RIVER

An emaciated, limping, wheezing man with a makeshift bandage wrapped around his head, docks his boat.

ORLEAN (V.O.)

Augustus Margary survived toothache, rheumatism, pleurisy, and dysentery...

Someone steps from behind a bush, stabs him, steals his boat.

ORLEAN (V.O.) (cont'd)

... only to be murdered when he completed his mission and traveled beyond Bhamo.

The murderer sails down river.

ORLEAN (V.O.) (cont'd)

Laroche loved orchids but I came to believe he loved the difficulty and fatality of getting them almost as much as he loved the orchids themselves.

25 EXT. JANES SCENIC DRIVE - MORNING

25

Tony steps out of his truck. Laroche smiles warmly.

TONY

Morning. May I ask what you gentlemen have in those pillowcases?

LAROCHE

Yes, sir, you absolutely may.

(CONTINUED)

Laroche goes back to directing the Indians. Tony's confused.

TONY

Okay, I'm asking then.

LAROCHE

Oh, Okay then! Let's see...

(peeking in bags)

Five kinds of bromeliad, one peperomia, nine orchid varieties. About a hundred and thirty plants all told, which my colleagues have removed from the swamp.

TONY

You're aware that it's illegal to remove plants or animals from state owned land?

LAROCHE

And don't forget these plants are all endangered, sir. Every one of them.

TONY

Exactly. Well, that's exactly the issue. This is a state preserve.

LAROCHE

Yes, sir, it is.

(afterthought)

Oh, and my colleagues are all Seminole Indians. Did I mention that? You're familiar, I'm sure, with the *State of Florida v. James E. Billie*.

Tony nods, even though he has no idea.

LAROCHE (cont'd)

So you know that even though Seminole Chief Billie killed a Florida panther, one of, what, *forty* in the entire world?

Laroche looks to the Indians for confirmation. They give it.

LAROCHE (cont'd)

The state couldn't successfully prosecute him. Because he's an Indian and it's his right. As repugnant as you or I as white conservationists might find his actions.

TONY

But --

(CONTINUED)

LAROCHE

Not to mention the failed attempts on three separate occasions to prosecute Seminoles for poaching palm fronds, which, I believe, they use to thatch the roofs of their traditional chickee huts.

Larocche again looks to the Indians for confirmation.

RUSSELL

He's right. That's exactly what we use them for. Chickee huts.

Tony looks at the Indians.

RANDY

Yeah.

VINSON

Yeah.

RUSSELL

Yeah.

TONY

Yeah, but I don't... I can't let you fellas go yet. Just hold on while I...
(into radio)
Hey, Barry, can I get some help? Barry?

26 INT. RENTAL CAR - DAY

26

Orlean drives out of the Miami Airport parking lot. *

ORLEAN (V.O.)

Nothing in Florida seems hard or permanent.

She passes urban congestion and garish billboards advertising nature theme parks. *

ORLEAN (V.O.) (cont'd)

The developed places are just little clearings in the jungle...

Orlean drives past endless swampland.

ORLEAN (V.O.) (cont'd)

... but the jungle is unstoppably fertile, everything is always growing or expanding. At the same time, the wilderness disappears before your eyes.

27 INT. HOTEL ROOM - AFTERNOON 27

Orlean unpacks her suitcase on the bed. The TV is turned to the hotel information channel. On the screen a pretty woman walks us through what to do in case of fire. Orlean finishes organizing her stuff. She sits blankly on the bed for a long time, then starts to weep inconsolably.

*
*
*
*
*

28 EXT. RIVER'S EDGE - DAY/NIGHT 28

SUBTITLE: EARTH, THREE HUNDRED MILLION YEARS EARLIER

Simple green flowerless plants line the water. In a time lapse sequence, the plants grow, wither, die. They are replaced by new plants which go through the same process. This happens many times in an accelerating sequence.

*
*
*

29 EXT. BIG SPANISH-STYLE HOUSE - DAY 29

Kaufman gets out of his car with his books. Two teenage girls walk by. Kaufman watches as one whispers to the other. He thinks he hears the word "Fatso." The girls giggle.

30 INT. EMPTY HOUSE - A COUPLE OF MINUTES LATER 30

Kaufman passes a hall mirror, regards himself glumly, and climbs the stairs.

KAUFMAN (V.O.)

I am fat. I am repulsive. I cannot bear my own reflection.

At the landing Kaufman comes upon Donald, his identical twin brother, on his back in pajama bottoms and his new purple sweater.

*
*

DONALD

Did you wear your sweater from mom yet? Comfy.

*
*

KAUFMAN

What's with you?

DONALD

My back.

Kaufman nods vaguely, continues down the hall.

*

DONALD (cont'd)

Hey, Charles, you'll be glad, I have a plan to get me out of your house *pronto*.

(CONTINUED)

KAUFMAN

A job is a plan. Is your plan a job?

DONALD

Drumroll, please
(supplies it)

I'm gonna be a screenwriter! Like you!

Kaufman doesn't respond, enters his bedroom.

DONALD (cont'd)

Okay, I know you think this is just one of my get-rich-quick schemes. But I'm doing it right this time. I'm taking a three-day seminar!

*

31 INT. EMPTY BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

31

Kaufman lies face down on his mattress on the floor.

DONALD (O.S.)

It's only five hundred bucks!

KAUFMAN

(muffled by pillow)

Screenwriting seminars are bullshit.

Kaufman pulls a photo of Margaret, clipped from a trade paper, from under his pillow. He gets lost in the picture.

DONALD (O.S.)

In theory I agree with you. Okay? But this one is highly regarded within the industry.

KAUFMAN

Donald, don't say "industry."

Donald appears on all fours in the doorway. Kaufman puts the paper back under his pillow.

*

DONALD

I'm sorry, I forgot. Charles, this guy *knows* screenwriting. People come from all over to study his method. I'll pay you back, buddy. As soon as I sell --

*

KAUFMAN

Let me explain something to you.

DONALD

Yeah, okay.

(CONTINUED)

KAUFMAN

Anybody who says he's got "the answer" is going to attract desperate people. Be it in the world of religion --

DONALD

(indicating his back)

I just need to lie down while you explain this to me. Sorry. I apologize.

(lies down, stares at ceiling)

Okay, go ahead. Sorry. Okay. Go.

KAUFMAN

There are no rules to follow, Donald, and anybody who says there are, is just --

DONALD

Not rules, *principles*. McKee writes: "A rule says, you *must* do it *this way*. A principle says, this *works*... and *has* through all remembered time."

KAUFMAN

The script I'm starting, it's about flowers. No one's ever done a movie about flowers before. So, there're no guidelines, and --

*

DONALD

What about Flowers for Algernon?

KAUFMAN

That's not about flowers. And it's not a movie. There was a book --

*

DONALD

Oh, okay, I never saw it. Okay, keep going. Hey, what about Cactus Flower? I saw that. There's definitely a flower in *that*.

*
*
*
*

KAUFMAN

Look, my point is, those teachers are dangerous if your goal is to do something new. And a writer should always have that goal. Writing is a journey into the unknown, not building a model airplane.

*

*

Donald stares at the ceiling, fuming. Kaufman waits. Getting no response, he pulls out his Hegel book and reads:

31 CONTINUED: (2)

31

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

Each being is, because posited, an op-
posited, a conditional and conditioning,
the Understanding completes these its
limitations by positing the opposite...

Kaufman's head is spinning. He puts the book down. Both
brothers stare at the ceiling. Donald finally speaks

DONALD

McKee is a former Fulbright scholar. Are
you a former Fulbright scholar, Charles?

Kaufman looks over at Donald's repulsive girth.

32 INT. LIBRARY - DAY

32

SUBTITLE: CONNECTICUT, TWENTY-FOUR YEARS EARLIER

A teenaged Kaufman reads a book. He looks out the window
onto a courtyard where kids are smoking and eating lunch. He
spots Donald chatting up two pretty girls. They seem to be
enjoying Donald. He says good-bye and walks happily away.

GIRL

Bye, Donald!

*

*

The girls look at each other and giggle maliciously. One
puffs out her cheeks.

32A INT. EMPTY LIVING ROOM - DAY

32A

*

Kaufman stares at a blank sheet of paper in a typewriter.

*

33-34 OMITTED

33-34

*

35 EXT. SWAMP - LATE MORNING

35

*

Ranger, sheriff, and state police cars are parked near the
van and Ford. Lots of sweating, uniformed people. The
pillowcases have been emptied, the plants lie on black
plastic sheets. A guy sprinkles water on them. Laroche
enthusiastically helps Ranger Mike Owen catalogue the
flowers. The Indians lean against their car, bored and
smoking. Nirvana seeps tinnily out the car window.

LAROCHE

... and what we have here, my friend, is
... thirteen *Encyclia Cochleata*... four
Encyclia Tampensis --

MIKE OWEN

I'm sorry, *Encyclia* what?

(CONTINUED)

LAROCHE
 (pointing to each)
Coch-le-ata. Tem-pen-sis.
 (checks Owen's spelling)
 Okay, let's see, twenty-two *Epidendrum Nocturnum*. A very good haul. Two *Catopsi Floribunda*. Three *Polyrrhiza Lindenii*, the ghost orchid. What I really came for. These sweeties grow nowhere in the U.S. except in your swamp.

MIKE OWEN
 That true? Boy, you really know your plants, Mr. Laroche.

LAROCHE
 Yeah. I do. I'm one of the world's foremost experts. But that'll all be revealed at the hearing.

35A INT. EMPTY KITCHEN - DAY

35A *

Kaufman talks on the phone as he prepares a salad. *

KAUFMAN
 Hi, my name is Charlie Kaufman and I'm writing a screenplay based on Susan Orlean's book The Orc -- *

MIKE OWEN
 Oh, hi! *

KAUFMAN
 Hi. So, I want to come down to the Fakahatchee and -- *

MIKE OWEN
 Great! We'd love to have ya'. *

KAUFMAN
 Yeah, and I was wondering if you could give me a little information about supplies I might need, y'know, bug sprays -- *

MIKE OWEN
 Bug spray would be helpful. *

KAUFMAN
 Bug spray. I can do that. *

MIKE OWEN
 You might want the strongest you can
 find. With Deet. Mosquito netting. I
 like to josh it's a little like walking
 through a biting, buzzing, gray could.
 Long sleeves. Heavy, heavy pants.
 You'll be trudging through acidic, thigh-
 high water. And the water's black, so
 you won't be able to see the snakes.

*
*
*
*
*
*
*
*

KAUFMAN
 Okay.

*
*

MIKE OWEN
 Or the alligators. So a strong boot,
 something they won't easily bite through.

*
*
*

KAUFMAN
 (clearly not going)
 Sounds good. So I'll check my schedule
 and get back to you.

*
*
*
*

MIKE OWEN
 Look forward to it!

*
*

36 INT. EMPTY DINING ROOM - A BIT LATER

36

Kaufman sits at a card table in the otherwise empty room. He
 picks at his salad and reads Orlean's book. Donald lies on
 the floor, chomping a hoagie and reading a copy of Story by
 Robert McKee.

*
*
*

KAUFMAN
 The Orchidaceae is a large, ancient
 family of perennial plants with...

*

Kaufman, bored, looks over at Donald, whose cheeks are
 stuffed with food.

DONALD (V.O.)
 The most memorable, fascinating
 characters tend to have not only a
 conscious but an unconscious desire.
 Although these characters are unaware of
 their subconscious need --

KAUFMAN
 Maybe you should watch what you eat,
 Donald. Did you ever consider maybe
 you're a bit fat? Does it ever occur to
 you, you kind of represent me in the
 world?

(MORE)

KAUFMAN (cont'd)
That people look at you and think, he's Charlie's twin, therefore that's what Charlie must look like?

DONALD
By the way, mom's paying for the seminar.

KAUFMAN
Did you even hear what I said?

DONALD
Yeah. Anyway. I pitched mom my screenplay --

KAUFMAN
Don't say "pitch."

DONALD
Sorry. Anyway, she loved my... telling of my story to her. She said it's "Silence of the Lambs" meets "Psycho."

KAUFMAN
Hey, maybe you and mom could collaborate. I hear she's really good with structure.

DONALD
You think you're so superior, Charles. Well, I'm really gonna write this. And you'll see. And, and... you *suck*, okay?

The two glare at each other. They go back to their books.

KAUFMAN (V.O.)
The Orchidaceae is a large, ancient family of perennial plants with...

DONALD (V.O.)
Do not proliferate characters; do not multiply locations. Rather than hopscotching through time, space, and people, discipline yourself to a reasonably contained cast and world...

SUBTITLE: FLORIDA, THREE YEARS EARLIER

Orlean drives on State Road 29, past prefab housing.

ORLEAN (V.O.)
Florida is a landscape of transition and mutation...

38 INT. EMPTY BEDROOM - DAY

38

Kaufman traces a stubby, nail-bitten finger along State Road 29 along a Florida road map. He turns to his typewriter, and types in a clumsy hunt-and-peck style.

KAUFMAN (V.O.)

We open on State Road 29.

(stops, stares off)

It's swampy and lonely.

(typing)

A lonely stretch of road cutting through untamed swampland.

(stops, thinks, types)

A white van appears from around a curve.

Its driver: a skinny man with no front teeth. This is John Laroche.

*
*
*

39 INT. COURT ROOM - DAY

39

The proceedings are in progress. Orlean hurries in, sits in the back. Laroche, in a Miami Hurricanes cap, wrap-around Mylar sunglasses, and a Hawaiian shirt, is on the stand. Alan Lerner, the tribe's lawyer, questions him.

LERNER

Finally, Mr. Laroche, what is your experience in the area of horticulture?

LAROCHE

Okay, I've been a professional horticulturist for twelve years. I've owned a plant nursery of my own which was destroyed by the hurricane. I'm a professional plant lecturer. I've given at least sixty lectures on the cultivation of plants. I'm a published author, both in magazine and book form. I have extensive experience with orchids, and the asexual micropropagation of orchids under aseptic cultures. This is laboratory work, not at all like your nursery work.

(grins)

I'm probably the smartest person I know.

LERNER

Thank you.

LAROCHE

You're very welcome.

40 INT. BARNES AND NOBLE - DAY 40

As she rings up his books, Kaufman admires the cashier's flower tattoo. She catches him and smiles with red, wet, pierced lips. She unbuttons her blouse and shows him a breast with a heart tattoo. A sweet heartbeat turns to knocking.

41 INT. EMPTY BEDROOM - NIGHT 41

Kaufman, in bed masturbating, looks up at the closed door.

KAUFMAN

What?!

The door opens. Donald stands there for a moment in shadows.

DONALD

Look, you wanna hear my pitch, or what?

KAUFMAN

Go away. God damn it.

DONALD

(lost)

Y'know, I'm just trying to do something.

Kaufman squints at his brother, sits up, waits.

DONALD (CONT'D)

Hey, thanks a lot, man. Cool.

(flicks on light, then in pitch mode:)

Okay, there's this serial killer, right --

Kaufman groans, lies down, stares at the ceiling. *

DONALD (CONT'D)

No, wait. See, he's being hunted by a cop. And he's taunting the cop, right? Sending clues who his next victim is. He's already holding her hostage in his creepy basement. So the cop gets obsessed with figuring out her identity, and in the process he falls in love with her. Even though he's never even met her. She becomes, like, the unattainable, like the Holy Grail.

KAUFMAN

It's a little obvious, don't you think? *

(CONTINUED)

DONALD

Okay, but there's a twist. See, we find out the killer suffers from multiple personality disorder. Okay? See, he's really also the cop *and* the girl. All of them are him! Isn't that fucked-up?

Donald waits, proud.

*

KAUFMAN

The only idea more overused than serial killers, is multiple personality. On top of that you explore the notion that cop and criminal are really two aspects of the same person. See every cop movie ever made for other examples of this.

DONALD

Mom called it psychologically taut.

KAUFMAN

The other thing is, there's no way to write this. Did you consider that? I mean, how could you have someone held prisoner in a basement and working in a police station at the same time?

DONALD

Trick photography?

KAUFMAN

Okay, that's not what I'm asking. Listen closely, what I'm asking is... in the reality of this movie, if there's only one character, right?... Okay? How could you... What exactly would the...

*

Donald waits blankly. Kaufman gives up, gets out of bed.

KAUFMAN (cont'd)

I agree with mom. Very taut. *Sybil* meets.. I dunno, *Dressed to Kill*.

*

*

Kaufman dresses and exits.

DONALD

(calling after)

Cool. I really liked *Dressed to Kill*... until the third act denouement.

*

KAUFMAN (O.S.)

That's not how it's pronounced.

(CONTINUED)

41 CONTINUED: (2)

41

DONALD

Oh. Okay. Sorry.

42 EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

42

Orlean exits the courthouse and watches Laroche in a huddle with Lerner, Vinson, and Buster Baxley, vice-president of the tribe's business operations. They're all smoking intently.

*

LAROCHÉ

They're gonna fucking crucify me.

BUSTER

I'll go into the Fakahatchee with a chainsaw. I swear to God.

*

LERNER

Buster, for crying out loud, I handled it. Didn't I remind her the Indians used to *own* Fakahatchee? Look, we'll deal with all this at trial.

Buster waves a dismissive hand at Lerner, walks away. Vinson shrugs, stubs his cigarette, follows Buster. Lerner and Laroche stand there a moment. Lerner walks off. Laroche cracks his neck. A charmingly shy Orlean approaches.

ORLEAN

Mr. Laroche?

Orlean smiles, apologetic for the intrusion.

ORLEAN (CONT'D)

My name's Susan Orlean, I'm a writer for the New Yorker. It's a maga --

LAROCHÉ

I'm familiar with the New Yorker. *The New Yorker, yes, the New Yorker.* Right?

ORLEAN

Right. So I was interested in doing a piece about your situation down here.

Laroche scowls, smokes furiously. Orlean tries some more.

*

ORLEAN (CONT'D)

I find your story really fascin --

*

*

LAROCHÉ

Yeah? Put this in: I don't care what goes on here.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

42 CONTINUED:

42

LAROCHE (cont'd)

I'm right, and I'll take this all the way to the Supreme Court. That judge can screw herself.

Orlean scribbles on her pad. Laroche twists his head to see that she's writing "Judge can screw herself."

LAROCHE (cont'd)

That for real would go in?

ORLEAN

Absolutely.

*
*

Laroche smiles his toothless smile at Orlean.

*

LAROCHE

I'll have to speak to my advisors.

*
*

43 EXT. FIELD - MORNING

43

MUSIC: lush, profound orchestral piece.

A glorious orange, large-petalled orchid blooms in dramatic time-lapse. We slowly, lovingly circle the flower.

SENSUOUS FEMALE NARRATOR

The Orchidaceae is a large, ancient family of perennial plants with one fertile stamen and a three petalled flower. In most orchid species, one petal is enlarged into a lip and is the most conspicuous part of the flower.

44 INT. CALIFORNIA PIZZA KITCHEN - DAY

44

Kaufman, in a booth, reads The Orchid Thief, takes notes.

*

KAUFMAN (V.O.)

The Orchidaceae is a large, ancient...

He's bored, looks up, watches a waitress with glorious, orange hair, pouty lips, soulful eyes, and a voluptuous form, turning slowly around, scanning her station. She sees Kaufman, approaches, and smiles warmly down at him. Her badge reads: Alice, Arcadia, CA. Kaufman sweats.

ALICE

So what looks good today?

KAUFMAN

Um, hi. The key lime pie, please. A small slice. I'm watching my... And a coffee, please. Skim milk. Please.

*

(CONTINUED)

44 CONTINUED:

44

ALICE
 (sees book)
 Orchids! I absolutely *love* orchids.

Kaufman goes blank.

KAUFMAN
 Cool!

*

He flinches at his lameness. A small awkward pause.

ALICE
 So, I'll be right back with your pie.

She smiles warmly again and leaves. Kaufman is humiliated.

45 EXT. ORCHID SHOW - DAY

45

Alice, in her CPK uniform, and Kaufman walk hand-in-hand, inspecting sexy orchids together. She smiles warmly at him.

ALICE
 I think these flowers are so sexy.

*

*

Alice stands very close to Kaufman. Her bare arm touches his. Kaufman looks at the touching arms. Alice continues to study the flower but intertwines her fingers in Kaufman's.

*

ALICE (cont'd)
 Let's see what's around back.

*

She leads Kaufman behind the display to a quiet, wooded area. She unbuttons her uniform. It falls to the ground, leaving her naked, dappled in sunlight, her beautiful red hair glowing. Kaufman drops to his knees in front of her and kisses her thighs, caresses her ass. Alice glides Kaufman's head to her crotch.

*

*

46 INT. EMPTY ROOM - NIGHT

46

Kaufman finishes jerking off. He lies lonely in the dark.

47 INT. GIRL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

47

SUBTITLE: CANTON, OHIO, FORTY-THREE YEARS EARLIER

*

It's dark. A lonely, little girl in a nightgown lies on her bed, holds a flashlight in one hand and writes in her diary with the other.

*

(CONTINUED)

47 CONTINUED:

47

LITTLE GIRL (V.O.)

Today I played with Mary. We had fun.
We played Mommy and Daddy. I got to be
the Mommy. It was very fun.

*

Footsteps in the hall. The little girl flicks off the
flashlight, closes her eyes. The door opens. A middle-aged
woman walks in, bumps tipsily into the dresser, sits on the
edge of the bed, looks at her daughter and cries quietly.

*

*

*

*

48 EXT. HOTEL PARKING LOT - MORNING

48

Orlean leans against a car and smokes. A tiny, lost figure.
There's a honk. Orlean snaps out of her reverie to see
Laroche screeching to a stop in his banged-up van.

ORLEAN (V.O.)

A few days after the hearing, Laroche
took me to an orchid show in Miami.

She opens the passenger door.

ORLEAN (cont'd)

Hi. Thanks for picking --

LAROUCHE

I want you to know this van is a piece of
shit. When I hit the jackpot, I'll buy
myself an awesome car. What are you
driving?

*

ORLEAN

An Aurora. It's my father's. He lives --

LAROUCHE

Awesome. I think I'll get one of those.

*

Orlean nods, climbs in, and tries to rearrange some of the
junk on the front seat so she'll have a place to sit.

LAROUCHE (cont'd)

Sit on top of that. You won't hurt it.

She situates herself on the edge of the seat, rests her feet
on an open bag of potting soil. Laroche lurches off.

*

49 INT. VAN - DAY

49

Laroche drives manically. Orlean watches the road and holds
one hand against the dashboard.

(CONTINUED)

LAROCHE

Where do these people learn to drive?
The world is insane. My theory is --

Orlean switches on a mini-cassette recorder, pulls out a notebook. Laroche clams up. Orlean tries to figure a way in.

ORLEAN

So I was so impressed to hear how accomplished you are in the world of horticulture and --

LAROCHE

Yeah, yeah. The thing you gotta know is my whole life is looking for a goddamn profitable plant. And that's the ghost.

We see that Orlean is writing "The world is insane."

ORLEAN

Uh-huh. Why the ghost orchid?

While Laroche talks, Orlean writes.

LAROCHE

The sucker's rare. Collectors covet what is not available. I'm the only one in the world who knows how to cultivate it.

She's writing: "skinny as a stick, posture of *al dente* spaghetti." Laroche looks over and smiles. Orlean smiles back.

ORLEAN

Uh-huh.

She indicates, with a small jerk of the head, that he might want to watch the road. He doesn't take the hint.

LAROCHE

The plan was, get the *Indians* to pull it from the swamp. I researched it. As long as I don't touch the plants, Florida can't touch us. Then I'd clone hundreds of them babies in my lab, sell 'em, and make the Seminoles a shitload of change.

Orlean writes: "crushes out cigarette, steers with knees as he lights another."

(CONTINUED)

LAROCHE (cont'd)
And I stop future poaching by making the
flowers readily available in stores.
Then I give a big speech at the trial
about how the legislature should get rid
of loopholes smart people like me can
find. I'm a hero. The flowers are
saved. Laroche and nature win.

Orlean writes: "guy is priceless."

LAROCHE (cont'd)
Did you get that last part?

ORLEAN
Yes, of course.

50-52 OMITTED

50-52

52A INT. 7 1/2 FLOOR SET - MORNING

52A

The set from Being John Malkovich. Crew people bustle about,
bending down as they enter the squat set. No one pays any
attention to Kaufman, who stands by himself to the side.
Donald is at the craft service table, picking at food.
Caroline, a pretty, young make-up woman, stops by the table.
Kaufman watches nervously as Donald eyes her. Finally Donald
says something to her. She looks over, says something back.
It's too far away to hear the conversation. Donald says
something else and Caroline laughs. The conversation warms
up. Kaufman can't believe his eyes. The assistant director
appears in the hall.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Scene 23 up next! All keys to set!

Catherine Keener and John Cusack pass Kaufman. They nod
perfunctorily.

KAUFMAN
Hey.

Cusack enters the hallway set.

KAUFMAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I'm fat. I'm old --

Keener sees Caroline, who's still chatting with Donald.

KEENER
(playfully)
Caroline, c'mon, jeez. We're shooting a
movie here. Let's go! Let's go!

(CONTINUED)

Kenner grabs Caroline pulls her down the hall. *

CAROLINE *
(laughing) *
You're insane, Keener! Let go! *

Kaufman watches. Donald approaches Kaufman. *

DONALD *
Hey, man. *

KAUFMAN *
Please don't hit on crew members, Donald. *

DONALD *
No, Caroline's a really nice girl. *

KAUFMAN *
Just don't embarrass me. Okay? I have *
to work with these people. *

DONALD *
I won't. Anyway, listen, I meant to ask *
you, I need a cool way to kill people. *
Don't worry! For my script! Ha ha! *

KAUFMAN *
I really don't write that kind of stuff. *

DONALD *
Oh, man, please. You're the genius. *

Kaufman stares at Donald, rubs his eyes, sighs. *

KAUFMAN *
Here you go. The killer's a literature *
professor. He cuts off little chunks of *
his victims' bodies until they die. He *
calls him "The Deconstructionist."

DONALD *
That's kinda good. I like that.

KAUFMAN *
See, I was kidding, Donald. *

DONALD *
Oh, okay. Sorry. You got me! Ha-ha. *
Do you mind if I use it, though?

53 INT. BOY'S BEDROOM (1972) - NIGHT 53

There are now many turtles in aquariums. Many turtle books and posters. The boy, in a turtle T-shirt, looks out the window into the darkness. His eyes are troubled.

MOTHER (O.S.)
 (praying softly)
 For certain is death for the born/And
 certain is birth for the dead

54 INT. LIVING ROOM (1972) - CONTINUOUS 54

The boy comes downstairs. His father, in a backbrace, watches TV; his sister lies on the couch, semi-conscious, more pale than before. His mother pats the girl's head with a damp cloth. There's a little Hindu altar with candles. *

MOTHER
 Therefore over the inevitable/Thou
 shouldst not grieve.
 (beat)
 Sweet, sweet Diane.

The boy surveys the sad scene. His mother looks up, smiles.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
 A slice of pie for my turtle expert?

The boy beams with pride, then gets solemn.

BOY
 Mom, there's something I feel I have to do. I don't know how to do this, but I feel in my stomach that I have to.

MOTHER
 What do you have to do, honey?

BOY
 Collect one of every turtle in the world.
 (beat)
 It's a long list, ma. *Cuora galbinifrons*, *Graptemys versa*, *Callagur borneoensis*, all the Galapagos species, people think there's only one, but that's not true. *Cycloderma frenatum*, *Cuora pani*...
 (sighs)
 I don't think my life is worth living if I can't do this.

The boy and his mother look at each other.

(CONTINUED)

54 CONTINUED:

54

MOTHER

Well, we'd better get started, huh, baby?

The boy nods his head solemnly.

55 INT. VAN - DAY

55

Laroche drives, solemnly nodding his head. Orlean studies him for a moment, her sad eyes wet and glistening. The tape recorder is on between them.

ORLEAN

Wow, that's some story. How many turtles did you end up collecting?

LAROUCHE

(matter-of-fact)

Oh, I lost interest right after that.

ORLEAN

Oh.

LAROUCHE

I dropped turtles when I fell in love with Ice Age fossils. Collected the shit out of 'em. Fossils were the only thing made any sense to me in this fucked-up world.

*

They drive in silence. Orlean watches a flying heron.

*

ORLEAN

I guess I'd like to know how you can just detach from something when you've invested so much of your soul --

*

LAROUCHE

Ditched fossils for resilvering old mirrors. My mom and I had the largest collection of 19th Century Dutch mirrors on the planet. Perhaps you read about us. Mirror World October '88? I have a copy somewhere...

*

Laroche fishes through junk as he drives. Orlean writes "What is Passion?" on her pad. She underlines it.

*

ORLEAN

So, did you ever miss the turtles? The only thing that made you ten year old life worth living?

(CONTINUED)

LAROCHE

I'll tell you a story. I once fell deeply, profoundly in love with tropical fish. I had sixty goddamn fish tanks in my house. I'd skin-dive to find just the right ones. *Anisotremus virginicus*, *Holacanthus ciliaris*, *Chaetodon capistratus*. You name it. Then one day I say, *fuck fish*. I renounce fish. I vow to never set foot in the ocean again, that's how much *fuck fish*. That was seventeen years ago and I have never since stuck so much as a toe into that ocean. And I love the ocean!

ORLEAN

(beat)

But why?

LAROCHE

(shrugs)

Done with fish. *

56 OMITTED

56 *

57 INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE - DAY

57

Kaufman sits in silence across from his female therapist.

KAUFMAN

I'm still masturbating a lot.

THERAPIST

Uh-huh.

(beat)

The same woman? *

KAUFMAN

I mean, not a lot a lot.

(beat)

No. Different woman. The new girl I'm obsessed with. *

THERAPIST

Burger King? Dimples and sparkly eyes? *

KAUFMAN

No. California Pizza Kitchen.

THERAPIST

Right. Red hair, likes orchids? *

Kaufman nods. *

(CONTINUED)

THERAPIST (CONT'D)

So do you think you'll talk to this one? *

57A EXT. SEMINOLE NURSERY - DAY

57A *

Orlean pulls up to the nursery. A few Indians are hauling plants. She recognizes Vinson from the courthouse. Today he's wearing a green t-shirt with white skulls. His long-black hair is braided. He's handsome. Orlean approaches. *

ORLEAN

Hi. I'm looking for John Laroche. *

Vinson comes over to her. His eyes are gentle. She's taken. *

ORLEAN (cont'd)

Hi. Hi. I'm writing an article about John and I thought I'd drop by to... *

VINSON

John's not here today. *

ORLEAN

Oh. *

(beat) *

So you were in the swamp with him, right? I saw you at the courthouse... is how I know. *

VINSON

Yes. I'm Vinson Osceola. *

ORLEAN

Susan Orlean. Could we maybe talk for a bit? I'm just trying to get a feel for -- *

VINSON

You have very beautiful hair. *

He gently reaches out and touches it. *

ORLEAN

Oh. Thank you. I washed it this morning, so... I'm using a new conditioner and... Anyway... Oy... *

VINSON

I can see your sadness. It's lovely. My heart holds yours. *

ORLEAN

(taken aback) *

I'm just a little tired. *

(CONTINUED)

Vinson nods, completely present.

*

ORLEAN (cont'd)

*

So maybe we could go and chat. I could get some background for the --

*

*

VINSON

*

I'm not going to talk to you much. It's not personal. It's the Indian way.

*

*

Vinson smiles. It cuts right through her. He touches her hand and heads back to work. She watches him haul potted plants, immersed in the activity, muscles straining against his shirt. Orlean scribbles "He turns me on" on her notepad. She just stands there.

*

*

*

*

*

58 INT. CALIFORNIA PIZZA KITCHEN - DAY

58

*

Kaufman, hair combed, sits nervously in a booth, watching Alice. He tenses as she comes up to him. She smiles warmly.

*

KAUFMAN

Hi!

ALICE

Hey! Some key lime pie for ya today?

KAUFMAN

(thrilled she remembered)

Okay, yeah. That sounds great.

ALICE

I'll pick you out an extra large piece. Preferred customer.

She winks at him. He's so in love.

KAUFMAN

Thank you. That's really sweet of you.

ALICE

Well, I'm just a sweetie, ain't I. Still reading about orchids, I hope.

*

KAUFMAN

Yes, I am, in fact!

*

ALICE

A friend of mine has this pretty little pink one, grows right on a tree branch. Just like that. I can't remem --

*

KAUFMAN

That's what's called an epiphyte.

ALICE

(pointing at him excitedly)
Right! Right! Boy, you know your stuff!

KAUFMAN

Not really. I'm just learning.
Epiphytes grow on trees, but they're not
parasites. They get all their
nourishment from the air and rain.

ALICE

Well, I'm impressed. That's great.

Awkward pause.

KAUFMAN

There are more than thirty thousand kinds
of orchids in the world.

ALICE

Wow, that's a lot, huh?

KAUFMAN

Yeah.

ALICE

So I'll be right back with a big slice of
key lime pie for my orchid expert.

He beams. She smiles and turns to leave. Kaufman blurts:

KAUFMAN

But, so, anyway, I was also wondering...

Alice turns back, still smiling.

KAUFMAN (cont'd)

I'm going up to this orchid show on
Saturday in Santa Barbara? And I --

Alice's smile slips away. Her warmth dissipates.

ALICE

Oh, um, well --

KAUFMAN

I'm sorry. I apologize. I'm sorry.

(CONTINUED)

58 CONTINUED: (2)

58

ALICE
(nodding)

So I'll be right back with your pie then.

He nods, watches Alice walk away and say something to another waitress. The other waitress looks over at him. He sweats.

KAUFMAN (V.O.)

I am fat. I am old. I have to get out
of here right now. Fuck the pie.

*
*

The other waitress brings his pie. He smiles a thank you and obligingly eats.

*
*

59 INT. NEW YORKER - MORNING

59

Orlean, at her desk, copies something from her notebook onto the computer.

*

ORLEAN (V.O.)

There are more than thirty thousand known
orchid species. One species looks like a
German shepherd...

*

60 EXT. SANTA BARBARA ORCHID SHOW - DAY

60

Kaufman walks alone among the crowd of orchid enthusiasts, past a Santa Barbara Orchid Society sign. He tries to study the flowers. They are dull. He forces himself to look.

ORLEAN (V.O.)

... one looks like an onion, one looks
like an octopus. One looks...

Kaufman finds his attention drifting from orchids to women: all different shapes, colors, personalities, some in subtle clothing, some in garish clothing, all glowing.

ORLEAN (V.O.) (cont'd)

... like a school teacher, one looks like
a gymnast, one looks like a Midwestern
beauty queen, one looks like a New York
intellectual with whom you'd do the
Sunday Times crossword puzzle in bed.
One looks like that girl in high school
with creamy skin. One has eyes that
dance. One has eyes that contain the
sadness of the world.

*

He is sick with adoration for the women, who pay him no mind.

(CONTINUED)

60 CONTINUED:

60

ORLEAN (V.O.) (cont'd)

Nothing in science can account for the way some people feel about orchids. Those love them, love them madly.

One by one the women turn to the men they're with: a whisper in the ear, a shared look, an arm slipped through an arm. Kaufman is alone in this sea of people and flowers.

61 OMITTED

61 *

62 MONTAGE

62 *

This sequence shows the entire history of mankind from a world sparsely populated with primitive hunter-gatherers to today's overcrowded technological society. We see the history of architecture, war, religion, commerce. We see murder and procreation. We see man interacting with his environment: farming, eating meat, admiring a view. We see old age and birth. We see it again and again at dizzying speed. We see Laroche as a child alone with his turtles. We see Orlean as a child alone with her diary. We see Alice serving food, smiling at customers. We finish on sad Kaufman getting into his car and leaving the Santa Barbara Orchid Show. The entire sequence takes two minutes.

63 INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE - DAY

63

Kaufman talks to the therapist.

KAUFMAN

I could tell a woman I'm a screenwriter and I could get laid.

*

THERAPIST

I'm sure that's true.

*

KAUFMAN

But I want them to like me. The way I like them. The way I'd do anything for some woman walking down the street. A million women walking down the street. I don't need to know what their jobs is. I don't need to know them at all.

*

*

(a terrible sadness)

No one will ever love me like that.

Kaufman glances down at his therapist's breasts. He does it fast and unintentionally. He quickly shifts back to her face. His therapist wraps her shawl around her.

64 INT. SHOW HALL - DAY

64

Crowded with orchid lovers. Noisy chatter and calliope music. Elaborate displays include orchids on a ferris wheel, plastic clowns, and a booth that looks like a circus big top.

LAROCHE

Once you get the sickness, it takes over your life. Look at me. It's all I think about.

*

(dramatic pause)

It'll happen to you. You'll see.

ORLEAN

I don't know. I'm not prone to --

Larocche runs over to a flower, fondles its petals.

LAROCHE

Angraecum sesquipedale! Beauty! God! Darwin wrote about this one.

ORLEAN

Uh-huh.

LAROCHE

Charles Darwin? Evolution guy? Hello?

ORLEAN

(annoyed)

I know who Darwin is.

65 INT. EMPTY BEDROOM - NIGHT

65

A depressed Kaufman fishes on his floor through an ever increasing pile of books: about turtles, mirror resilvering, fish, Hegel, etc. He finds The Portable Darwin. The cover features a daguerreotype of Darwin. Kaufman paces and reads.

*

*

66 INT. BOOK-LINED STUDY - NIGHT

66

SUBTITLE: ENGLAND, ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY NINE YEARS EARLIER

Sepia. A sickly Darwin writes at his desk.

DARWIN (V.O.)

Therefore I should infer from analogy that probably all the organic beings which have ever lived on this earth have descended from some one primordial form, into which life was first breathed.

67 INT. EMPTY BEDROOM - NIGHT 67

Kaufman looks off into space, thinking. Silence. Suddenly, he grabs his mini-recorder and paces like a caged animal.

KAUFMAN

We start before life. All is silent...

*

68 EXT. SHOW HALL - DAY 68

Blasting music. Crowds. Laroche shows the flower to Orlean.

LAROCHE

See that nectary all the way down there? Darwin hypothesized a moth with a nose twelve inches long to pollinate it. Everyone thought he was a loon. Then, sure enough, they found this moth with a twelve inch proboscis -- proboscis means nose, by the way -- and --

ORLEAN

I know what proboscis means.

LAROCHE

Let's not get off the subject. This isn't a pissing contest. The point is what's wonderful is that every one of these flowers has a specific relationship with the insect that pollinates it.

69 EXT. MEADOW - DAY 69

We're with an insect as it buzzes along.

LAROCHE (V.O.)

There are orchids that look exactly like a particular insect.

It finds an orchid which it resembles. It lands on the flower and begins rapidly jerking its abdomen.

LAROCHE (V.O.) (cont'd)

So it's attracted to the flower, like a lover. Think about it. The insect has no choice but to make love to that flower. The flower insists. And this attraction, this passion, is so much larger than either of them. Neither understands the significance of this interaction. But because of it, the world lives.

*
*
*
*
*
*
*
*
*

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

69 CONTINUED:

69

LAROCHE (V.O.) (cont'd)

The insect, covered with pollen, carries it off, falls in love with another flower and pollinates it. How did this relationship develop? This odd connection? Does it matter? Can we fight it? Should we?

*
*
*
*
*
*

The insect, covered in pollen, flies away. It merges with thousands of insects doing the same thing: Flying, buzzing around flowers.

*

70 INT. SHOW HALL - DAY

70

Orlean looks at Laroche. In the background people buzz around flowers: feel petals, stare deep into nectaries, jabber passionately, carry boxes of plants.

*
*
*

LAROCHE

You gotta fall in love with them. Once you learn anything about orchids, you'll devote your life to learning everything about them. You have to. You're supposed to.

*
*

Orlean looks at Laroche, then deeply into various flowers: a dizzying array of colors and shapes. She remains detached and scribbles on her pad: "Is this guy more alive than I am?"

*
*
*

71 INT. APARTMENT - EARLY EVENING

71

Orlean sits at the dining room table with her husband and another couple. She is detached here as well.

HUSBAND

He's a great character. No front teeth. One of those trailer guys, not too educated, but taught himself everything there is to know about --

(punchline)

-- orchids!

MALE GUEST

Orchids? I love that. It's unexpected.

HUSBAND

Still lives with his dad. Right, Susie?

Orlean nods.

FEMALE GUEST

Oh, that's a great detail.

(CONTINUED)

71 CONTINUED:

71

HUSBAND

So, Susie gets to do a natural history thing, which she loves, plus this tremendously quirky character --

Orlean's husband goes on talking, but his voice goes under. They smile at each other, but there's a terrible distance between them. She gets up and heads toward the bathroom.

*
*

ORLEAN (V.O.)

I wanted to want something as much as people wanted these plants...

72 INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

72

Orlean enters and stares at herself in the mirror.

ORLEAN (V.O.)

... but it isn't part of my constitution.

HUSBAND (O.S.)

What is it about people who collect, who get obsessed with these... *things*? It's a real modern phenomenon ripe for the picking, no pun intended --

*
*

ORLEAN (V.O.)

I suppose I do have one unembarrassed passion.

Orlean past her own reflection to the reflection of her husband chatting in the background.

73 INT. NEW YORKER OFFICES - EARLY EVENING

73

Orlean is at her desk. We see "I suppose I do have one unembarrassed passion" on the computer screen. Orlean cries and types. As the words appear on her screen, we hear them in voice-over.

*
*
*

ORLEAN (V.O.)

I want to know how it feels to care about something passionately.

74 INT. LARGE EMPTY LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

74

Kaufman paces furiously with his mini-cassette recorder. He's a sweaty mess.

(CONTINUED)

KAUFMAN

... then, after the history of life on the planet, in the last *seconds* of the montage, we see the whole of human history: tool-making, hunting, farming, war, lust, religion. Yearning. Then, bam! Cut to Susan Orlean writing a book about orchids. And the movie begins.

He rewinds the recorder, presses "play." As he listens, he slowly shifts from unbridled enthusiasm to a bottomless pit of depression. *

TAPED KAUFMAN VOICE

We start before life begins. All is silent. We see the first amino acid and show step by step how things mutated, adapted, evolved. This has never been attempted in a movie before. It breaks every rule. This is amazing! *

The taped voice continues. Kaufman stares despondently out the window, into the night. The front door bursts open and Donald charges in. Kaufman quickly turns off the recorder. *

DONALD

McKee is a genius! *And* hilarious! He just comes up with these great jokes, and everyone laughs! But he's serious, too, Charles. *You'd* love him. He's all *for* originality, just like you! But he says, we have to realize we all write in a genre, so we must find our originality *within* that genre. See, it turns out there hasn't been a new genre since Fellini invented the mockumentary!

Kaufman sits. Donald waits for a response, heaving with excitement. No response from Kaufman.

DONALD (cont'd)

My genre is thriller! What's yours? *

KAUFMAN

(quietly)

You and I share the same DNA. Is there anything more lonely than this? *

76 INT. ORLEAN'S STUDY - EVENING 76

Orlean looks at the photo of Laroche, sits sadly for a moment, then types. Through an open door, we see Orlean's husband at the kitchen table finishing his dinner. *

LAROCHE (V.O.) *

I got married. She was beautiful, my wife. We opened a nursery. *

77-86 OMITTED 77-86 *

87 INT. NURSERY - DAY 87 *

Laroche and his wife stand amidst lonely-looking plant enthusiasts who ask him questions, browse, stare into space. *

LAROCHE (V.O.)

People started coming out of the woodwork, to ask me stuff, to admire my plants, to admire me.

One guy pulls Laroche aside. *

CUSTOMER #1 *

John, what is this? It's amazing! *

LAROCHE *

Catasetum tenebrosum. From Peru. *

CUSTOMER #2 *

John, would you come over and look at my Eulophia? It's not doing well and I don't want to move it. *

LAROCHE *

Are you simulating it's dry season? Because excessive watering will -- *

CUSTOMER #2 *

But Dave Maxwell said -- *

LAROCHE *

Why would anyone listen to Maxwell? *

CUSTOMER #3 *

Hey, did you see the number he brought to the Miami show? Could be his daughter. *

CUSTOMER #1 *

It's a shame. Laura was such a class act, too. Say, John, what can you tell me about this *Dactylorhiza*? *

(CONTINUED)

87 CONTINUED:

87

LAROCHE
Everything.

*
*

Everyone gathers around as Laroche begins to talk.

*

88 INT. VAN - NIGHT

88

Laroche drives. Orlean looks out at the dark night.

LAROCHE
I believe some folks were really spending
time with me because they were lonely.

*
*

Orlean looks at him. After a long silence, Laroche muses:

LAROCHE (cont'd)
You know why I love plants? Because
they're so mutable. Adaptation is a
profound process. It means you figure
out how to thrive in the world. People
can't sometimes.

*
*
*
*

ORLEAN
Well, it's easier for plants; they have
no memory. They just move on to what's
next. For a person, it's almost shameful
to adapt. It's like running away.

*
*
*
*
*

89 INT. AGENT'S OFFICE - DAY

89

Kaufman sits with his agent Marty in a glass-walled office.

*

KAUFMAN
I don't know how to adapt this. I
should've just stuck with my own stuff.
I don't know why I thought I could --

MARTY
See her? I fucked her up the ass.

*

Marty waves at a passing beauty. She waves back, keeps
walking. Kaufman follows the girl's ass with his eyes.

*

MARTY (cont'd)
Just kidding. Hey, maybe I can help.

*
*

Kaufman looks at Marty. Will he accept help from an agent?
He glances at Marty's non-receding hairline, his full head of
hair. Marty smiles at him.

*
*
*

KAUFMAN
It's about flowers.

(CONTINUED)

MARTY

It's not only about flowers. It's got that crazy plant nut guy. He's funny, right?

*

Kaufman pulls out a folded newspaper clipping, reads:

KAUFMAN

"There is not nearly enough of him to fill a book." So Orlean "digresses in long passes." Blah blah blah... "No narrative really unites these passages."

*

*

*

(looking up defiantly)

New York Times Book Review. I can't structure this. It's that sprawling New Yorker shit.

Marty gets distracted by another sexy woman walking by.

*

MARTY

Oh man. I'd fuck her up the ass.

*

KAUFMAN

There's no story. The book has no story.

MARTY

Make one up. The book's a jumping off point. No one in town can make up a crazy story like you. You're the king.

*

KAUFMAN

I didn't want to do that this time. It's someone else's material. I have a responsibility... Anyway, I wanted to grow as a writer, do something profound and simple. Show people how amazing flowers are.

MARTY

Are they amazing?

*

KAUFMAN

I don't know.

(uncertain)

I think they are.

*

*

MARTY

Look, what I tell a lot of guys is pick another film and use it as a model. I always thought this one could be like Apocalypse Now. The girl journalist spends the whole movie searching for the crazy plant nut guy -- what's his name?

*

*

*

(CONTINUED)

KAUFMAN
John Laroche.

MARTY
She has to travel deep into the darkest swamps of Africa to find the mysterious "Laroche."

KAUFMAN
I need you to get me out of this.

MARTY
Charlie, at the end of the day, I think it would be a terrible career move.

89A INT. EMPTY BEDROOM - DAY

89A

Kaufman, alone in bed, ejaculates. He lies there. After a few moments, he gets up and sits naked in front of his typewriter. He reads the page.

KAUFMAN (V.O.)
The Orchidaceae is a large --

The empty bedroom seems to get bigger and sadder.

89B EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

89B

A crowd of people. Reporters talk to video cameras.

REPORTER
... three Seminole men and a Miami orchid grower for trying to steal rare orchids --

Seminole lawyer Lerner is on the steps talking to reporters.

LERNER
The only reason we made the no-contest plea was for convenience.

Laroche hides around the corner of the building, smoking and ranting at Orlean.

LAROCHE
I told you I'd be crucified. The judge is a moron. She didn't know shit about Indian rights and she didn't know shit about shit.

Buster, at his car, talks to reporters.

89B CONTINUED:

89B

BUSTER

Just like any treaty you guys sign, it isn't worth the paper it's printed on.

*
*
*

A park official is being interviewed.

*

PARK OFFICIAL

The ruling is murky. They were nailed on a technicality. It doesn't protect the preserves the way we would've hoped.

*
*
*
*

89C INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

89C

Orlean interviews the prosecuter. She sips iced tea.

*
*

PROSECUTOR

I was determined to convict them, especially Laroche, who I found so maddening. It was all so maddening, what with the protection the Native Americans have.

*
*
*
*
*
*

ORLEAN

Hence the branches.
(turns to waitress)
Could I get some lemon, please?

*
*
*
*

PROSECUTOR

Exactly. The Native American protection is only in regard to endangered species. But the endangered species were attached to ordinary branches. *Nobody's* allowed to take those, not even the goddamned Indians. So that's what we got 'em on.

*
*
*
*
*
*

ORLEAN

It's a hollow victory, isn't it? Laroche gets a five hundred dollar fine and a six month ban from the Fakahatchee.

*
*
*
*

PROSECUTOR

(shaking his head)
I hate that guy. Please don't put in I said, goddamned Indians.

*
*
*
*

90 MONTAGE

90

Jumble of images: Laroche talking, flowers, Indians, Orlean, the trial. The rapid fire click-click of typing.

*

KAUFMAN (V.O.)

Okay, we open with Laroche. He's funny. Okay, he says, I love to mutate plants.

*

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

90 CONTINUED:

90

KAUFMAN (V.O.) (cont'd)
 Mutation is fun.... Okay, we show
 flowers, okay, we have the court case. We
 show Laroche, he says, I was mutated as
 baby, that's why I'm so smart...that's
 funny. Okay we open at the beginning of
 time...no, okay we open with Laroche
 driving into the swamp, okay --

*
*
*
*
*

91 INT. EMPTY BEDROOM - NIGHT

91

Kaufman awakes with a start. Enthusiastic off-screen typing.
 He peers through the darkness at the books, papers coffee
 cups. He picks up The Orchid Thief, opens it, reads.

*
*

ORLEAN (V.O.)

The pioneer-adventures in Florida had to
 travel inward, into a place as dark and
 dense as steel wool. They had to
 confront what a dark, dense, overabundant
 place might have hidden in it.

*
*
*
*
*

92 OMITTED

92

*

93 INT. LAROCHE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

93

Lit only by the light of the TV Laroche's father watches.
 Laroche talks on the phone and half watches TV.

*
*

LAROCHE

What are you up to?

*
*

93A INT. ORLEAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

93A

Orlean lies on her bed in her underwear.

*

ORLEAN

Ah, David's out of town. I'm just
 hanging out. How about you?

*
*
*

LAROCHE (PHONE VOICE)

Nothing. Going over some paperwork.

*
*

ORLEAN

Oh, I don't mean to bother you. Just
 thought I could get some more info.

*
*
*

LAROCHE (PHONE VOICE)

No problem.

*
*

Orlean is silent for a moment.

*

ORLEAN

I think you say some pretty smart things,
 John.

*
*
*

(CONTINUED)

93A CONTINUED:

93A

LAROCHE

The smartest guy I know.

*
*

Orlean starts to tear up, then gets professional to cover.

*

ORLEAN

So, tell me, what happened to your nursery?

*
*
*

93B INT. LAROCHE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

93B

*

Laroche glances at the TV. On top are two framed photos: one of Laroche's sister and one of Laroche's mother.

*
*

LAROCHE

It was going well, but sometimes bad things happen. Darkness descends.

*
*
*

94 INT. LAROCHE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

94

SUBTITLE: NORTH MIAMI, NINE YEARS EARLIER

Laroche ushers his wife, mother, and uncle out of the house. His father watches TV. There's only a photo of Laroche's sister on the TV set now.

LAROCHE

Sure you don't want to come, dad?

His father doesn't respond.

95 INT. LAROCHE'S CAR - A FEW MOMENTS LATER

95

They pile into a nice new American car, his wife in front, his mother and uncle in back. Laroche pulls into traffic.

UNCLE JIM

Nursery business good, Johnny?

LAROCHE

Everything's good, Uncle Jim. This last year's been a dream, I'm telling you. We're finally pulling out of debt.

MOTHER

Amen, honey. Praise Allah, Buddha, Vishnu. And all the rest of 'em.

Laroche smiles back at his mother. A screech of tires and another car crashes head on into theirs. Laroche's face smacks the steering wheel, his front teeth fly in all directions.

*

(CONTINUED)

95 CONTINUED:

95

His mother rockets forward smashing through the windshield. His uncle hits Laroche's wife in the head, jerking her forward and landing on top of her.

96 EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

96

Banged-up and missing his front teeth, Laroche stands amidst a group of mourners at a double funeral.

97 INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

97

Laroche, in his mourning suit, sits by his comatose wife.

98 EXT. LAROCHE'S STOOP - NIGHT

98

*

It's dark. Laroche, on the cordless phone, stares out at the street where the accident took place.

*

*

LAROCHE

She divorced me soon after she regained consciousness.

*

98A INT. ORLEAN'S APARTMENT -NIGHT

98A

*

Orlean is crying hard now. She has the phone mouthpiece flipped up so she can't be heard. She regains control and flips it down to talk.

*

*

*

ORLEAN

If I almost died, I think I'd leave my marriage, too.

*

*

*

LAROCHE (PHONE VOICE)

Why?

*

*

ORLEAN

Because I could. It's like a free pass. No one can judge you if you almost died.

*

*

*

LAROCHE (PHONE VOICE)

I judged her. And then, adding insult to injury, the hurricane destroyed my greenhouse.

*

*

*

*

98B EXT. STREET - DAY

98B

*

Laroche walks through a field where the remains of his greenhouse are scattered about: glass, wood, and the green pulp that was once plant life.

*

*

*

LAROCHE (V.O.)

Everything. I knew it would break my heart to start another nursery, so when the Seminoles wanted a white guy, an expert, to get their nursery going, I took the job.

*
*

98C INT. LITTLE BOY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

98C

Larocche is on his cordless phone. The many turtle posters been replace with many orchid posters.

*
*

LAROCHE

I wasn't gonna give them a conventional little potted-plant place. I was gonna give them something amazing. Y'know?

*
*
*
*

ORLEAN (PHONE VOICE)

Yeah, John, I know. I understand.

*
*

99 INT. PARTY HOUSE - NIGHT

99

A sad Kaufman, beer in hand, sees Margaret across a room crowded with young Hollywood types. He tries to duck but she spots him. She runs over and hugs him. She's drunk.

*
*
*

MARGARET

Hey, man!

*
*

KAUFMAN

Hi, Margaret.

*
*

MARGARET

You hate me. You don't call me no more.

*
*

KAUFMAN

I've been busy is all.

*
*

MARGARET

Oh.

(beat)

Well, sit, sit.

*
*
*
*

She pulls him down onto a couch and puts her arm around him.

*

MARGARET (cont'd)

So, how's the script, lover?

*
*

KAUFMAN

I shouldn't have taken it. I can't figure out how to make it work. I wanted to do something amazing. I'm full of shit. I don't know. There's no story.

*
*
*
*
*

(CONTINUED)

MARGARET

Oh, Charlie. Boy. It is a challenging one. God bless you for trying. Man... so did you get anything out of going into the swamp?

KAUFMAN

Um --

MARGARET

S-s-scary the way Orlean described it. I assumed there'd be some dramatic --

KAUFMAN

It was scary, but...

MARGARET

No, story, huh?

KAUFMAN

Not really.

A young man approaches. Margaret doesn't bother removing her arm from Kaufman's shoulder.

MARGARET

Hey you.

(to Kaufman)

Charlie, this is my friend David.

Kaufman and David shake hands.

DAVID

Hey.

KAUFMAN

Hey.

MARGARET

David spent some time in the Everglades. Charlie said it wasn't really helpful for him to be down there, Davey.

DAVID

No? I was fascinated. I had a piece about it in National Geographic. I'll get Marg to send it to you.

KAUFMAN

Oh, wow. That'd be great.

DAVID

Cool. Well, we should head, Marg.

(CONTINUED)

99 CONTINUED: (2)

99

MARGARET

(pecks Kaufman on cheek) *

You'll figure it out, man. You're the best. And you *are* amazing.

Kaufman watches Margaret and David head off. David puts his hand on Margaret's ass. She kisses his ear.

100 INT. NEW YORKER OFFICE - EVENING

100

Orlean looks at a book called The Native Orchids of Florida. She sees a photo of a ghost orchid glowing white on the page. A line of text catches her eye: "Should one be lucky enough to see a flower all else will seem eclipsed." Orlean closes the book, sits there. She dials the phone. *

LAROCHE (PHONE VOICE)

Yeah.

ORLEAN

Hey. *

LAROCHE (PHONE VOICE)

Susie-Q!

ORLEAN

So I was thinking it'd be good for the article for me to go into the Fakahatchee to see a ghost. I'd like *you* to take me. *

LAROCHE (PHONE VOICE)

I'd love to, but, hey, I'm banned. Goddamn crucified me. Get one of them monkey-suited rangers. 'Course, they wouldn't be able to locate a ghost, if it climbed off a tree and shoved itself up their ass. Hey, put that in the article! *

101 INT. EMPTY BEDROOM - MORNING

101

A hollow-eyed Kaufman puts mosquito netting in his suitcase. *

102 INT. EMPTY LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

102

Donald types cheerily on a lap-top computer at an ergonomic desk. Kaufman descends the stairs with the suitcase. *

KAUFMAN

The swamp is dark, dangerous, as dense as steel wool, Donald. I don't know if it'll kill me, but if it doesn't, I'll have something honest to give the world. *

(MORE) *

(CONTINUED)

102 CONTINUED:

102

KAUFMAN (cont'd)

That's the difference between writing and aping some guy's "principles."

*

Donald looks up from his work.

DONALD

Charles, I'm putting a song in. Like when characters sing pop songs in their pajamas and dance around. I thought it might be a nice way to break the tension. So, try to think of a song about multiple personality. Hey, where you going?

*

*

*

*

103 OMITTED

103

104 INT. AIRPLANE - NIGHT

104

Kaufman reads The Orchid Thief.

ORLEAN (V.O.)

You would have to want something very badly to go looking for it in the Fakahatchee Strand.

*

*

*

104A EXT. SWAMP - DAY

104A

*

SUBTITLE: FAKAHATCHEE, ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTEEN YEARS EARLIER

*

A surveyor scribbles in a notebook. The pond is alive with alligators.

*

*

ORLEAN (V.O.)

An early surveyor made this entry in his field notes: A pond surrounded by cypress swamp, impracticable. Full of monstrous alligators, counted fifty and stopped.

*

*

*

*

*

104B INT. AIRPLANE - NIGHT

104B

*

Kaufman is getting more nervous. He closes the book and watches a stewardess tending to another passenger.

*

*

105 INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - NIGHT

105

Kaufman fixes a salad in the kitchenette. The door opens and the stewardess enters dragging her luggage on a little cart.

KAUFMAN

Hey! How was Denver?

STEWARDESS

Oh, God, sweetie, I'm so glad to be home.
(kisses him)

*

*

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

105 CONTINUED:

105

STEWARDESS (cont'd)

Did you get any writing done? God, I've
waited all day to feel you inside me.

*
*

The stewardess slips out of her blazer, unbuttons her blouse. Kaufman slides his hand into her open shirt and caresses her breast. She sighs contentedly.

106 INT. AIRPLANE BATHROOM - NIGHT

106

Kaufman finishes jerking off, stands, pulls up his pants, adjusts himself, and exits the bathroom.

107 INT. AIRPLANE - CONTINUOUS

107

Kaufman steps out of the bathroom. The stewardess is there talking to another stewardess. She regards Kaufman blankly, then goes back to her conversation. He heads up the aisle. One of the stewardesses laughs. He tenses, takes his seat.

*

108-114 OMITTED

108-114

*

115 INT. RENTAL CAR - MORNING

115

A pale, pasty Kaufman drives down a road surrounded by swamp.

ORLEAN (V.O.)

The swampy part of the Fakahatchee is hot
and wet and buggy and full of cottonmouth
snakes and diamond back rattlers and
alligators and snapping turtles and
poisonous plants and wild hogs and...

*
*
*
*

116 OMITTED

116

*

117 EXT. SWAMP - MORNING

117

The sky is overcast. Mike Owen leads Kaufman through a cool swamp, which is completely dry. The two men walk easily on peaty ground. Kaufman, slathered with sun screen and covered head to foot in unnecessary protective clothing, tries to be interested in Owen's lecture. He takes notes.

*

MIKE OWEN

So the whole ecosystem is six thousand
years old. Five to six thousand years
old. About that. Five or six.

KAUFMAN

Okay.

MIKE OWEN

Now the Fakahatchee is the largest of all
the cypress strands, probably in the
world.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

117 CONTINUED:

117

MIKE OWEN (cont'd)

I don't know of any cypress strand bigger. It's about twenty miles long, or nineteen, nineteen to twenty, nineteen... and right here it's about five miles wide, four and a half, five. So, again, it's twenty miles long, three to five miles wide.

KAUFMAN

Um, why isn't it wet? Susan Orlean said when she came she was up to her thighs in horrible, black water. It was sweltering. There were snakes and alligators. She said it was the scariest thing she's ever done.

*

MIKE OWEN

Well, there's usually water. We've been going through a bit of a drought. Good for us today, though!

*

*

118 OMITTED

118

*

119 INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

119

Orlean, in her underwear and still dirty from the swamp, holds a phone to her ear. She has cute little dirty smudges on her face. Her caked-with-mud clothes are on the floor.

*

*

ORLEAN (V.O.)

That night after Mike Owen took me into the swamp, I called Laroche.

*

*

ORLEAN (CONT'D)

(into phone)

I didn't see anything but bare roots. And I had this thought. Maybe the ghost orchid only blooms in the minds of people who've walked too long in the swamp.

120 INT. ORLEAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

120

Orlean types. It's pouring and sheets of rain beat against her window. She glances at her husband, across the room reading a book. She sighs, continues typing.

ORLEAN (V.O.)

What I didn't say to him is that life seemed to be filled with things that were just like the ghost orchid -- wonderful to imagine and easy to fall in love with but a little fantastic and fleeting and out of reach.

121-123 OMITTED 121-123 *

123A INT. PLANE - NIGHT 123A *

A morose Kaufman reads The Orchid Thief. *

KAUFMAN (V.O.)
... fleeting and out of reach. *

Kaufman is deeply moved. He hi-lites the passage, then looks at the smiling photo of Orlean. He finds himself lost in it.

124 INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT 124

Orlean, dirty from the swamp, is on the phone.

LAROCHE (PHONE VOICE)
(beat, clears throat)
Jesus Christ, of course there are ghost orchids out there! I've stolen them!
(beat, a cleared throat)
You *should* have gone with me.

125 CLOSE-UP OF MAGAZINE 125

The line: "... then he cleared his throat and said: 'You *should* have gone with me.'"

VALERIE (O.C.)
Beautifully written. Really unique.

PULL BACK TO:

126 INT. RESTAURANT - MIDDAY 126

Busy lunch crowd. Valerie sits at a table with Orlean and an open New Yorker magazine.

ORLEAN
Thank you. Thanks very much.

VALERIE
We're big fans. Laroche is such a fun character. *

ORLEAN
Yeah, John's a character all right.

VALERIE
It's funny and fresh. And sad in a way.

ORLEAN
Well, thanks. Thank you.

(CONTINUED)

VALERIE

So we were wondering, what's next?

ORLEAN

Oh, um, Random House wants me to expand it into a book. So I'll be doing that.

VALERIE

And there'll be more of Laroche?

ORLEAN

Yeah. More John, more orchids.

VALERIE

Y'know, we'd really like to option this. *

ORLEAN

(laughing)

You want to make it into a movie? *

VALERIE

Laroche is *such* a fun character. *

127 INT. VAN - DAY

127

Laroche, wearing a Cleveland Indians T-shirt, drives crazily through the Hollywood, Florida Seminole reservation. Orlean holds on, but seems to be enjoying herself now.

LAROCHE

No shit I'm a fun character.

(beat)

Who's gonna play me?

Orlean laughs, a real affection for Laroche in her manner. *

ORLEAN

I've got to write it first. Then someone's gotta do the screenplay. These things mostly never get made. So -- *

LAROCHE

I think I should play me.

Orlean is charmed. Laroche swerves into a parking space in the nursery lot.

128 EXT. SEMINOLE NURSERY - DAY

128

Laroche and Orlean get out of the van.

(CONTINUED)

LAROCHE

I've got all the right qualities to play Laroche. While you write, I'll take acting classes. I'll study the shit out of acting.

*
*
*

A few young Indian guys haul bags of potting soil and look at Laroche sourly. Orlean scans the grounds for Vinson. Laroche indicates the giant cartoon Indian on his T-shirt.

*
*

LAROCHE

I wear this just to screw with 'em.

129 INT. TRAILER - CONTINUOUS

129

Laroche enters his office, looks at some papers on his desk.

LAROCHE

Most of them don't even bother calling me John anymore. Now it's "Crazy White Man." That's a good title for the movie.

*

Before Orlean can respond, Laroche picks up the phone and dials an impossibly long number. He waits, gestures for Orlean to sit on a chair piled high with junk.

LAROCHE (cont'd)

You won't hurt anything.

Orlean moves the junk over, shares the seat with it.

LAROCHE (cont'd)

(Yelling into phone)

Hello? Hello? Hi? This is John Laroche from the Seminole Nursery. Sem-ih-nole!

(to Orlean)

How do you say Seminole in Spanish?

(into phone)

That's right, yes! Yeah, I want to order some more of those pink string beans!

(yelling)

Pink String Beans! Pink String Beans!

*

Buster appears in the door.

LAROCHE (cont'd)

(into phone)

I'll call back. Back!

(hangs up)

Hey, Buster.

*

BUSTER

John.

*

(CONTINUED)

LAROCHE

I was trying to order some pink string beans from Argentina.

BUSTER

No kidding.

*

LAROCHE

I figure just because Project Ghost Orchid is dead, we're not closing shop.

BUSTER

Listen, John --

LAROCHE

We'll get into plant multiplication. Buy little ones, turn 'em into big ones, sell 'em at a profit. Simple plant multiplication for the masses.

BUSTER

John, we're thinking maybe now's a good time for you to take a few weeks.

*

Larocche stops short. He glances over at Orlean, humiliated in front of her. Her heart is breaking for him. There are tears welling in her eyes. Larocche looks back at Buster.

ORLEAN

I'll wait outside.

LAROCHE

No.

*

Larocche stares at Buster. Buster stares back. Orlean does what she can to make herself invisible.

LAROCHE (CONT'D)

Y'know, the guys on my crew here, all they do is smoke weed all day. I been meaning to talk to you about that. So if it's a question of productivity -- I got lot's of ideas, Buster, I'm really excited about. The sprinklers were busted for a while, so all the dead shrubs... But I got it fixed. It's fixed. And we'll recover quick and --

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

Larocche weaves through traffic. Orlean holds on.

LAROCHE

Goddamn politics. Crazy White Man's bad publicity. Ooh, Crazy, crazy white man.

(pounds steering wheel)

I can't believe I'm dealing with this!

(pounds steering wheel)

Like I could give a damn. If they fire me, I'll sue. I already did some legal research on this. They can't fire me. And I ain't going to quit.

*

Larocche gets quiet and they drive in silence.

*

131 OMITTED

131

*

132 INT. PHONE BOOTH - DAY

132

*

It's on the side of a desolate stretch of Florida road. Orlean dials the phone. It rings for a long time. Finally:

*

LAROCHE (PHONE VOICE)

(ghost-like)

Yeah?

133 INT. LITTLE BOY'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

133

*

The flower posters are gone. There is nothing on the walls. The room looks sad, empty, and anonymous. We don't see Larocche at all. He's in the room but the camera searches and never finds him.

*

*

*

*

ORLEAN (PHONE VOICE)

John, it's Susan...

*

*

LAROCHE (O.C.)

Susan who?

*

*

ORLEAN

... Look, I was just wondering if you might be willing to talk some more.

*

*

*

LAROCHE (O.C.)

What about?

ORLEAN (PHONE VOICE)

John! Stop! I'm trying to put together a book. Don't just abandon me down here.

*

LAROCHE (O.C.)

I'm no longer interested in orchids. I'm pursuing other avenues. I apologize for any inconvenience this might cause you.

134 INT. PHONE BOOTH - CONTINUOUS 134 *

LAROCHE (PHONE VOICE)
Thank you for your time.

Larocche hangs up. Orlean stands there for a moment, then falls to the floor and breaks into tears. *

ORLEAN
Goddamnit, Susan. Just stop crying!
This is your fucking life! What are you
doing? What are you doing, what are -- *

135 INT. GIRL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 135

SUBTITLE: CANTON, OHIO, THIRTY-FOUR YEARS EARLIER *

The little girl's room from before, but it's a teenager's room now. Bob Dylan's Just Like a Woman plays on the stereo. On the walls are posters of Dylan, Velvet Underground and a pilfered movie poster from Bergman's Persona; on the floor are records and books, a copy of I Been Down So Long It Looks Like Up to Me by Richard Farina. On the dresser, make-up, a tampax box, a NOW button. A blonde, skinny teenage girl in embroidered, hip-hugger bell-bottoms and a peasant blouse, lies on her bed and writes in her journal. *

TEENAGE GIRL (V.O.)
I baby-sat for Kelly tonight and just stared into her blue, infant eyes. She is so pure, so present, so beautiful. What happens to everyone? I apologized to her for what she will have to become to survive the nastiness. Then I cried. I couldn't stop. At one point, Kelly smiled up at me: the baby trying to comfort the fucked-up adult. And I thought, how perfect, it's starting already.

136 OMITTED 136 *

137 MONTAGE 137 *

Susan Orlean, her journalist persona on, talks to various orchid enthusiasts, visits nurseries, sits in lecture halls, attends orchid shows. She is bored and distracted. *

137A INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT 137A *

Orlean sits on her bed, lonely and lost. She flips through her address book. There is no one to call. *

(CONTINUED)

137A CONTINUED:

137A

She studies her orchid contact list. There's Vinson's phone number. After a long beat she dials the phone.

137B INT. HOTEL ROOM - LATER

137B

Orlean, dolled-up, anxiously gets ready to go out, eyes herself in the mirror, plays with her hair. The phone rings. She picks up.

ORLEAN

Hello? David! Hi. Not really. Um... okay. Hey, honey, can I call you back? I've got an interview and -- No, it might be late. Let me call you in the morning. Yeah. Work good? Good. Okay, hon, I'll speak to you in the morning.

137C INT. HOTEL BAR - A LITTLE LATER

137C

Orlean sits by herself at a table and watches the door. She sips a glass of champagne. Her notebook and tape recorder are on the table. After a few moments, Vinson enters. She waves. He saunters over and sits.

ORLEAN

(slightly tipsy)

Hey, thanks for coming. This should be really helpful. I'm glad you reconsidered talking.

VINSON

Yeah. Sure thing.

There's a silence.

ORLEAN

Um, okay. So, what was it like for you, this whole media circus?

Orlean fumbles to turn on her tape recorder. Vinson watches her trembly fingers.

VINSON

I don't know. Y'know? Just, y'know.

ORLEAN

Yeah. Uh-huh. It must've been crazy! Boy, I was just fascinated with this story and, um, all the Native American aspects and, y'know, how... *large* the scope was and...

(CONTINUED)

Orlean trails off. Vinson is different than the last time she met him. He barely looks at her, he seems bored and impatient. Orlean is at a loss. *

ORLEAN (cont'd) *
... so I thought it would be helpful... *
for me... to hear a little bit about *your* *
background and how you came to -- *

VINSON *
We should go to your room. I can reveal *
all sorts of Native American aspects up *
there. *

ORLEAN *
Oh. Um, we can talk here. Y'know. I *
think we can -- this seems fine... here. *

VINSON *
(stares at her for a moment) *
Listen, do you want to get laid or not. *
You were awfully fucking flirty on the *
phone. *

ORLEAN *
Oh. Gosh. No, I just -- Did I -- *
communicate something? No, no. No, I *
just wanted to get some, um, Native *
American, um, look, I apologize, if -- *

VINSON *
Ah, fuck. I drove an hour to get here. *

He heads out the door without looking back. Orlean just sits there. She's shaking. She finishes her drink. *

138 OMITTED 138 *

139 INT. EMPTY HOUSE - NIGHT 139 *

Kaufman enters with his bags and heads to the stairs. Donald, typing furiously at his desk, looks up.

DONALD
How was Florida, man?

KAUFMAN
(climbing the stairs)
Okay.

DONALD
Hey, my script's going amazing! Right now I'm working out an Image System.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DONALD (cont'd)
 Because of my multiple personality theme,
 I've chosen the motif of broken mirrors
 to show my protagonist's fragmented self.
 Bob says an Image System greatly
 increases the complexity of an aesthetic
 emotion. Bob says --

KAUFMAN
 You sound like you're in a cult.

Kaufman disappears upstairs.

DONALD
 No, it's just good writing technique.
 (types, then:)
 Oh, I made you a copy of McKee's Ten
 Commandments. I've posted one over both
 our work areas.

140 INT. EMPTY BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

140

Kaufman tears down the Ten Commandments. Donald appears
 backlit in the doorway and seems oddly threatening.

*

DONALD
 You shouldn't have done that.

They look at each other. Donald breaks the tension, smiles.

DONALD (cont'd)
 'Cause it's extremely helpful.
 (lies down on floor)
 Hey, I got a song! "Happy Together." I
 was worried about putting a song in a
 thriller, but Bob says Casablanca, one of
 the greatest screenplays ever written,
 did exactly that. Mixed genres.

*

*

*

*

KAUFMAN
 I need to go to bed, Donald. I haven't
 slept in a week.

DONALD
 Okay. Cool. Good night.

*

Donald remains on the floor.

141 OMITTED

141

*

142 INT. EMPTY BEDROOM - NIGHT

142

*

Kaufman lies half-awake in bed, sweating, his eyes darting
 back and forth. He looks over at the clock. It's 3:32.

KAUFMAN

Damn it.

Donald is no longer in the room, but can be heard happily snoring off-screen. Kaufman switches on a lamp, pulls The Orchid Thief from his bag, flips through it. There are now many yellow hi-lited passages. He reads one.

*
*

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

There are too many ideas and things and people, too many directions to go. I was starting to believe the reason it matters to care passionately about something is that it whittles the world down to a more manageable size.

KAUFMAN (cont'd)

Such sweet, sad insights. So true.

Kaufman flips to the glowing, smiling author photo.

KAUFMAN (cont'd)

I like looking at you.

He stares at the photo. Its smile broadens. It talks.

ORLEAN PHOTO

I like looking at you, too. Charlie.

The photo smiles warmly at him. Kaufman closes his eyes, begins to jerk off.

Then: Kaufman and Orlean are in his bed together, making love. She smiles at him throughout. They finish.

Then: Kaufman is alone in bed, heaving. He looks at the still smiling photo. It seems somehow sleepy now.

KAUFMAN

I don't know how to do this. I'm afraid I'll disappoint you. You've written a beautiful book. I can't sleep. I'm losing my hair. I'm fat and repulsive --

ORLEAN PHOTO

Shhh. You're not. Whittle it down. Focus on one thing in the story, find the thing you care passionately about and write about that.

Kaufman studies her delicate, melancholy face. He's in love.

(CONTINUED)

ORLEAN PHOTO (cont'd)
(sweet, flirty smile)
I figured there might be something...

Kaufman paces and talks animatedly into his mini-recorder.

KAUFMAN
We see Susan Orlean, delicate, fragile,
beautiful, haunted by loneliness, typing
at her desk. We hear her voice-over.
(reading book)
"John Laroche is a tall guy, skinny as a
stick..."

Donald, in his underwear, enters with Caroline. She's in a T-shirt we've seen Donald wearing.

*
*

DONALD
Morning.

CAROLINE
Hi!

*
*

Kaufman looks up, sees Caroline with Donald, smiles.

*

KAUFMAN
Hey, hey.

DONALD
(pouring coffee)
You seem chipper.

*

KAUFMAN
I'm good. I have some new ideas.

CAROLINE
God, you guys are so smart! It's like a
brain factory here.

*
*
*

DONALD
(modestly)
I got some ideas, too, this morning.

*
*

CAROLINE
Really, really good ones.

*
*

DONALD
I'm putting in a chase sequence now. The
killer flees on horseback with the girl.
The cop is after them on a motorcycle.

*
*

(MORE)

DONALD (cont'd)

It's like a battle between motors and horses. Like technology versus horses.

KAUFMAN

And they're all still one person, right?

DONALD

Hey, that's the big pay-off.

KAUFMAN

(nice)

Well, it sounds exciting.

DONALD

Thanks, man. Thanks.

Caroline kisses Donald on the cheek.

*

CAROLINE

Told you he'd like it.

*

*

144-147 OMITTED

144-147

*

148 INT. EMPTY BEDROOM - NIGHT

148

Kaufman has a bunch of 1960's reference books on the floor in front of him. He is looking at one entitled Pop Music of the Sixties. He copies down the names of Bob Dylan and Velvet Underground. He reads the lyrics to Just Like a Woman and seems pleased. The notebook page already includes: Tampax Box, NOW button, I Been Down So Long It Looks Like Up To Me by Richard Farina, peasant blouse, Bergman's Persona. Kaufman seems quite pleased with his research. He picks up The Orchid Thief to reward himself with a glance at the Orlean photograph. But he opens the book to the wrong page and sees an About the Author paragraph. The last line jumps off the page: "She now lives in New York City with her husband."

*

*

*

*

*

*

149 EXT. L.A. STREET - NIGHT

149

Kaufman wanders the street, distraught. A couple of passing women snicker. At him?

150 INT. EMPTY BEDROOM - NIGHT

150

Kaufman types with new resolve.

KAUFMAN (V.O.)

Susan watches her husband across the dinner table. She thinks, who is this man? She thinks, why am I here? She thinks, how did this happen?

*

*

*

*

151 INT. EMPTY LIVING ROOM - DAY 151

Kaufman and Orlean move furniture into the room. It now looks warm and inviting. Orlean wears a bandana kerchief.

KAUFMAN

I'm so thrilled I get to adapt your book, get to merge our thoughts. I love that. It's intimate, like a marriage.

*

ORLEAN

Not like a marriage.

KAUFMAN

Maybe what marriage could be?

*

Her eyes tear up. She kisses him on the cheek, exactly as Caroline kissed Donald.

*

*

ORLEAN

Isn't it ironic? You adapting my book? My three years in Florida meditating on my inability to experience passion resulted in my finding it with you.

They kiss and fall onto the new couch.

152 INT. EMPTY BEDROOM - MORNING 152

Kaufman masturbates alone in bed.

153 INT. KITCHEN - DAY 153

Kaufman paces with his mini-recorder. Off-screen laughing and chattering from Donald and Caroline.

*

KAUFMAN

We see the little girl writing in her journal. Her drunken mother enters, sits on young Susan's bed and cries. We see the loneliness of her childhood, her mother's disappointment at life, and how it forever scars the little girl.

*

*

*

*

*

*

Kaufman is immensely pleased. He smiles at Orlean's photo.

KAUFMAN (cont'd)

This is good. I'm finding you.

The phone rings.

KAUFMAN (cont'd)

Yallo?

(CONTINUED)

VALERIE (PHONE VOICE)
Hi, Charlie. It's Valerie. Just bugging
you again. How's everything going?

KAUFMAN
Good. I think really good now.

VALERIE (PHONE VOICE)
Great. So I spoke to Susan yesterday.

KAUFMAN
(beat)
Uh-huh, uh-huh.

VALERIE (PHONE VOICE)
I told her you were making terrific
progress and she's really excited to read
the script.

Sweat appears on Kaufman's brow.

KAUFMAN
Good.

*

VALERIE (PHONE VOICE)
And she said she'd love to meet you.

All color drains from Kaufman's face.

KAUFMAN
Um, well, y'know, for me it's distracting
to... or confusing to discuss what I'm
exploring in the screenplay at this
point... before I finish... So...

*

VALERIE (PHONE VOICE)
That's fair. I'll let her know.

KAUFMAN
Tell Susan I'd be very happy to meet her
at a future date. As she sees fit.

VALERIE (PHONE VOICE)
Okay. Good enough.

KAUFMAN
And tell her how much I love her book.
Say I think she's a great writer. Tell
her I said that. Okay?

*

(CONTINUED)

153 CONTINUED: (2)

153

VALERIE (cont'd)

Will do. Just keep us posted, Charlie.
Because we're very excited and anxious
and all those good things.

*
*

KAUFMAN

Okay. Nice talking to you.

*

Kaufman hangs up and looks at the photo of Orlean. It's still smiling, but not at him. It's not glowing. Maybe it's even smirking. Kaufman paces frantically, holding his stomach. Donald's off-screen typing grows louder.

154 INT. EMPTY LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

154

Donald types at his desk on his computer. Caroline, on the floor, sips coffee and skims a magazine. Kaufman storms in.

*
*

KAUFMAN

You can sit here and pretend to be a writer, mocking the seriousness of what I do, like some kind of fucking funhouse mirror version of me! But let me tell you, you don't know what writing is!

Kaufman grabs his stomach, doubles over.

155 INT. EMERGENCY ROOM - DAY

155

Kaufman is on a gurney and hooked up to an IV. He watches a slightly haggard woman with a bandaged head sitting in a small room across the hall. She glances over in his direction. He smiles. She looks through him.

KAUFMAN (V.O.)

She thinks I'm repulsive. She thinks, why aren't there any cute guys in emergency rooms. She thinks --

*
*
*

An attendant enters the room across the hall and wheels the woman out. It is obvious she's only semi-conscious.

*
*

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

I'm an idiot. I'm completely self-involved. Of course it's impossible for me to write about anyone else's --

*
*
*
*

Kaufman's eyes light up.

*

156 INT. EMPTY BEDROOM - DAY

156

Kaufman paces with his mini-cassette.

(CONTINUED)

KAUFMAN (V.O.)

Movie opens. Charlie Kaufman, fat, old, bald, paces. His voice-over carpets the scene. "I am old. I am fat."

*
*

157-160 OMITTED

157-160

*

161 INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

161

Orlean is on the phone. She is shaky and drunk and still dolled-up from her interview with Vinson.

*
*

LAROCHE (PHONE VOICE)

Yeah?

ORLEAN

It's Susan again.

*

LAROCHE (PHONE VOICE)

I know.

*

ORLEAN

Um, how's it going?

*
*

161A INT. LITTLE BOY'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

161A

*

The room is now filled with computer equipment. Posters of naked women adorn the walls.

*
*

LAROCHE

Great! I'm training myself on the Internet. It's fascinating. I'm doing pornography. It's amazing how much these suckers will pay for photographs of chicks. And it doesn't matter if they're fat or ugly or what.

*
*
*
*
*
*
*

ORLEAN (PHONE VOICE)

That sounds good.

*
*

LAROCHE

It's great is what it is.

*
*

ORLEAN (PHONE VOICE)

So, look, I hate feeling like I'm being a pain to you, but I still haven't seen a ghost. And I was hoping, maybe you'd --

*
*
*
*

LAROCHE

Yeah, yeah. I'll take you in. Tomorrow.

*
*

ORLEAN

Really? Thank you so much! Oh, John!

*
*

162 INT. EMPTY BEDROOM - NIGHT

162

Kaufman types. The cassette player plays. *

KAUFMAN (ON RECORDER)

Kaufman, repugnant, ridiculous, jerks off to the book jacket photo of Susan Orlean.

Donald appears in the doorway with a script.

KAUFMAN (cont'd)

What?! What do you want?

DONALD

I finished my script. I'm done.

Kaufman stares at his typewriter, doesn't say anything.

DONALD (cont'd)

So would you show it to your agent?

(proudly)

It's called The Three.

Kaufman grabs Donald's script and throws it on his bed. The Three is printed on the cover in some dramatic bold typeface.

DONALD (cont'd)

Thanks. Also, I wanted to thank you for your idea. It was very helpful. I changed it a little. Now the killer cuts off body pieces and makes the victims eat them. It's, like, Caroline has this great tattoo of a snake swallowing it's tail and --

*
*
*

Kaufman puts his head in his hands.

KAUFMAN

Ourobouros.

DONALD

I don't know what that means.

KAUFMAN

The snake is called Ourobouros.

DONALD

I don't think so. But, anyway, it's cool for my killer to have this modus operandi. Because at the end when he forces the woman, who's really *him*, to eat *herself*, he's also eating *himself* to death.

(CONTINUED)

KAUFMAN
I'm insane. I'm Ourobouros.

DONALD
I don't know what that word means.

KAUFMAN
I've written myself into my screenplay.
It's eating itself. I'm eating myself.

DONALD
Oh. That's kinda weird, huh?

KAUFMAN
It's self-indulgent. It's narcissistic.
It's solipsistic. It's pathetic. I'm
pathetic. I'm fat and pathetic.

DONALD
I'm sure you had good reasons, Charles. *
You're an artist.

KAUFMAN
The reason is I'm too timid to speak to
the woman who wrote the book. Because
I'm pathetic. Because I have no idea how
to write. Because I can't make flowers
fascinating. Because I suck.

DONALD
Hey, am I in the script?

KAUFMAN
I'm going to New York. I'll meet her.
That's it. That's what I have to do.

DONALD
Don't get mad at me for saying this,
Charles, but Bob's got a seminar in New
York this weekend at the Hyatt Regency. *
So if you're stuck --

Kaufman shoots Donald a look. *

163 OMITTED 163 *

164 INT. CAR - A BIT LATER 164

The sun has come up strong. It looks hot. Laroche speeds
along with one finger on the wheel, paying little attention
to the road. The car veers onto the shoulder, he lazily
corrects it. Orlean is tense.

LAROCHE

I remember one time when I was fifteen,
 my mother and I came to the Fakahatchee
 to look for a ghost. We walked for
 hours, through the most intense heat I'd
 ever felt. We couldn't find one. I
 wanted to turn back. But my mom said,
 John, if you keep searching for something
 past doubt, past hopelessness, past the
 absolute certainty that you'll never find
 it, there it'll be. So we walked. I had
 goddamn bloody blisters on my feet. And
 we found ourselves in this charred
 prairie, desolate, sun blasted, y'know.
 And there in the middle of it was this
 one gorgeous, snowy *Polyrrhiza lindenii*.

*
*
*
*

They drive in silence for a little while. She watches him.

164A EXT. MIDTOWN NEW YORK CITY STREET - DAY

164A

Kaufman, sweaty and anxious, walks along.

*
*

ORLEAN (V.O.)

He made it sound like a Bible story, the
 hopeful journey through darkness into
 light. I never thought many people in
 the world were like John, but I was
 realizing more and more that Laroche was
 an extreme, not an aberration -- most for
 something exceptional, something to
 pursue, even at their peril, rather than
 abide an ordinary life.

Kaufman arrives at the New Yorker building and enters with
 steely determination.

*

165-167 OMITTED

165-167

168 EXT. SWAMP - MORNING

168

Laroche and Orlean step off the levee into black water. They
 sink to their knees. The ground is soft; it's a struggle to
 pull their feet up to walk. Things slither past in the
 water. Something big runs by in the distance. Bees, and
 dragonflies hover. Gnats and mosquitoes bite. Birds
 screech. Frogs croak. Laroche points to a yellow flower.

*
*

LAROCHE

Here we go. *Encyclia tempensis*.

Laroche lights a cigarette.

(CONTINUED)

LAROCHE (cont'd)
Nice little sucker, isn't it?

Orlean examines it. Laroche continues and Orlean attempts to keep pace. He points at a tiny orchid on another tree.

*

LAROCHE (CONT'D)
Clamshell orchid. You know that.

*

ORLEAN
Uh-huh.

LAROCHE
See, I found you two already. I'll show you every orchid you want today. I'll find you a fucking ghost if it kills me.
(pointing to another orchid)
Rigid *Epidendrum*. That's an ugly-ass orchid. But I'm no snob. I'm interested in all orchids. Not just pretty ones.

Orlean laughs appreciatively.

*

169 OMITTED

169

*

170 INT. ELEVATOR - DAY

170

*

Kaufman rides up in the crowded elevator. It stops a few times; people get off and on. Kaufman sweats. The doors open. The New Yorker logo is painted on the wall opposite the elevator. Nobody gets off or on. The doors close. The elevator continues up. Kaufman hates himself. Soon the elevator is emptied out with the exception of Kaufman. It begins its descent and stops once again at the New Yorker. This time Orlean gets on. Kaufman is panicked. Orlean looks at him blankly, presses "lobby", and faces front. Kaufman sweats, studies the back of her head. The elevator arrives at the lobby. Orlean gets out. Kaufman hesitates.

*

*

171 EXT. NEW YORK CITY STREET - DAY

171

Orlean walks along. Kaufman follows her.

172 EXT. SWAMP - LATE MORNING

172

The sun is much higher in the sky. Orlean is a sweaty mess, frizzed hair, anxious, scraped, dirty.

LAROCHE
(peppy)
They're right nearby. Just follow me.

173 INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

173

Orlean sits by herself, reading Vanity Fair. Kaufman sits a few tables away. He scribbles in his notebook.

KAUFMAN (V.O.)

Reads Vanity Fair. Funny detail: New Yorker writer reads Vanity Fair. Use!

A waitress brings a tuna sandwich and an iced tea to Orlean.

KAUFMAN (V.O.) (cont'd)

Likes tuna, drinks iced tea. Good character details. Good stuff!

Orlean looks up from her magazine and smiles at the waitress.

ORLEAN

Thanks. Could I get some lemon please?

The waitress nods and leaves. Kaufman scribbles.

KAUFMAN (V.O.)

Likes lemon in tea and her voice is not at all what I imagined. Interesting!

174 EXT. SWAMP - NOON

174

Orlean follows Laroche. She watches him start off in one direction, stop, then go in another direction. *

ORLEAN

Can I ask you a personal question? *

Laroche turns and scowls at her.

LAROCHE

We're not lost.

175 INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

175

Kaufman types from his notes. *

KAUFMAN (V.O.)

Orlean turns from the prosecutor to the waitress and says: Could I get some lemon, please? *

Kaufman reads what he has written. He's frustrated, hysterical. He paces, yanks the sheets from the bed, tries to tear them, swings them wildly, knocking over a bedside lamp and shattering the bulb. *

(CONTINUED)

He stops, heaves, bends to pick up the broken glass. The
phone rings. He answers it, still holding the glass.

KAUFMAN (CONT'D)

Hello?

MARTY (TELEPHONE VOICE)

Hey, it's Marty. How's it going? Has it
been helpful to talk to the writer?
What's her name?

KAUFMAN

Susan Orlean. It's been okay.

MARTY (TELEPHONE VOICE)

Well, I mean, are you making headway?
Valerie's breathing down my neck.

KAUFMAN

(hollow)
You can't rush inspiration.

MARTY (TELEPHONE VOICE)

Okay, fair enough. Um, the other reason
I'm calling is to tell you The Three is
just amazing.

KAUFMAN

I don't know what that is.

MARTY (TELEPHONE VOICE)

Donald's script! A smart, edgy thriller.
Best script I've read this year.

KAUFMAN

Oh. Good.

MARTY (TELEPHONE VOICE)

I'll sell it for a shitload. Two fucking
talented guys in one family. Y'know,
maybe you could bring your brother on to
help you finish the orchid thing.

KAUFMAN

Marty, don't say that. I mean --

MARTY (TELEPHONE VOICE)

Just a thought, buddy. He's really
goddamn amazing at structure.

KAUFMAN

I gotta go. I have an appointment.

(CONTINUED)

175 CONTINUED: (2)

175

MARTY (TELEPHONE VOICE)
Adios, amigo. Finish! Finish!

*
*

176 EXT. SWAMP - LATER

176

The sun is high. Orlean and Laroche sit on dry ground. She stares at him. He won't look at her, but busies himself opening the backpack and pulling out food. Finally:

LAROCHE
I'm just turned around a little.

He looks up at her, sees her staring at him. He pokes around on the ground for something, comes up with a straight twig.

LAROCHE (cont'd)
A sundial. I'll just set this up, wait a few minutes, and we'll be able to tell which way the sun is moving. We want to be heading southeast.

Laroche sticks the twig into the ground, stares at it.

LAROCHE (cont'd)
You should eat something.

Orlean takes a cracker. This relaxes Laroche. He stretches his legs, knocks over the twig. Without looking at Orlean, he puts the twig back.

LAROCHE (cont'd)
So do you collect anything?

ORLEAN
(non-responsive)
Not really.

LAROCHE
Well, y'know it's not really about collecting the thing, it's about --

ORLEAN
The sundial isn't working.

Laroche looks down at it.

LAROCHE
It is so.

Orlean stares at the twig in the ground. She looks at Laroche. Laroche smiles sheepishly at Orlean. Rage and panic sweep across her face, her fists clench into balls.

(CONTINUED)

Her eyes become wild, some dark fantasy plays out in her brain. Laroche seems unaware.

*

ORLEAN
(panicky)
Look, look, I need to --

*
*
*

LAROCHE
The thing about computers. The thing I like is that I'm immersed in it but it's not a living thing that's going to leave or die or something.

*
*
*

Orlean looks sadly at Laroche.

*

LAROCHE (CONT'D)
Okay, fuck the sundial. We'll just go straight and eventually we'll get there.

*

They rise.

LAROCHE (cont'd)
What I mean is we'll get somewhere. Out of here. I mean, logically, we have to get out as long as we walk straight.

Laroche points them in a direction and they walk.

*

177 OMITTED

177

*

178 EXT. NYC STREETS (MONTAGE) - MORNING

178

*

Kaufman wanders. He eyes other sad-looking, balding, overweight men wandering the streets also.

KAUFMAN (V.O.)
I am fat. I am repulsive. I am old. I can't write. I am just one more old, fat, bald man on the street.

*
*

179 EXT. SWAMP - DAY

179

Laroche leads the way. There's a sadness, a sense of defeat and humiliation that he tries to conceal. Orlean is stony.

LAROCHE
I've done this a million times. Whenever everything's killing me, I just say to myself, screw it, and go straight ahead.

Laroche leads Orlean back into the brush.

180 EXT. NYC STREET - MORNING 180

Kaufman sees a glass building ahead, glowing in the sun. He walks toward it. *

181 INT. LOBBY - MORNING 181

The lobby of an auditorium, crowded with enthusiastic people signing up for something. Kaufman waits in line. He watches the handsome guy ahead of him flirt with a female registrar. The guy moves on and the registrar looks without interest at Kaufman. *

REGISTRAR

Yes?

Kaufman averts his eyes from her cool gaze; they come to rest on a pile of McKee's book Story next to her.

182 INT. AUDITORIUM - A BIT LATER 182

Kaufman sits in the packed room. McKee paces the stage with a mic clipped to his lapel.

MCKEE

Years from now you'll be standing around a posh cocktail party congratulating yourself on how you spent an entire weekend locked in a room with an asshole from Hollywood for your art. *

The audience laughs, except for Kaufman who looks pained.

KAUFMAN (V.O.)

I am pathetic. I am a loser. I am fat.

MCKEE

So... what is the substance of writing? Nothing as trivial as words is at the heart of this great art. *

McKee continues to talk but his voice goes under.

KAUFMAN (V.O.)

I have failed. I am panicked. I am fat. I have sold out. I am worthless. I...

MCKEE

Literary talent is not enough. First, last, and always the imperative is to tell a story.

Kaufman watches with disdain as people take notes.

(CONTINUED)

MCKEE

Twenty-three hundred years ago, Aristotle said, when storytelling goes bad in a society, the result is decadence.

(deadpan)

Well, just look around you.

Everyone except Charlie laughs at McKee's joke.

MCKEE (cont'd)

Your goal must be a good story *well told*. Craft is the sum total of all means used to draw the audience into deep involvement, and ultimately to reward it with a moving and meaningful experience.

*
*
*
*
*

McKee scribbles a diagram onto a transparency in an overhead projector. It's some kind of complicated time-line with act-breaks and corresponding page numbers indicated. The audience members take copious notes. Kaufman sweats.

KAUFMAN (V.O.)

It is my weakness, my ultimate lack of conviction that brings me here. Easy answers. Rules to short-cut yourself to success. And here I am, because my jaunt into the abyss brought me nothing. Well, isn't that the risk one takes for attempting something new. I should leave here right now. I'll start over --

(starts to rise)

I need to face this project head on and --

*

MCKEE

... and God help you if you use voice-over in your work, my friends.

Kaufman looks up, startled. McKee seems to watching him.

*

MCKEE (CONT'D)

God help you! It's flaccid, sloppy writing. Any idiot can write voice-over narration to explain the thoughts of a character. You must present the internal conflicts of your character in action.

*
*
*
*
*

Kaufman looks around at people scribbling in notebooks. "Flaccid..." writes the guy on one side of him. "Any idiot..." writes the guy on the other side.

183 CONTINUED:

183

MCKEE (cont'd)
Okay, one hour for lunch.

184 EXT. NYC STREET - A FEW MINUTES LATER 184

Students exit onto the street in groups. Kaufman wanders by himself. His face is troubled. There is no sound.

185 OMITTED 185 *

186 INT. AUDITORIUM - LATER 186

It's late. The audience is tired, but still attentive. Now Kaufman takes serious notes. McKee, energetic as ever, wears his sweater tied around his shoulders. We stay firmly planted on his face as he talks and talks.

MCKEE

Long speeches are antithetical to the nature of cinema. The Greeks called it stykomythia -- the rapid exchange of ideas. A long speech in a script, say a page long, requires that the camera hold on the actor's face for a minute. Look at the second hand on your watch as it makes one complete rotation around the clock face and you'll get an idea of how intolerable that would be for an audience. The ontology of the screen is that it's always now and it's always action and it's always vivid. And that's an important point. We are not recreating life on the screen. Writers are not tape recorders. Have you ever eavesdropped on people talking in a coffee shop? Then you know how dull and tedious real conversation is. Real people are not interesting. There's not a person in this world -- and I include myself in this -- who would be interesting enough to take as is and put in a movie as a character.

*

DISSOLVE TO:

187 INT. AUDITORIUM - LATER STILL 187

McKee faces the audience, holding a cup of coffee.

MCKEE

The other day someone asked me if Michelle Pfeiffer were beautiful.

*

*

(CONTINUED)

187 CONTINUED:

187

He pauses theatrically, sips his coffee, then, deadpan:

*

MCKEE (cont'd)

Michelle Pfeiffer is proof for the
existence of God.

*

*

The overtired audience breaks into uproarious laughter.
Kaufman, with dark circles under his eyes, giggles a little.

MCKEE (cont'd)

Okay. That's it for tonight. Remember,
there'll be a Q and A tomorrow morning
before class starts.

188 INT. HOTEL - NIGHT

188

In bed, Kaufman struggles with Aristotle's Poetics. There's
a photograph of a bust of Aristotle on the book's cover.

DISSOLVE TO:

189 OMITTED

189

*

189A INT. KAUFMAN'S DINING ROOM - DAY

189A

*

Darwin and Aristotle and Kaufman have tea. It's silent and
tense. Aristotle rises to stretch. He walks around the
table. Out of nowhere, he smashes Darwin in the back of the
head. Darwin flies face forward into the card table,
collapsing it. He turns, grabs Aristotle's foot and pulls
him down. A violent fight ensues. Kaufman can't get out of
the way, can't seem to move as the two men brutally bludgeon
each other, smash against walls leaving bloody prints.

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

190 INT. AUDITORIUM - MORNING

190

Kaufman, bleary-eyed, sits in the back. McKee paces.

MCKEE

Anyone else?

Kaufman timidly raises his hand.

MCKEE (cont'd)

Yes?

KAUFMAN

What if a writer is attempting to create
a story where nothing much happens, where
people don't change, they don't have any
epiphanies. They struggle and are
frustrated and nothing is resolved. More
a reflection of the real world --

*

*

(CONTINUED)

MCKEE

The real world? The real fucking world? First of all, if you write a screenplay without conflict or crisis, you'll bore your audience to tears. Secondly: Nothing happens in the world? Are you out of your fucking mind? People are murdered every day! There's genocide and war and corruption! Every fucking day somewhere in the world somebody sacrifices his life to save someone else! Every fucking day someone somewhere makes a conscious decision to destroy someone else! People find love! People lose it, for Christ's sake! A child watches her mother beaten to death on the steps of a church! Someone goes hungry! Somebody else betrays his best friend for a woman! If you can't find that stuff in life, then you, my friend, don't know much about life! And why the fuck are you taking up my precious two hours with your movie? I don't have any use for it! I don't have any bloody use for it!

KAUFMAN

Okay, thanks.

191 EXT. NYC STREET - NIGHT

191

The last of the students are filing out. Kaufman waits, leaning against the building. McKee emerges, carrying his brown leather bag. A shaky, tired Kaufman approaches him.

KAUFMAN

Mr. McKee?

MCKEE

Yes?

KAUFMAN

I'm the guy you yelled at this morning.

MCKEE

(trying to recall)

I need more.

KAUFMAN

I was the one who thought things didn't happen in life.

MCKEE

Oh, right, okay. Nice to see you.

(CONTINUED)

KAUFMAN

I need to talk.

MCKEE

I'm sorry. I can't talk to writers about material I haven't read.

*
*

KAUFMAN

Mr. McKee, my even standing here is very scary. I don't meet people well. But what you said this morning shook me to the bone. What you said was bigger than my screenwriting choices. It's about my choices as a human being. Please.

*
*

McKee hesitates for a moment, then reaches out and puts his arm around Kaufman.

MCKEE

I could use a drink, my friend.

192 EXT. SWAMP - DAY

192

Laroche and Orlean slog through the water with purpose, looking only straight ahead. As they walk the sounds and colors become subdued. Soon there is silence.

ORLEAN (V.O.)

We turned to the right and saw only more cypress and palm and sawgrass

They turn left and see metal flashing in the sunlight.

ORLEAN (V.O.) (cont'd)

So we turned to the left, and there, far down the diagonal of the levee, we could see the gleam of a fender.

Orlean and Laroche walk toward the car.

ORLEAN (V.O.) (cont'd)

We followed it like a beacon...

193 INT. BAR - NIGHT

193

Kaufman and McKee sit at a table with beers. Kaufman reads from his copy of The Orchid Thief.

KAUFMAN

... all the way to the road.

Kaufman closes the book. There's a pause.

(CONTINUED)

MCKEE

Then what happens?

KAUFMAN

That's the end of the book. I wanted to present it simply, without big character arcs or sensationalizing the story. I wanted to show flowers as God's miracles. I wanted to show that Orlean never saw the blooming ghost orchid. It's about disappointment.

MCKEE

(disappointed)

I see.

(beat)

That's not a movie. Maybe you've got two acts.

*
*

KAUFMAN

(pause)

I've got pages of false starts and wrong approaches. I'm way past my deadline. I can't go back.

McKee sips his beer, eyes Kaufman.

MCKEE (cont'd)

Tell you a secret. The last act makes the film. You can have an uninvolved, tedious movie, but wow them at the end, and you've got a hit. Find an ending. But don't cheat! Don't you dare bring in a *deus ex machina*. Your characters must change and the change must come from them. Do that and you'll be fine.

*
*
*
*

Tears form in Kaufman's eyes.

KAUFMAN

You promise?

McKee smiles. Kaufman hugs him. McKee recognizes his bulk.

MCKEE

You've taken my course before?

KAUFMAN

My brother did. My twin brother Donald. He's the one who got me to come.

(CONTINUED)

MCKEE

Twin screenwriters. Julius and Philip Epstein, who wrote Casablanca were twins.

KAUFMAN

You mentioned that in class.

MCKEE

One of the finest screenplays ever written.

*

194 INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

194

Kaufman paces, tries to read Story. McKee's Ten Commandments is taped to the wall. As is a photo of Michelle Pfeiffer ripped from a magazine.

*

195 INT. MCKEE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

195

McKee, like Darwin before him, sits at his desk and writes.

MCKEE (V.O.)

Climax. A revolution in values from positive to negative or negative to positive without irony -- a value swing at maximum charge that's absolute and irreversible.

196 INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

196

Kaufman is lost in McKee's text. He rubs his temples. He dials the phone.

DONALD (PHONE VOICE)

Great writers residence.

Caroline giggles in the background.

*

KAUFMAN

Donald.

DONALD (PHONE VOICE)

Hey, how's the trip? Gettin' it on with that lady journalist? You dog you!

KAUFMAN

Yeah. Listen, I'm calling to say congratulations on your script.

196A INT. EMPTY LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

196A

Donald sits on the floor with Caroline and Catherine Keener. They drink wine and are in the middle of a board game.

*

*

*

(CONTINUED)

DONALD
Isn't that cool? Marty says he can make
me, like, high-sixes against a mill-five.

KAUFMAN (PHONE VOICE)
That's great, Donald.

DONALD
I want to thank you for all your help.

KAUFMAN (PHONE VOICE)
I wasn't any help.

DONALD
C'mon, you let me stay in your place and
your integrity inspired me to even try.
It's been a wild ride. Keener says she
really wants to play Cassie!

KEENER
(jokingly, tipsy)
Oh, please, please, Donald, please...

196B INT. HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

196B

KAUFMAN
What?

DONALD (PHONE VOICE)
She stopped by after work with Caroline.
And she picked up the script and couldn't
put it down.

KEENER (O.C.) (IN BACKGROUND)
I couldn't put it down because I had glue
on my hands!

Keener, Caroline, and Donald laugh. Kaufman is silent for a
long moment, taking this all in.

KAUFMAN
Catherine Keener is in my house?

DONALD (PHONE VOICE)
Yeah. We're playing Boggle. She's
great. You should hang out with her.

KAUFMAN
Yeah. Um, look, I've been thinking,
maybe you'd be interested in hanging out
with *me* in New York for a few days.

(CONTINUED)

DONALD (PHONE VOICE)
Oh my God, yes!

*

KAUFMAN
Yeah? I was going to show my script to
some people. Maybe you could read it,
too. Y'know, if you like.

*

*

*

*

DONALD (PHONE VOICE)
Of course! I'm flattered!

*

*

197 INT. HOTEL ROOM - MORNING

197

Donald lies on his back on the floor intently reading the
script. Kaufman paces. Donald finishes, is quiet.

KAUFMAN
So, like, what would you do?

DONALD
Script kind of makes fun of me, huh?

KAUFMAN
Sorry. I was trying something. I --

DONALD
Hey, I don't mind. It's funny.

KAUFMAN
Okay. Good. So, what would you do?

*

DONALD
You and me are so different, Charles.
We're different talents.

KAUFMAN
I know. Just for fun. How would the
great Donald end this script?

DONALD
(giggling)
Shut up. The great Donald.
(serious)
I feel like you're missing something.

*

KAUFMAN
(stung but covering)
All right. Like what?

DONALD
I don't know, man. I'm thinking,
subtext. Y'know, who is Susan Orlean?

*

*

(CONTINUED)

KAUFMAN

She's a journalist writing a story.

DONALD

Is she? I mean, yes, of course she's that, but, look...

(picks up Orchid Thief, reads)

"Sometimes this kind of story turns out to be something more, some glimpse of life that expands like those Japanese paper balls you drop in water and they bloom into flowers, and the flower is so marvelous you can't believe there was a time all you saw in front of you was a paper ball and a glass of water."

(looks up)

First of all, she said she didn't care about flowers. That's inconsistent.

KAUFMAN

For God's sake, it's just a metaphor.

DONALD

For what? What turned that paper ball into a flower? It's not in the book.

KAUFMAN

I don't know. You're reaching.

DONALD

Maybe, but I think you need to actually talk to this woman. To know her.

KAUFMAN

I can't. Really.

DONALD

I'll go. Pretend I'm you.

Kaufman rolls his eyes.

DONALD (CONT'D)

I want to do it, Charles. Someone's got to talk to her.

A long silence while Kaufman looks his brother up and down.

KAUFMAN

But you've got to be exactly me. I have a reputation to maintain. You can't be a goofball. You can't be an asshole.

(CONTINUED)

DONALD
I'm not an asshole.

KAUFMAN
You know what I mean. No flirting. No bad jokes. Don't laugh how you laugh.

DONALD
(sort of hurt)
I'm not going to laugh. I get to have people think I'm you. It's an honor.

198 INT. ORLEAN'S OFFICE - DAY

198

Orlean is behind her desk. Donald, dressed as Charlie, sits across from her, doing his best serious writer impression. *

DONALD
So, I guess I'll bring out the big guns now. Do you keep in touch with Laroche? *

Orlean responds with what might be a practiced casualness.

ORLEAN
I had a brief phone conversation with him when the book came out. He said, "You know, if you write a couple more books, you could become a pretty good writer."

Donald laughs appreciatively as he scribbles on his pad.

DONALD
(flirty despite himself)
I think you're a very good writer *now*. *

ORLEAN
Thanks.

DONALD
The reason I ask, is that I felt I detected an attraction to him. In the *subtext*. Care to comment?

ORLEAN
Our relationship was strictly reporter-subject. I mean, certainly an intimacy develops in that type of relationship. You spend a lot of time together. By definition, I was very interested in everything he had to say. But the relationship ends when the book ends. *

Donald scribbles, mumbles under his breath. *

(CONTINUED)

ORLEAN (CONT'D) *

What?

DONALD

Nothing. Okay, just one more question. *

(reading from pad)

If you could have dinner with one historical personage, living or dead, who would it be?

Orlean is somewhat relieved she's dealing with an idiot. *

ORLEAN

I'd have to say... Einstein or Jesus.

DONALD

Very good. Interesting answer. *

199 INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

199

Kaufman paces, stares out the window, watches TV. Donald enters, dressed as Charlie.

DONALD

She was nervous. She's lying.

KAUFMAN

What do you mean? What happened?

DONALD

Nothing. She said all the right things. Too right.

KAUFMAN

Maybe they're too right because they're true. Did you embarrass me? *

DONALD

People who answer questions too right are liars. And everybody says Jesus and Einstein. That's a prepackaged answer. *

KAUFMAN

What do you mean "Jesus and Einstein"?

DONALD

Listen, Charles, I have an idea. You need to buy me a pair of binoculars. *

KAUFMAN

What's Jesus and Einstein? *

(CONTINUED)

Donald winks, picks up a pen, holds it like a microphone, and sings and dances around Kaufman, who just stares at him.

DONALD

(singing)

Imagine me and you, I do.

(talking)

C'mon.

(singing)

I think about you day and night --

(talking)

C'mon, sing with me!

(singing)

It's only right to think about the one
you love and hold her tight.

*

*

*

KAUFMAN

What the hell do you need binoculars for?

*

200 INT. EMPTY SUITE OF OFFICES - NIGHT

200

Kaufman nervously watches the door. Donald stares out the window with binoculars.

*

KAUFMAN

I don't want to be caught here. I don't
want to be doing this.

*

DONALD

Leave. I'll just stay a little longer.

Kaufman can't step out into the hallway by himself.

KAUFMAN

Well, is she doing anything at all?

DONALD

Still just staring off. Sadly.

KAUFMAN

Let's go. Let's go.

DONALD

She's dialing her phone!

201 INT. ORLEAN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

201

We watch this in silence through the binoculars. Orlean waits as the phone rings. She closes her office door. A conversation ensues, becoming more and more agitated.

DONALD (O.S.)

She's upset.

(CONTINUED)

201 CONTINUED:

201

KAUFMAN (O.S.)

Stop watching her. Leave her alone.

Orlean looks out her window. She starts to cry. *

202 INT. EMPTY SUITE OF OFFICES - CONTINUOUS

202

Kaufman paces behind Donald, who watches through binoculars.

DONALD

She's crying. She hung up the phone.
She's at her computer. *

KAUFMAN

This is morally reprehensible.

Through binoculars we see Orlean on her computer at an online
airline reservation site.

DONALD

United to Miami. Tomorrow morning.
(turns to Kaufman) *

Hmm, I thought she was done with Laroche. *

KAUFMAN

Her parents live in Florida, Donald.

DONALD

That was no parent phone call, my friend.

KAUFMAN

Don't say "my friend."

203 INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

203

Kaufman tries to read McKee's Story. Donald flips a pencil
lazily in the air and reads The Orchid Thief.

DONALD

Have you checked out Laroche's porn site? *

KAUFMAN

No. I'm trying to read.

Donald tapes some computer keys.

DONALD

Anyway, I'm gonna look at it. Research. *

Heh heh. Don't tell my old lady. *

KAUFMAN

You mean mom? *

(CONTINUED)

DONALD

No. I don't mean mom.
 (waits for website to come up)
 I still say we go to Miami tomorrow.

*
*

KAUFMAN

Forget it.

*

DONALD

(studying website)
 Some of these chicks are okay. Hey,
 guess what? We're going to Miami.

*
*

KAUFMAN

I said, no.

DONALD

I said, oh yeah, baby. C'mere.

*

Kaufman sighs, goes over to the computer. On the screen is a
 naked photo of Orlean, posed but awkward. Kaufman stares
 incredulously at it.

*

204 INT. RENTAL CAR - DAY

204

Kaufman and Donald are parked in the loading area at the
 Miami Airport, Donald behind the wheel. Orlean waits on the
 sidewalk with a suitcase. The beat-up white van pulls up.

*
*

DONALD

Told ya.

KAUFMAN

It's so weird to see that van in real
 life.

*

Orlean gets in, the van speeds off. Donald follows.

*

205 INT. CAR - A BIT LATER

205

Donald drives, keeping up with the van, which speeds and
 swerves through traffic. Kaufman is sweaty, nervous.

206 EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - LATER

206

The van pulls into the driveway of a neat, middle-class
 house. Kaufman and Donald drive by, in time to see Orlean
 and Laroche emerge from the van. Orlean seems different now:
 more exotic. Donald parks up the street, gets out, and
 watches as Laroche lugs Orlean's suitcase into the house.

*

DONALD

I'll get a closer look. You wait here.

(CONTINUED)

KAUFMAN

(momentously)

No. I should go. I mean, it should be me, right? I mean, it's my...

DONALD

Go for it, bro. You the man.

Kaufman gets out of the car. Donald gets in, peruses Kaufman's script. Kaufman walks past the house, trying to peer in windows. He slinks around back. His eyes widen as he discovers a greenhouse filled with row upon row of ghost orchids. There's movement in a window in the house. Kaufman ducks.

*
*
*

LAROCHE (O.S.)

Darlin', I dunno what's come over you!

Kaufman crawls to the window, looks in. Orlean and Laroche are laughing, kissing, undressing each other. Kaufman is heartbroken and transfixed. Orlean pulls away giggling, crawls to the coffee table, snorts some lines of green powder. Laroche waits patiently. She drags herself back to him and continues where they left off. Laroche glances at the window, locks eyes with Kaufman. He jumps up and runs naked to the back door. Orlean, oblivious, continues to rub herself. Kaufman makes a mad dash around the side of the house. Laroche cuts him off, drags him into the house.

*
*
*
*
*
*
*
*
*
*

207 INT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

207

Laroche throws Kaufman down into a chair. The chair slides across the floor, tips over. Laroche's new beautiful set of white teeth, have slipped. He adjusts them.

*
*

ORLEAN

Who's that, Johnny?

*
*

KAUFMAN

I just... nobody, I just --

*

LAROCHE

Who the fuck are you?

KAUFMAN

Um, I'm just... Wrong house.

*

Orlean studies Kaufman.

*

ORLEAN

You know what? It's that screenwriter. How did he find me, Johnny?

*
*

(CONTINUED)

LAROCHE

The guy adapting our book? Wild!
(to Kaufman)

Hey, dude, who's gonna play me?

KAUFMAN

I'm not -- I don't know that. I should --

Kaufman rises. Orlean rises.

LAROCHE

I thought I should play me.

ORLEAN

Did he follow me? Did you follow me?

KAUFMAN

No, of course not. I should go.

LAROCHE

Okay. Well, it was nice to meet you.
Let me give you my number.

Larocche begins to write his phone number.

ORLEAN

I'm freaking, John. Why is he here?
What does he know?

KAUFMAN

I don't know anything about anything.

LAROCHE

He did see the greenhouse.

ORLEAN

Shit, don't let him leave.

Larocche looks at Susan, then kind of stands in Kaufman's way.

LAROCHE

Have a seat for a moment, 'kay?

Kaufman does. Orlean tries to focus.

ORLEAN

You going to put this in your screenplay?

KAUFMAN

I really don't know what *this* is.

Orlean sees Kaufman glance at the drugs on the coffee table.

(CONTINUED)

ORLEAN

He's lying! I mean, he's researching his script, right?

*
*

LAROCHE

Good point. Why are you here?

*

KAUFMAN

I'm not sure. I was just -- I'm just down here to see the swamp.

*
*
*

LAROCHE

Oh. Well, I don't know if I'm available to take you in. Maybe in a week or --

*
*
*

ORLEAN

That's not why he's here!

*
*

LAROCHE

Why, then?

*
*

ORLEAN

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

KAUFMAN

I'm pretty much going to stick with the book. I'm almost done, anyway. I'm pretty clear on the structure.

*
*

Kaufman rises.

LAROCHE

I believe him, Suze.

*

ORLEAN

Hold him.

*

Larocche does. Orlean massages her temples. She talks to herself for a while, gestures to herself. She looks up.

ORLEAN (cont'd)

We have to kill him.

KAUFMAN AND LAROCHE

What?

ORLEAN

(mumbling)

I don't know.

(screaming)

I don't know!

(CONTINUED)

LAROCHE

Susie?

ORLEAN

What are we supposed to do? You tell me! *

LAROCHE

(slow, deliberate)

Susie, you need to calm down. You're
getting a little emotional and you -- *

ORLEAN

Don't talk to me like I'm a mental
patient! I hate when you do that! *

LAROCHE

I'm not. I'm sorry. *

ORLEAN

I can't have him writing about me. I
can't have people -- all those people --
watching my -- *

KAUFMAN

Can I please speak? *

ORLEAN

Lock him in the closet. I have to think. *

LAROCHE

Yeah, okay. *

Laroche escorts Kaufman to the closet as Susan paces. *

LAROCHE (cont'd)

(quietly)

Just for a little while, Charlie. Sorry. *

KAUFMAN

(trying to keep a friend here)

It's okay. I understand. Thank you. *

Kaufman gets in. Laroche closes the door. *

208 INT. CLOSET - CONTINUOUS

208

Kaufman stands in the dark as the door is locked. He listens. *

LAROCHE (O.S.)

Susie, we can't kill anyone. *

(CONTINUED)

ORLEAN (O.S.)

Then what? Everyone will find out. My mom! It'll be in a damn movie! I'll be humiliated. It will ruin our thing! Us!

*
*
*

LAROCHE (O.S.)

It will?

*
*

ORLEAN (O.S.)

Protect me, Johnny. Please.

*

There's a long sweaty silence.

*

LAROCHE (O.S.)

There are a couple guns with my dad's stuff in the basement.

Kaufman inhales sharply.

208A INT. BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

208A

Laroche, in close-up, descends the basement stairs. He pulls a cord lighting a bare bulb. He sifts through a cardboard box, pulls out a stack of ancient TV guides, finds a battery-operated bartender doll, turns it on. The bartender shakes a drink, his pants fall down, his face lights up red. Laroche turns it off. He reaches into the box and pulls out a gun.

*
*
*
*
*
*

208B INT. LAROCHE'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

208B

Orlean, in close-up, chews her fingernail and cries. Laroche can be heard ascending the creaky basement stairs. He passes behind her. She glances down at his off-screen hand.

*
*
*

ORLEAN

Do you know how to put the bullets in?

*

LAROCHE (O.S.)

I think you just stick them in. In these holes here.

*
*

Orlean nods her head, a little hysterically.

*

209 INT. LIVING ROOM WINDOW - CONTINUOUS

209

Unnoticed, in close-up, Donald watches the goings-on. Laroche and Orlean, large, blurry, pacing foreground figures, occasionally pass between Donald and the camera.

*
*
*

ORLEAN (O.S.)

I thought maybe we'd take him to the Fakahatchee.

*
*
*

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ORLEAN (O.S.) (cont'd)
 He could be found drowned, like he was
 doing research, like he slipped and hit
 his head on a rock.

*
*
*

LAROCHE (O.S.)
 Okay. That sounds like a real thing that
 could happen.

*
*
*

ORLEAN (O.S.)
 You have a car, screenwriter?

*
*

KAUFMAN (O.S.)
 I, um, no, I --

*

ORLEAN (O.S.)
 Of course he does. We'll drive his car
 and leave it on the side of the swamp.

*
*
*

KAUFMAN (O.S.)
 I don't have a car!

*
*

Donald disappears from the window.

Kaufman drives through a nice, suburban Miami neighborhood.
 His headlights shine on Laroche's van ahead. Orlean sits
 next to him, holding a gun. She skims Kaufman's screenplay.

*
*

KAUFMAN
 Look, I don't care what you're doing.
 I'm really just interested in orchids.

*
*

ORLEAN
 Hey, here's me again!
 (mockingly reading from screen)
 "Isn't it ironic? You adapting my book?
 My three years in Florida meditating on
 my inability to experience passion
 resulted in my finding it with you."
 Jesus, that's sort of creepy.

*
*
*
*

KAUFMAN
 I was just trying to do something.

*

ORLEAN
 Jerking off to my photograph. God,
 there's an image I could do without.

*
*

KAUFMAN
 It's a story. I didn't really do it.

*
*

They drive in silence. Orlean reads more of the screenplay.

ORLEAN *
Here's a good one! *
(mocking)
"I wanted to know what it's like to care
about something passionately."

Orlean laughs derisively.

KAUFMAN *
You can laugh, but I didn't make that up.
That's a quote from your book.

ORLEAN
Yeah, I know, Charlie-boy. Chill. I'm
laughing at who I used to be. It's sad.

KAUFMAN
So now you learned about passion. From a
weirdo with no teeth. Bully for you.

ORLEAN *
You can't learn about passion! You can *
be passion. And it wasn't Johnny who *
made me passion. It was orchids.

KAUFMAN *
You never even cared about orchids.

ORLEAN *
I lied about what happened at the end of
the book. I'll tell you the truth now.

KAUFMAN
Look, if you don't tell me, you don't
have to kill me.

ORLEAN *
(considers) *
No, I do.

KAUFMAN *
We can turn around. Get a cup of coffee. *
Can we do that? We can talk this out. *
I'll sign anything. We can forget I ever *
came here. We can do whatever you want. *

ORLEAN *
Listen, this isn't easy for me either. *

Kaufman stares straight ahead at Laroche's van. *

ORLEAN (cont'd) *
So, we're on the way out of the swamp -- *

211 EXT. SWAMP - DAY

211

Laroche leads Orlean through the swamp. He spots something on a tree, circles it, stands there awestruck. Orlean comes around to see a beautiful ghost orchid hanging from the tree.

LAROCHE

The jewel of the Fakahatchee.

Orlean tries to feel some passion for it, can't.

ORLEAN

It's a flower. It's just a flower. *

LAROCHE *

Might as well grab it, long as I'm here. *

Laroche pulls a hacksaw from his bag. *

211A INT. VAN - DAY

211A *

Laroche drives. Orlean stares out the window. *

LAROCHE *

Boy, my porn site is gonna be big. *

No reaction. They drive in silence. Then: *

LAROCHE (cont'd) *

Look, something I didn't tell you... I want to tell you... About the ghost, okay? I know you're going through some shit. I think this might help you. *

Orlean doesn't even acknowledge he's talking. *

LAROCHE (CONT'D) *

Susan, I want you to know this. It wasn't my thing, I'd always wanted the ghost for the reasons I told you, but some of the Indians... *

211B EXT. SEMINOLE NURSERY TRAILER - NIGHT

211B *

Laroche heads up the steps and enters. *

LAROCHE (V.O.) *

I'd just started up the nursery. I went back one night to pick up something. *

211C INT. TRAILER BACK ROOM - NIGHT

211C *

Laroche peeks in the room. A bunch of young, stoned Indian men. Some stare off. One sings to himself. Two of the men make out. One of the men is slicing up a ghost orchid and pulverizing it. One of the men looks up and sees Laroche.

*
*
*
*

ORLEAN (V.O.)

*
*

Jesus.

211D INT. VAN - DAY

211D *

Orlean seems interested now.

*

LAROCHE

*

They wanted the ghost just to extract their drug. It had been a ceremonial thing, but the young guys, they liked to get stoned. As I said, I always wanted to clone it only to sell to collectors, like I told you, but --

*
*
*
*
*
*

ORLEAN

*

Vinson. Was he one of the --

*

LAROCHE

*

Sure. Vinson lived on that shit. Till they ran out.

*
*
*

ORLEAN

*

There was this day he was fascinated by me. My hair. My sadness.

*
*
*

LAROCHE

*

It does that. That's what I wanted to tell you. I think you'd like it, Susie. It seems to help people be... fascinated.

*
*
*
*

ORLEAN

*

Oh, fuck! Fuck it. Fuck Vinson!

*

LAROCHE

*

I can extract it for you. I know how. I watched. I'm probably the only white guy who knows. I want to do this. Y'know, your sadness is fascinating to me, too.

*
*
*
*
*

ORLEAN

*

I'm done with orchids, Laroche.

*

211E INT. RENTAL CAR - NIGHT 211E *

Kaufman drives. He's barely listening. He's pasty white with fear. Orlean stares out the window as they follow Laroche down a strip-malled highway. *

KAUFMAN *

I can't even really hear you. Please, if you're not going to let me go, let me be. *

ORLEAN *

I was so sad that night. So drained. *

211F INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT 211F *

Orlean sits blankly on her bed, reviews some notes, paces. *

ORLEAN (V.O.) *

I went down to the bar. Maybe I could get laid. I didn't know. Something. *

211G INT. HOTEL BAR - NIGHT 211G *

Orlean sits at the bar sipping a glass of champagne. The place is empty. A female bartender chats and giggles on the phone. Orlean tears her cocktail napkin into tiny pieces. *

211H INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - NIGHT 211H *

Orlean, a little tipsy, emerges from the elevator and heads with some uncertainty down the generic hall, trying to remember her room number. There's a small package outside one door. Her name is written on it. This must be her room. *

211I INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT 211I *

Orlean sits on her bed, talks on the phone, and stares at a little plastic baggie with green powder in it. *

ORLEAN *

(bored) *

That sounds good, hon. So you think you'll speak to him about it tomorrow? *

No, you should, you should. He needs to hear how you feel. All right then. *

Yeah, Friday. Okay. You too. *

Orlean hangs up, picks up the baggie, sniffs inside, puts it down, picks it up, pours some onto the glass-topped desk. She pulls a dollar bill from her purse, rolls it up, hovers over the green powder, stares at it. *

(CONTINUED)

211I CONTINUED:

211I

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

I figured, what the fuck. I figured,
what the hell. I figured, who really
cares about anything anymore.

She snorts a small amount, stands, tries to determine if it's
going to kill her. She feels nothing. She snorts the rest,
stands again, tries to feel something, doesn't. She sighs.

211J INT. HOTEL BATHROOM - A FEW MOMENTS LATER

211J

Orlean brushes her teeth, dully watches herself in the
mirror. Suddenly she becomes fixated on the white suds in
her mouth, on the wonderful sensation of bristles against
gum, on the scrubbing sound. A smile lights her face and
toothpaste dribbles down her chin. She watches her grinning
face with love. She bends in to the mirror for a better
look. She giggles. She alters the rhythm of her brushing.
She makes various shapes with her mouth to change the tone.

211K INT. HOTEL ROOM - A LITTLE LATER

211K

Orlean lies on the floor studying the carpet weave: the
texture, the colors. She's never seen anything more
beautiful. She tugs at a strand, rolls it around in her
fingers, sniffs it, sucks it.

211L INT. HOTEL ROOM - A LITTLE LATER

211L

The lights are off. Orlean leans her forehead against the
window and stares with awe out the window at the star-filled
sky. How exquisite! She cries, but not like any other
crying she's done: now it's at the beauty of the universe.
She tries to open the window for a better look, discovers it
does not open. Her frustration quickly turns to fascination
with the glass. She notices the oily imprint her forehead
left on it. She makes many forehead prints on the glass.

211M INT. HOTEL ROOM - A LITTLE LATER

211M

Orlean lies sprawled on her back on the bed, holding the
phone to her ear, listening to the dial tone. It's so
beautiful. She tries to sing along with it. Suddenly she
hangs up and dials "0."

ORLEAN

Hello? Is this the operator?

OPERATOR

Maybe I help you, Ms. Orlean?

ORLEAN

How do you know my name?

(CONTINUED)

OPERATOR
This is the hotel operator, ma'am.

ORLEAN
I'm so embarrassed! Can you tell me, how
I get a hold of the operator operator?

OPERATOR
Dial nine and then zero.

ORLEAN
Okay. Thank you so much!

OPERATOR
Good night, ma'am.

ORLEAN
Good night, ma'am, to you, too!
(hangs up)
She was so nice.

Orlean dials again.

SECOND OPERATOR
Operator.

ORLEAN
Hi! I was just wondering if you could
help me. I am trying to determine the
notes in your dial tone.

SECOND OPERATOR
The notes in my...?

ORLEAN
In your dial tone. It's so pretty.

SECOND OPERATOR
I don't have any idea.

ORLEAN
Well, would it be possible to speak with
your supervisor?

SECOND OPERATOR
You'd have to call during business hours,
eight to five-thirty. But I don't think
anyone here is going to know that.

ORLEAN
You have been very helpful! Say, would
you like to come over? After your shift?

SECOND OPERATOR
I can't really do that.

ORLEAN
Okay! You have a wonderful night!

Orlean hangs up, stares at the ceiling. She imitates a dial tone. The phone rings. She listens to it, forgets to pick up the phone. Finally she remembers.

ORLEAN
Hello?

LAROCHE
Hi. It's John. Did you get my package?

ORLEAN
John! John! John John John! Hey, John, do you know what notes are in a dial tone?

LAROCHE
I could figure it out. I have perfect pitch.

ORLEAN
Oh, that would be so helpful.

LAROCHE
I'll get right on it.

ORLEAN
Don't go yet!

LAROCHE
Okay.

There's a pause. Orlean fingers the phone cord.

ORLEAN
John, I'm very happy now.

LAROCHE
I'm glad.

There's a pause. She studies her feet.

ORLEAN
Johnny, did you ever wish you could use your toes just like fingers?

LAROCHE
Sure, all the time.

(CONTINUED)

ORLEAN *
Really?! Me too! *
(beat) *
I love my toes! I never let them do *
anything fun! I wish they could do *
activities. *
(starts to cry) *
I want my toes to be happy. *

LAROCHE *
They will be. *

ORLEAN *
They're my friends and I ignore them! *
That's not right! I will walk on the *
beach tomorrow. Then I will buy a pair *
of beautiful ocean blue socks! A *
souvenir of the day for my toes. *

LAROCHE *
Okay. *

ORLEAN *
You're so nice. Do you like socks, too? *

LAROCHE *
Yes, I do. *

ORLEAN *
I like socks. Who invented socks? *

LAROCHE *
I have a book. My guess is they were *
probably introduced in several cultures *
simultaneously. *

ORLEAN *
Huh. Isn't it amazing to think that *
socks were invented at all, let alone *
several times simultaneously! *

LAROCHE *
I'll find out exactly who and when. *

ORLEAN *
Did you ever see those ones with separate *
toes? I feel they are very wrong. I *
think toes should be with their fellows. *
(pause) *
Do you sleep in yours? *

LAROCHE *
Socks? No. *

(CONTINUED)

ORLEAN
(excited)
Me neither! Me neither!

*
*
*

Orlean grins.

*

212 OMITTED

212

*

212A INT. RENTAL CAR - NIGHT

212A

*

ORLEAN
Oh, Johnny.

*
*

Kaufman stares straight ahead.

*

KAUFMAN
I don't want to die. Please think about
what you're doing. I'm a person, just
like you.

*
*
*
*

ORLEAN
We spoke all night.

*
*

212B INT. HOTEL ROOM - MUCH LATER

212B

*

Orlean is on the floor, on the phone, but not talking. She
stares out the window at the early morning light. Finally:

*
*

ORLEAN
(whisper)
Johnny?

*
*
*

LAROCHE
Hi.

*
*

ORLEAN
It's beginning to get light here.

*
*

LAROCHE
Here, too.

*
*

ORLEAN
Really? There you go. We're twins.
(beat)
Are you lonely sometimes, Johnny?

*
*
*
*

LAROCHE
I was a weird kid. Nobody liked me. But
I had this idea if I waited long enough,
someone would come around and just,
y'know, understand me. Like my mom,
except someone else.

*
*
*
*
*

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

212B CONTINUED:

212B

LAROCHE (cont'd)

I knew the universe wouldn't let me go my whole life alone like that. It'd send someone, she'd look at me, and quietly say, "yes", just like that. And I wouldn't be alone anymore.

*
*
*
*
*

Orlean is flabbergasted. She remains silent, then:

*

ORLEAN

I once had the very same belief, John.

*
*

212C INT. VAN - NIGHT

212C

The van is parked on the beach. The back doors are open. Orlean and Laroche make love inside on a sleeping bag. The junk is pushed to the sides. Laroche seems clumsy, but Orlean is enraptured: every touch sends her further into the experience. She glances past Laroche at the moon. She sees the moonlight reflecting off the junk in the van. Everything glows with unearthly beauty: a coke can, a bag of soil, some lines of the green powder spread on a trowel. Orlean looks with love at these items, then at Laroche's straining face. She pulls him to her and kisses him.

*
*
*
*
*
*
*
*
*
*

ORLEAN

(in a whisper)

Yes.

*
*
*

Laroche starts to cry.

*

212D INT. RENTAL CAR - NIGHT

212D

Kaufman drives, pale and sweaty. They pass very few cars now. Orlean smiles, lost in her story.

*
*

ORLEAN

I'd never had sex before. Not like that, anyway. I wasn't guilty about my marriage. Or fantasizing about someone else. I was just there. Alive. Adapting. You will not take this away. I won't go back.

*
*
*
*
*
*
*

Orlean looks hard at Kaufman, who stares straight ahead.

*

KAUFMAN

I don't want anything from you.

*
*

ORLEAN

Back in New York, back on the book, I couldn't focus. Back, I couldn't care.

*
*
*

212E INT. ORLEAN'S OFFICE - NIGHT 212E *

Orlean paces. She types at the computer standing up. *

ORLEAN *
 (plowing through) *
 Um... and we followed it... like a *
 beacon... all the way to the road. Done. *
 (dials phone) *
 Yeah, hi. I need a ticket to Miami. *

213 OMITTED 213 *

213A EXT. LAROCHE'S BACKYARD - DAY 213A *

Laroché is inside a make-shift greenhouse tending to several *
 immature ghost orchids. Orlean lies on the grass outside, *
 transfixed by a colony of ants. The sun is warm on her skin. *

LAROCHE *
 Milking the Seminoles is cool, but we *
 should introduce this to the general *
 public, Suze. Make a shitload of change. *

ORLEAN *
 Boy! I can quit writing! *
 (new thought) *
 I wish I were an ant. They're very *
 shiny. *

LAROCHE *
 You're shinier than any ant, darlin'.

ORLEAN *
 That's the sweetest thing anyone's ever *
 said to me. *

LAROCHE *
 Well, I like you, is why. *
 (back to business) *
 The cool part is, if the gov doesn't know *
 the drug exists, it ain't controlled. A *
 Laroché kind of plan, if I do say. *

214 INT. RENTAL CAR - NIGHT 214 *

Kaufman and Orlean drive. The passing landscape is dark and *
 wooded and swampy. There are no other cars. The only thing *
 clearly visible is the lit-up rear of Laroché's van. *

ORLEAN *
 So... Our product is a small hit on the *
 Miami club scene. *
 (MORE) *

(CONTINUED)

214 CONTINUED:

214

ORLEAN (cont'd)

We're going to make a fortune. We call it "Passion." The kids call it Pash or P or Flower.

(giggles)

Isn't that sweet?

*

Up ahead, Laroche turns off the road at the Fakahatchee sign.

ORLEAN (cont'd)

Follow Johnny, please.

*

215 EXT. JANES SCENIC DRIVE - A LITTLE WHILE LATER

215

Laroche's van stops in the middle of the road. His hand out the window indicates that Kaufman should pull off to the right onto a logging road. Kaufman does, pulls up to a metal barrier and parks. Laroche parks behind, blocking him in.

*

*

*

*

216 OMITTED

216

*

217 EXT. LOGGING ROAD - CONTINUOUS

217

Kaufman gets out of the car. Orlean does also, keeping the gun on him.

ORLEAN

Come around.

As Kaufman comes around the car to join Orlean, he sees Donald, wild-eyed, on the floor in the back. Laroche is in the rear of his van, getting some equipment. As Orlean goes to meet Kaufman, Donald swings open the back right passenger door, hitting her and sending her flying. Laroche pokes his head out of the back of his van in time to see Donald grabbing Kaufman and dragging him into the swamp.

*

LAROCHÉ

Who was that?!

ORLEAN

I don't know! I didn't see!

LAROCHÉ

Fuck! Help me find the flashlights!

*

Orlean pulls herself up and drags herself over to the van as Laroche is throwing things around in the messy back, searching for flashlights. We see the lovely Coke can.

*

218 EXT. SWAMP - CONTINUOUS

218

Kaufman and Donald slog through the black swamp, trip over unseen vines. Laroche and Orlean banging around in his van can be heard in the distance.

*

(CONTINUED)

KAUFMAN

For Christ's sake, why didn't you do something while we were in the car? *

DONALD

My back had seized. I couldn't move.

Laroche and Orlean have found the flashlights and entered the swamp. The beams search the darkness near the brothers. Donald pulls Kaufman behind a stand of trees. They sit and wait in silence, breathing hard. Orlean and Laroche are heard slogging and talking in the distance. *

LAROCHE (O.C.)

It was a guy?

ORLEAN (O.C.)

Fat. That's all I could tell. *

LAROCHE (O.C.)

This really complicates things.

Orlean and Laroche are very close now.

ORLEAN (O.C.)

I know, John. I get that. Thanks.

LAROCHE (O.C.)

We need to split up. *

Orlean and Laroche can be seen behind Kaufman and Donald now.

ORLEAN

I'm not going to be by myself out here. *

LAROCHE

All right. But we've gotta hustle. *

Laroche and Orlean move off. Their voices get far away. *

KAUFMAN

They're going to find us.

DONALD

I don't think so.

KAUFMAN

I don't want to die, Donald. I've wasted my life. God, I've wasted it.

DONALD

You did not. And you're not gonna die.

(CONTINUED)

KAUFMAN

I wasted it. I admire you, Donald, y'know? I spend my whole life paralyzed worrying what people think of me and you - you're just oblivious.

DONALD

I'm not oblivious.

KAUFMAN

No, you don't understand. I say that as a compliment. I really do.

(beat)

There was this time in high school. I was watching you out the library window. You were talking to Sarah Marsh.

DONALD

Oh, God. I was so in love with her.

KAUFMAN

I know. And you were flirting with her. And she was really sweet to you.

DONALD

I remember that.

KAUFMAN

Then when you walked away, she started making fun of you with Kim Canetti. It was like they were laughing at *me*. You didn't know at all. You seemed so happy.

*
*
*

DONALD

I knew. I heard them.

KAUFMAN

How come you looked so happy?

DONALD

I loved Sarah, Charles. It was mine, that love. I owned it. Even Sarah didn't have the right to take it away. I can love whoever I want.

*

KAUFMAN

She thought you were pathetic.

DONALD

That was her business, not mine. You are what you love, not what loves you. That's what I decided a long time ago.

*

(CONTINUED)

Kaufman and Donald sit there for a long while in silence.
Kaufman starts to cry softly.

DONALD (cont'd)
What's up?

KAUFMAN
Thank you.

DONALD
For what?

Slogging sounds. Orlean and Laroche are getting close again.
Flashlight beams miss Kaufman and Donald by inches. *

ORLEAN (O.C.)
We looked here already.

LAROCHE (O.C.)
No.

ORLEAN (O.C.)
I recognize this tree.

LAROCHE (O.C.)
Suzy, I know every tree in here. *

ORLEAN (O.C.)
I'm thinking this is a bad idea, John. *

On Orlean and Laroche. *

LAROCHE
What do you mean? *

ORLEAN
It was the Pash. My head is clearing now
and suddenly this whole idea seems
completely fucked up. *

LAROCHE
Well, y'know, I said that. I said this
was crazy. I tried to reason with -- *

ORLEAN
I know. I'm sorry. *

LAROCHE
Yeah, anyway, what do we do now? *

ORLEAN
Maybe we talk to the guy. We can't go
killing people. *

(CONTINUED)

LAROCHE

If you recall, that's what I said before.

ORLEAN

I made a mistake. Jesus. What do you want from me?

Laroche shakes his head, mutters, then:

LAROCHE

(calling)

Charlie! We're not going to hurt you.
We just want to talk!

On Kaufman and Donald. They look at each other. Donald shakes his head "no."

ORLEAN

We're really sorry! It's just that...

The flashlights shine elsewhere and the voices go far away.

DISSOLVE TO:

219 EXT. SWAMP - EARLY MORNING

219

The light is gray, pre-dawn, murky. Donald and Kaufman are asleep. Donald awakens, looks around. The rental car is still there, but there's no van. Donald nudges Kaufman. He wakes, looks at Donald, who indicates the missing van.

KAUFMAN

They gone?

DONALD

I don't know. Maybe.

They quietly slog toward the road. There's no sign of Laroche or Orlean. Donald looks back and smiles at Kaufman. They're getting out of here. Kaufman feels a new, profound affection for his brother. He pats Donald on the back. It's an awkward tap, something never attempted before. Donald gives a cheerful thumbs-up without looking back. They arrive at the car. Donald is heading around to the passenger side and stops dead in his tracks. Kaufman looks over to see what's caught Donald's eye: there, sitting propped against a tree, sleeps Laroche, his rifle on the ground next to him. Kaufman and Donald are momentarily frozen. Then:

ORLEAN (O.S.)

(in the distance)

John!

(CONTINUED)

Kaufman and Donald whirl around to see Orlean eyeing them as she emerges from the van parked up the road.

ORLEAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

John!

Laroche opens his eyes. With a groggy start he sees the identical brothers standing before him. He instinctively grabs for the rifle. To everyone's surprise it fires. Donald is hit in the arm. Donald yelps.

KAUFMAN

Jesus!

Laroche is wide-eyed, doesn't know what to do. Kaufman grabs Donald and shoves him in the driver's side door. Kaufman gets in behind him, closes the door and searches his pockets for keys. Laroche approaches the car. Kaufman finds the keys, starts the car, backs wildly onto Janes Scenic Drive.

*
*
*

220 INT. RENTAL CAR - CONTINUOUS

220

Kaufman driving. Donald in the midst of an adrenaline rush.

*

DONALD

(laughing)

I can't believe I got shot! Isn't that fucked up?

KAUFMAN

(laughing too)

Shut up! Stop laughing. Are you okay?

DONALD

Yeah! It's cool! I'm shot!

KAUFMAN

We gotta get you to a hospital.

*

They pass Orlean next to the van. She follows them with eyes spaced on pash.

*

DONALD

Jesus, Give me some of that shit. That looks nice. Let's party!

*

Kaufman and Donald both crane their necks to watch her recede as they drive the swamp road. Then, from around a curve, a ranger truck comes barreling. The vehicles collide and spin violently around. The driver's side airbag deploys. Donald flies through the windshield. Kaufman regains his bearings and sees his brother halfway out the car, the front of his body a bloody mess.

*
*

(CONTINUED)

Kaufman hurries around the car to Donald, who is conscious, but fading fast. Kaufman tries to keep him awake, at the same time watching out for Orlean and Laroche.

KAUFMAN

Donald, it's gonna be okay. You're gonna be okay. Just don't go to sleep.

Donald's eyes close. Kaufman starts to sing.

KAUFMAN (cont'd)

Imagine me and you. I do.

DONALD AND KAUFMAN

I think about you day and night.
It's only right. To think about the one
you love...

Donald is dead. A battered-looking, dazed Mike Owen emerges from the ranger truck, sees the two Kaufmans, is confused. Kaufman stares at the body. Orlean approaches Mike Owen from behind. Her mouth is open; she looks horrified, fascinated, at the body of Donald. Mike Owen reaches into his truck and grabs the C.B.

MIKE OWEN

We need help here. Logging road twelve.
Bad car accident. Is anyone there?
Terry? Terry, wake the hell up and --

Orlean shoots Mike Owen in the back of the head. He slumps to the ground, leaving Orlean and Kaufman staring at each other. Orlean's eyes well with tears. She can't look down at Owen. As Kaufman and Orlean stare at each other, it's obvious to both that this has gone beyond the point of no return. Kaufman must be next. He bolts into the swamp. She follows.

ORLEAN

Johnny!

Laroche, approaching from down the road, sees Kaufman running into the woods. He angles in to cut him off.

Laroche and Orlean, running from two different directions, gain on Kaufman and limit his options. Kaufman finds himself up against a lake. Alligators swim in it. There's nowhere to go. Orlean and Laroche arrive, stop, heave. The three stare at each other. Laroche walks toward Kaufman.

LAROCHE

I'm sorry I have to do this, dude. I'm
not a killer. But put yourself in our --

Laroche steps on something - An alligator: it awakens,
startled and angry, and reflexively grabs Laroche's leg. His
rifle fires at nothing. Orlean screams. The alligator
pulls Laroche to the ground and tears him apart. Kaufman
watches. Orlean turns her gun on the creature, shooting
crazily until it's dead. Laroche is dead. Orlean looks at
his body, drops her gun, stunned, then looks to Kaufman.

ORLEAN

(screaming)

You fat piece of shit! He's dead, you
hack! You ruined my life! You loser!
You're a goddamn fat, hack! You hear me?
What do you want?! What do you want from
--

KAUFMAN

Shut up! Shut up! My brother's dead,
you psychotic bitch! Your book ruined my
life! You're just a lonely, old,
desperate, pathetic drug addict!

ORLEAN

(suddenly weeping)

Oh my God. Everything's over. I did
everything wrong. I want my life back.
I want it back before it got all fucked
up. Let me be a baby again. I want to
be new. I want to be new.

Orlean collapses into a heap, sobbing. Kaufman watches,
suddenly feeling so much for this person, this concept turned
flesh before his eyes. The sun is rising. She glows.

KAUFMAN

Your writing. It helped me. Your book
didn't ruin my life at all. Okay?

ORLEAN

Writing's a lie. Everything is a lie.

KAUFMAN

No. I think it can touch people. Like
if it expresses how it is to be lonely,
that helps other people feel not so
lonely, maybe.

(CONTINUED)

ORLEAN

I just wanted, I just wanted, I just wanted...

There's a silence. Then:

KAUFMAN

What did you want?

ORLEAN

I just wanted. That's all. I just didn't want to die living the life I was living.

KAUFMAN

You tried to find something better for yourself. That's a good thing, Susan.

ORLEAN

Thank you for saying that.

KAUFMAN

You found somebody you loved. You followed your heart and you *loved* and --

ORLEAN

Johnny.

Orlean picks up Laroche's rifle and shoots herself.

222-223 OMITTED

222-223

224 INT. EMPTY LIVING ROOM - DAY

224

Kaufman and his mother are putting Donald's belongings in boxes. They look at each other from across the room. Wordlessly, they meet in the middle and hug, both crying.

MOTHER

You should get some furniture, I think.

KAUFMAN

Yeah. I'm going to do that, mom.

MOTHER

I worry about you, Charles.

KAUFMAN

I know. I'm going to get a couch, some overstuffed chairs, a coffee table. Make it really comfortable in here.

(CONTINUED)

MOTHER

Then you could entertain.

KAUFMAN

That sounds good.

225 INT. MARGARET'S OFFICE- DAY

225

Kaufman knocks on the open door.

KAUFMAN

Knock knock. *

Margaret looks up.

MARGARET

Char-lay!

She jumps up from her desk and runs to him, hugs him.

MARGARET (cont'd)

I'm so sorry to hear about your brother.

KAUFMAN

Thanks. Thank you.

She look compassionately into his face. He meets her gaze. She closes the door and brings him to the couch. They sit. *

MARGARET

I was going to call when I heard, but --
I don't know. Then it got to be too long
and then I couldn't. I'm just stupid. *

KAUFMAN

No, I understand, really. *

MARGARET

You able to work at all, sweetie? *

KAUFMAN

Hey, I'm almost done!

MARGARET

Great! Please let me read it when you're
ready. That's all I ask in this life. *

KAUFMAN

Listen, Margaret, I came by for a reason.
(deep breath, quickly) *

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

KAUFMAN (cont'd)

I wanted to tell you I think you're lovely and wonderful, and I've never been able to say it because I was afraid to find out you didn't feel the same.

*

Kaufman pauses and tries to read Margaret's reaction. He can't, so he plows on.

*

*

KAUFMAN (cont'd)

But I guess I realize now ,um, I can love you, y'know, *anyway*. I don't have to get anything back. I mean, I'm not saying you don't give me anything back. I'm not saying that at all. I'm just saying, I'm glad you're in the world.

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

(laughing, embarrassed)

So, thanks for being in the world, Margaret. Okay then.

*

MARGARET

Wow, Charlie. Wow. I don't know what to say.

KAUFMAN

It's okay. I'm glad I know you is all. I'll send you the script when it's done.

MARGARET

That sounds good. Hey, thanks for telling me, being honest. That's really great.

Kaufman smiles, gets up.

*

MARGARET (cont'd)

You're a great guy.

*

*

226 INT. CAR - A FEW MINUTES LATER

226

*

Kaufman, in the parking garage, waits in line with his validated ticket. The attendant takes it and Kaufman pulls onto the street. Margaret appears in front of his car, looking a little pale. Kaufman rolls down his window.

*

*

*

*

KAUFMAN

Hey. What's up?

She approaches, nervously kisses him. He looks at her.

*

MARGARET

I kinda thought maybe I could play hooky today. Stupid job. What do you think?

(CONTINUED)

KAUFMAN

Um, that sounds good. I've never played
hooky before.

*
*
*

Margaret smiles, runs around the front of the car, and hops
in the passenger side. They drive off, both staring ahead,
both sweetly anxious on this new adventure.

*

FADE TO BLACK.

"We're all one thing, Lieutenant. That's what I've come
to realize. Like cells in a body. 'Cept we can't see
the body. The way fish can't see the ocean. And so we
envy each other. Hurt each other. Hate each other.
How silly is that? A heart cell hating a lung cell."

- Cassie from The Three

In Loving Memory of Donald Kaufman

THE END